



# **A Social and Economic Portrait of the Mississippi Delta**

***A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PORTRAIT OF THE  
MISSISSIPPI DELTA***

***Edited by:***

***Arthur G. Cosby  
Mitchell W. Brackin  
T. David Mason  
Eunice R. McCulloch***

***Social Science Research Center  
Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station***

***Mississippi State University  
Mississippi State, Mississippi  
December 1992***

## ***Preface***

The origins of the Delta Project can be traced to the discussions of several key leaders from the Mississippi Delta region. Prior to the conclusion of Charlie Capps' term as president of the Delta Council in 1987, the Council explored the possibility of a comprehensive study of the Delta that would be used as a tool for planning the region's future. Council President John Dillard, of Leland, Mississippi, who succeeded Charlie Capps, reviewed the membership of the Delta Council and selected a cross-section of talented and farsighted individuals to serve in an advisory capacity for a study of the region.

The ultimate goal of the study was to improve the quality of life in a region where, in spite of rich natural resources, large numbers of people still live in poverty. The Project was to carry out a fundamental assessment of the Delta region, its people, its economy, its social system, its local government capacities, and its regional infrastructure. From the very first, the intent of the study was to go beyond a mere description of the Mississippi Delta; it was also to point toward courses of action that would lead to the improvement of the Delta region.

Dr. Arthur G. Cosby, director of the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University, was asked to develop a research team that could carry out a fundamental social and economic audit of the Delta's resources. Delta State University and Mississippi Valley State University were designated to collaborate in carrying out the Delta Project. Ultimately, over 30 university professors participated in the project by providing, in their areas of expertise, insights on the status and prospects for the Delta. The *Portrait of the Delta* reports on the major aspects of their contributions. The Delta Project has also benefited from the support of other research organizations. Dr. Verner Hurt and the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station have supported the endeavor from its conception. Through the efforts of the Delta Council, the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, and the Social Science Research Center, a special grant was obtained from the Cooperative State Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture to support the Delta Project efforts.

In 1989, the Advisory Committee of the Delta Project (see list of members following this preface) met at Delta State University to establish priorities for the social and economic audit of the region. At this day-long meeting, the introduction and charge were given by myself, as chair of the Advisory Committee, followed by a discussion by Dr. Kent Wyatt, president of Delta State University. The priority-setting process was led by Dr. Shirley Olson, a native of the Delta and professor of business at Millsaps College. After considerable deliberations and discussion, the Advisory Committee identified six primary issues as important in assessing the Delta. These were education, leadership, race relations, infrastructure, poverty, and health. While these six issue areas were not exhaustive, it was felt that most other problems

mentioned in a more detailed and comprehensive listing could be subsumed under one or more of these categories.

Dr. Cosby and his fellow professors were asked to use these categories as guides in developing their social and economic audit of the region. Their charge was to identify individuals, both in and out of the region, who could provide an accurate assessment of current circumstances **and** provide insights for future prospects. There was also a strong desire to obtain expertise with highly divergent views on critical issues. The Advisory Committee was interested in a wide range of views and options.

At a more personal level, since I have lived and worked all my life in Bolivar County in the heart of the Delta area, have seen the problems (we now face) develop through the years, and have seen what prompts this study, I was asked to make an assessment from my viewpoint. The future of the Delta area, in my opinion, lies in the ability to better educate, at all levels, our populace. Education will remedy many social ills, particularly by emphasizing self-respect and dignity. Quality education should be at a level to stimulate the minds of all our youth, and all our youth must participate in the educational system. Our academic disciplines must be sharpened to a level equal to that attainable in other states. A quality of education that will place all of our children in a fair, competitive position in the job market is a must. The desire to qualify and achieve should be a challenge and responsibility to every educable child and adult in Mississippi.

We must also promote and cultivate manual skills that reflect quality with dignity in the labor market. A high-tech society, which is destined for our future, will require intellectual and physical skills. We must do this, not at the expense of, but in conjunction with the promotion of the arts and professions. The myth must not be promoted that those who succeed must become "white-collar" employees. Education must eliminate the preconceived notion that there is a stigma attached to "blue-collar" work. Success in the job market is there for those who qualify and who have the energy and desire to pursue and achieve, regardless of their innate physical talents, sharpened by education or brain power, stimulated and energized to a level for keen competition.

There is a need for community leaders in the Delta to accept responsibility, to better understand the processes of government, to understand local, county, and state tax structures, how various taxes are imposed, and how this process has a direct impact on their ways of life and the future of their communities. Once an individual in a leadership position becomes better prepared and understands the necessity for integrity and responsibility in government as it affects them and their future, they become, in the true sense, leaders and are then able to more effectively exercise influence, particularly in local and state government.

Along with the need for effective leadership, the issues of race relations and poverty in the Delta constitute major challenges. Racial disharmony and the socially debilitating effects of poverty exact prodigious costs in the development of an environment conducive to economic development. By documenting the extent of racial disharmony, it becomes possible to identify racial differences in the goals and means related to economic development.

The effects of poverty-related problems of inadequate housing, schooling, health care, and jobs can likewise be assessed as they pertain to the production of human capital. Also, the costs of social problems, such as teen-age pregnancy, illiteracy, and youth delinquency, become major concerns. Addressing these topics as part of the total environment will result in more effective planning.

Major aspects of economic and infrastructure improvements in the Delta can be addressed in terms of investment capital, human capital, and an environment conducive to economic development. There must be a greater commitment by local, State, and Federal governments to pursue economic development in this region, with long-term, planned growth as the target. Value-added industries, which produce raw products and finish and market them should be pursued in order to prevent the loss of capital to other states. Local investment capital is also a must for supporting smaller, local industries. This will depend on more efficiently managed tax bases and greater support for and by local financial institutions. Eventually, modernization of information management systems between local governments in a coordinated manner will be necessary so that all local government units can exchange information with each other as well as with current businesses and business prospects. Not only would this enhance local government capabilities, the image of local communities would be enhanced, because they would appear more attractive to outside investors who seek locations that have the technical capability and administrative ability to provide the services and information necessary to support business expansion. Let the nation know who we are by showing those concerned how we look, act, and perform. All of these factors become highly recognizable to industrialists who look for places to live and to do business.

We must not overlook the needs to our existing industries. They are our neighbors, and their problems are our problems. Likewise, their successes are our successes.

Attitudes are also something we need to assess. We need to create optimism. This business of negative thinking destroys initiative. Good, wholesome, and optimistic publicity catches the eyes of those who are looking.

In summary, we need to establish pride in our communities, clean them up, run them efficiently, and develop our primary resources---people, land, and water. These must be contributing elements of concern for the future.

As you can see, I get optimistic when talking about the future of the Delta. I believe in the Delta and its people. We need to set a course and "get after it."

The Delta Project can and will set this course. Its importance for the future was well put when John Dillard said, "In my judgment, this undertaking should be one of the cornerstones to the next fifty years of the social and economic development of the Mississippi Delta."

Hugh Smith, Chair  
Advisory Committee  
Cleveland, Mississippi  
August 1989

**Advisory Committee to  
The Delta Project**

Luther Alexander  
Greenville

John Avaltroni  
Jackson

Joy Barret  
Belzoni

George Berry  
Leland

Robert Brown  
Indianola

Jimmy Dick Carter  
Rolling Fork

Ann Homer Cook  
Jackson

D. E. Cotton  
Tchula

Charles Dean  
Cleveland

John Dillard  
Leland

John Emmerich  
Greenwood

Howard Evans  
Greenwood

Oleta Fitzgerald  
Yazoo City

R. B. "Dick" Flowers  
Tunica

Billy Frazer  
Clarksdale

P. D. Fyke  
Jackson

Robert Gray  
Shelby

Clayton Henderson  
Tunica

John Sharp Howie  
Yazoo City

Roy Hudson  
Itta Bena

Verner Hurt  
Mississippi State

Maurice F. Lucas  
Renova

Morris Lewis  
Indianola

McKinley Martin  
Clarksdale

Margaret McKee  
Friars Point

Judith Mitchener  
Sumner

Grif Norquist  
Yazoo City

Henry Paris  
Indianola

William A. Percy, II  
Arcola

Arthur Peyton  
Greenville

David Powe  
Moorhead

Clara Reed  
Belzoni

Hugh Smith (Chair)  
Cleveland

Charles S. Tindall, Jr.  
Greenville

Gene Triggs  
Yazoo City

Harry Vickery  
Greenville

George Walker  
Clarksdale

Mayo D. Wilson  
Clarksdale

Kent Wyatt  
Cleveland

## CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>THE IMAGE OF THE DELTA: PAST AND PRESENT</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: My Delta. And Yours?</b> <i>Willie Morris</i>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 2: The Mississippi Delta: Historical Background</b> <i>Frank Allen Dennis</i>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Race Relations in the Delta</b> <i>Phyllis Gray-Ray</i>	<b>29</b>
<b>PICTURES OF THE PEOPLE</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Demography of the Delta</b> <i>John Saunders</i>	<b>45</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Perceptions and Attitudes of Delta Residents</b> <i>Stephen D. Shaffer</i>	<b>64</b>
<b>Chapter 6: Educational Attainment in the Delta</b> <i>Reid Jones, John Thornell, and Gene Hamon</i>	<b>90</b>
<b>Chapter 7: Capacity of the School Systems</b> <i>Larry Hailey</i>	<b>109</b>
<b>Chapter 8: Human Capital: Characteristics of the Labor Force</b> <i>Charles Campbell, Kathie S. Gilbert, and Paul W. Grimes</i>	<b>125</b>
<b>Chapter 9: Public Health Care Funding in the Mississippi Delta</b> <i>Eunice R. McCulloch and Martin Wiseman</i>	<b>149</b>
<b>Chapter 10: At-Risk Youth</b> <i>W. Ross Story</i>	<b>162</b>
<b>Chapter 11: Leadership in the Mississippi Delta</b> <i>Vaughn L. Grisham, Jr.</i>	<b>179</b>
<b>THE ECONOMIC PICTURE</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>Chapter 12: Delta Economy: Business Climate and Policy Environment</b> <i>John E. Gnuschke</i>	<b>195</b>

<b>Chapter 13: Delta Economy: Local Government Capacity</b> <i>Martin Wiseman</i>	<b>214</b>
<b>Chapter 14: Delta Economy: Physical Infrastructure</b> <i>Stephen Lemay</i>	<b>239</b>
<b>Chapter 15: Delta Economy: The Agricultural Base</b> <i>Al Myles and Lynn Reinschmiedt</i>	<b>256</b>
<b>Chapter 16: The Poverty Hurdle: Poverty as an Impediment to Development in the Mississippi Delta</b> <i>T. David Mason</i>	<b>279</b>
<b>Chapter 17: What Works and What Doesn't? Perceptions of Economic Development Among Delta Leaders</b> <i>Judith R. Porter</i>	<b>297</b>
<b>SUMMING UP</b>	<b>311</b>
<b>Chapter 18: A Delta Without Change is a Symbol Without Meaning</b> <i>Charles Washington</i>	<b>313</b>
<b>Chapter 19: Framing the Future: Views on the Future of the Mississippi Delta</b> <i>Arthur G. Cosby</i>	<b>317</b>



***The Image of  
the Delta:  
Past and Present***

## **Chapter**

# **1**

## ***My Delta. And Yours?***

***by***

***Willie Morris\****

*When it's darkness on the Delta,  
That's the time my heart is light,  
When it's darkness on the Delta,  
Let me linger in the shelter of the night.  
...old popular tune.*

We were flatland people. Almost as afterthought, there in Yazoo, the hills came sweeping down from their hardwood forests and challenged the flatness, mingling with it in querulous juxtaposition. But it was the flatland, I see now, that really shaped us—the violence of its extremes, the tumult of its elements, the tension of its memory.

I knew the place then better than I did my own heart—every bend in every road, the Indian mounds and white frame churches, the forlorn crossroads and cypress brakes, where the robin went for her first crocus. It was not in our souls then, only in our pores, as familiar to me yet as water or grass or sunlight. The town was poor one year and rich the next; and everything pertained to usury and mortgage, debenture and labor. We lived and died by nature, and Saxons and Africans together cared for the whims of the timeless clouds. Our people played seven-card stud against God.

It is still the Old Testament to me in its ageless rhythms and despairs. James C. Cobb, the historian, calls it "The Last South," Richard Ford, the novelist, "The South's South." It is, for sure, merely one region among countless on the Lord's earth as it swirls out at the edge of the universe, sharing immutably in the fears and terrors that beguile the human race; yet it never fails to haunt my deepest memory. Walker Percy once wrote that at a certain point in his life a man draws strength from living in some authentic relationship with the principal events of his past. I have often pondered what it was that brought me back to stay; am forever drawn to the textures, the echoes, the way things look and feel, the bittersweet tug of certain phrases: "We cross the River to Helena." "I stopped for supper in Belzoni." I have always been

titillated by its multifarious place names: Tallahatchie, Issaquena, Itta Bena, Mound Bayou, Indianola, Satartia, Midnight, Panther Burn, Savage, Brazil, Egypt, Pentecost, Swiftown, Hushpuckena. It is a blend of the relentless and the abiding for me, and an accumulation of ironies so acute and impenetrable that my vagabond heart palpitates to make sense of them.

In the 1940's in the Delta we had a closeness to the land, and we were so *isolated*. There was a **real** Main Street, though not especially prosperous. There were no motels to speak of, no interstates, no shopping plazas or franchise chains; nor were there many Republicans. "Only the game laws protect them," my grandmother, child as she was of the Civil War and the whipped-down South, would say of the party of Thaddeus Stevens, Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, and William Tecumseh Sherman. Better yet, there was no television, that grand silencer of words and conversation. We sat barefoot on the porches on summer nights and listened to the stories of the aged relatives. From beyond the alleys came the high resonant laughter and the poetry of the blues, the words of the poor and dispossessed. And when the fire truck came by with siren ablaze, we got in our cars and followed it.

The ubiquitous blacks were largely quiet, or so it seemed. But ever so often there were rumors of a mass uprising, and my father and the other white men would stock up on bullets and shotgun shells and lock all the doors and windows. It was planters' heaven then. The larger plantation owners, who were once going broke on 10-cent cotton, were now getting the Roosevelt relief money, funneling it to the workers in the off-season and then shutting it off when they needed the labor.<sup>1</sup> One noticed the prolix restlessness of the young playboy planters who drove the newest Cadillacs or Lincolns or sports cars to the Peabody or the Moon Lake Casino or Bourbon Street or the roof of the Heidelberg in Jackson where they brought their own whiskey in brown paper bags and danced with the wives of other men.

The poverty of the black people, in their hovels in town and their tenant shacks in the flatland, was wrenching and inscrutable. And so too was that of the poor whites. We children of the middle class absorbed all this as mindlessly as would the insects or the fireflies in driftless random, or the red water truck with our prancing in its wake. These were my childhood and teenage years, and they were poised, fragily and inevitably, before *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

In *North Toward Home*, published in the late 1960's, I described a scene of those years. On each side of the bayou running through the Delta side of town to the river was a low concrete wall only inches from the street. On Saturdays the blacks sat in a long row on the top of the wall. Men in soiled T-shirts, with anxious marginal countenances, would drive by in cars decorated with Rebel flags and open the doors and watch the black people topple backward off the wall like dominoes. "That really didn't happen, did it?" my northern readers asked.

There are not many prospects in America so beautiful as a field of white cotton in the fall; and if you stand in the right spot in late afternoon in the Delta, you catch the golden glow of autumn's setting sun, the green of the trees along the rivers, the bright red mechanical cottonpickers, the panoply of white in the undulating gloaming. It makes you feel big and important in such a moment, or at least to those who never worked these fields, and to know that the ancient Egyptians grew this same cotton, and that it has been with us since hieroglyphics—an ineluctable not many American places that you can *see* so far, thirty miles away, it seems, under the copious sweep of the horizons. You can stand up there in Kansas, or Nebraska and do that, but there is nothing to see except more of Kansas and Nebraska. Yet,

---

<sup>1</sup>James C. Cobb, in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. "In 1934, 44 percent of all Agricultural Adjustment Administration payments in excess of \$10,000 nationwide went to 10 counties in the Delta. This largesse facilitated the mechanization and consolidation of agriculture, and as federal farm programs continued, the money kept rolling in. In 1967 Delta planter and U.S. Senator James Eastland received \$167,000 in federal payments. The Delta's poor blacks were not nearly so fortunate, as a power structure dominated by lavishly subsidized planters declared war on the War on Poverty."

in this glutinous and devouring soil, cotton has forever pertained to blood and guilt, as it must have too with the Egyptians.

Here is a summer tableau from my boyhood time, as my comrades and I drive in a vintage Plymouth with dual exhausts through the Yazoo County Delta: All about us is the warm, deep aroma of July. The asphalt road on which we are traveling is built a little higher than the land that encompasses it; there are the occasional Burma Shave signs and every other mile, it seems, a small concrete cross off the side where someone had died in a car accident. Soon we pass an unpainted country store mere yards from a horseshoe lake; turtles bask in the sun on logs in the water, and on the gallery of the store a sign advertising its minnows, worms, and crickets: "Catch Fish or Die Trying." In the distance are the spooky old Indian mounds where we had come as children in search of arrowheads and earthen fragments of pottery. In the flatness they are the only rises; they resemble miniature grassy hills. They were *our* Indians, a smaller tribe among the Choctaws, dwelling along the river, never ceasing to taunt the childhood's imagination, and they were always going to one war or another in that ancient Delta. "I will make the white man red with his own blood," their chieftain said, "and then blacken them in the sun and rain, and the buzzard shall live upon his flesh." They were annihilated by the French, and all they have left behind them are these curious promontories of earth, and their place names—that and the odd high-cheeked features remaining in more than a few of the town's whites and blacks. Funny, from what I had heard of them, they were not terribly unlike the *white* people of the place in my day: violent, flamboyant, garrulous, a little eccentric, and unpredictable.

Amid the swamplands and thickets, the Yazoo River—"river of death"—appears and reappears before us everywhere in its unremitting twists and turns, and the grassy banks of the bayous are lined with the familiar willows, and the duckweed is thick and emerald green in the melancholy brakes of cypress, and the cattails dance in the whispery breeze. In the great empty fields, the cotton blossoms are dazzling white, soon to turn blue, then lavender; and in the furrows the Negroes are chopping with their hoes. In an adjacent field are a dozen or so Angus cattle. The vista is of black earth, black people, black beasts, and we can hear the muffled song:

*I ain't got too long now, I ain't got too long...  
I ain't got too long now, I ain't got too long...  
The man be comin' for me soon.*

Soon we find ourselves on one of the biggest plantations of our neighborhood. It is 3,000 unbroken acres, we have always been told, beginning at a tortuous creek seething with crawfish and cottonmouths and stretching all the way to the most tortuous bend in the river. All about us the plants show green and white in the rows, and occasionally deeper green patches in the farther fields, which means they are experimenting with rice and irrigation. "Posted" signs dot the dark soil. As we drive farther, the blacks are everywhere, ambling along the road, bent low before the cotton in the ancient ritual, ebony silhouettes in the sunshine. As we pass, they stand and wave, as if the car itself is a magnet that ripples among the flesh. The tiny unpainted shacks pervade the landscape, often with a tree or two in front, a worn-out tire roped to it for a swing, a modest vegetable garden with early corn and tomatoes, a slumping outhouse with a half-moon carved in the door, and a clothesline with garments arching in the breeze. After a time the shacks appear more frequently, in clusters along the road, with barefooted children in ragged clothes staring out at our approach, and naked infants in the grassless yards, and dogs under the arching chinaberries. We go by the schoolhouse, a gaunt wooden structure set back from the road with a rusty sloping tin roof and, as if in afterthought, a whitewashed porch filled with derelict furniture. And then to the commissary,

another unpainted and unadorned edifice, a dozen black men in front lifting sacks of flour from a truck, and one of the enormous new mechanical pickers parked in back. A strange sense of doom seems to hang over the land itself.

"If it wasn't for the Negroes," I overheard a "moderate" white lawyer say in those Delta years, "people around here wouldn't have nothin' to talk about."

I remember pondering this; it was indeed the simple truth. Mainly they were *there*, and they were blamed for everything wrong under the sun. "*A servant of servants shall ye be unto his brethren.*" In the town, almost every house had its black maid, who, for fifteen cents an hour, left her own dwelling early in the mornings and did not return until late afternoons—cooking, laundering, mopping, sweeping. They would take the dirty clothes home with them, boiling them in iron washtubs, scrubbing them on washboards in the backyards, pressing them with irons heated over wood fires; their labors never ceased. Then almost every second house had its yardman, Jap and Redeye and Shorty and Potluck and Shenandoah, who wore sweaty bandannas and had their own private jelly glasses to drink tap water from. From the womb to the tomb, the blacks tended to the whites of the town: their women raising the white infants, their men digging white graves, mowing the cemetery grass, clipping the hedges surrounding the very plots of the dead. In the proper seasons, the town blacks went out in trucks to the plantations to work from dawn to dusk. They lived in sprawling precincts with gravel or dirt roads and situated without rhyme or design, sometimes separate from the white sections, sometimes bordering and even mingling with them. If, through some precipitous act of nature, the blacks of our town suddenly vanished from the earth, we would have been strangely empty and bereft.

As a grown man I have thought often of those who labored so against the earth and who still live now in the town, or in Memphis or Chicago or Detroit or Gary, but mostly in Chicago to which they had drifted in hordes from the Delta with their belongings in cardboard boxes and suitcases tied with cotton clothesline, or lay now in pine boxes in the very soil they had once tended. It was mysterious and cruel and profoundly interior, that merging here in the Delta of the great European and African sources, yet vital and even life-given—as if we belonged together, and yet did not; the barrier between us acute and invisible. It was very strange and hard.

I have a white friend my age who once farmed in the upper Delta, as his father had before him, and now lives in a university town in Mississippi. His mother died when he was little, and his father was courting again, and for all purposes he was raised by an illiterate black muledriver named Shotgun, whom he loved. "The black people of the Delta didn't sail past the Statue of Liberty when *they* came to this country," he once said to me. "They made this place down here. They worked to death and got nothin', except just the ground itself, and it wasn't theirs either. I'd look out from my porch at night when I was a boy and see all the coal-oil lamps in their houses and wonder what they were thinking that night with their little lamps blinking in the shadows. Now I know they were thinking the same things I was.

David Sansing, the historian at the University of Mississippi, recalls one of his earliest childhood memories, of a little neighbor boy in Greenville telling him he had just been to the hills—to a place where the land was not flat. "It was the first time," Sansing remembers, "I realized there was a world out beyond where I could see. Hills!"

I myself was no stranger to hills, having grown up on precisely the first street in the Delta, so that when I left my house for school in the mornings as a child, the hills stood there a hundred yards or so before me. I have a recurring argument with upper-Delta people, like Charles Henry, now of Oxford, who would have us believe that the steepest descent into the Delta lies on State Highway 315 from Pleasant Grove to Sledge. When I show them the high abrupt entry on Highway 49-W into Yazoo City, Henry and others invariably acquiesce, though I sense with shame and a certain reluctance and anger. From the peaks of Yazoo one has the

palpable emotion of departing a mountainous spine into an unending valley of profound mists and shadows, sea-like and inexorable, suggesting to the most casual of travelers how geographically catastrophic the Delta truly is.

Our flat alluvial plain is 160 miles long and 50 miles at its widest point. Along its deepest north-south axis, as David Cohn wrote, the Delta begins, not literally but certainly spiritually, in the lobby of the Peabody in Memphis and ends on Catfish Row in Vicksburg. With notable generic exceptions, and despite a lingering antebellum myth, it was only thinly settled by the outbreak of the Civil War, and retained much of its raw frontier flavor into the 1890's. It was to the eastern edge near Batesville that the young Faulkner was first invited to General Stone's deer-and-bear lodge. The Big Woods were gradually cut back and destroyed until only the triangle of them formed by the Yazoo and the Mississippi near Yazoo City, remained; and this is the mileau for old Ike McCaslin's last hunt in *Delta Autumn*, to me one of the most beautiful and stunning short stories in the language. It was not merely fortuitous that Faulkner, the preeminent American writer, was obsessed with the Delta and with the violent, majestic Big River at its western edge—most Mississippi hill-country people have always been. He needed, I believe, the exotic, unregenerate, profligate, hedonistic, tormented Delta as a counterpoise to his more severe and unextravagant hills, and some of his finest work is set there.

James C. Cobb, the contemporary historian of this riotous and shadowy finger of earth, eloquently wrote:

For many whites the Delta became a land of wildest fantasies fulfilled, but for thousands of blacks the Delta that had promised them the rural South's best chance of upward mobility, became the burial ground for hopes and dreams.... The region's history has been one of tension and struggle—between the races, against the poorer hill counties, against the impenetrable swampy wilderness and the ravages of flood, pestilence, and disease, and, finally, against the intrusions of civil rights activists and federal civil rights policies.

The exodus of so many of its black people (beginning in the years after the First World War), making their departure northward on the Illinois Central or Highway 61 which pierces it in its soul, surely constitutes one of the largest migrations of human beings in modern history. This mass odyssey was only reinforced, of course, by the advent of farm mechanization after the Second World War; and today the landscape itself is the most mute and starkest testimony: the bereft vistas, the collapsed shacks dotting the fields, the rows of uninhabited tenements in the smaller hamlets. Brother Will Campbell, on a trip through the Delta not too long ago, looked across the land and claimed he saw a big tractor cultivating the rows, empty and without a driver. And where, too, did all the mules go? Their disappearance was presage and coincident with the exodus.

Over the years I have taken countless outlanders through the Delta: peregrinating Yankee scholars, writers, journalists, civil rights activists, and more than a few of the merely idle and professionally despondent curious. Their reaction has often been a singular blend of bafflement, titillation, anger, and, not the least of it, fear; yet to the person they are struck nearly dumb by its brooding quintessential sadness, its physical power. Two years ago I accompanied the photographer William Allard, with whom I was collaborating on a spread for *National Geographic*, on a four-day Delta swing. I was fascinated by the things there that absorbed one of America's most accomplished photographers: black children gathering pecans in an orchard abutting a huge modern plantation domicile in the stretch of Highway 3 south of Marks; the city hall converted from an old store in Jonestown with the black mayor and his

dog standing in front; a minuscule beer joint painted metallic purple near Holly Bluff; a graveyard near Lambert with a cotton gin in the background; a crumbling plantation house near Brazil right out of Tennessee Williams; a twelve-year-old white boy in a hunting camp west of Clarksdale, with his face ceremonially bloodied after his first deer; a venerable oak only a few feet off Highway 49-W, with posters for black political candidates and "Jesus Saves" signs nailed to the bark, as chimed noontime hymns from the Silver City church wafted across the unpeopled terrain; an ancient mausoleum near Chatham standing solitary in the middle of a cotton field—and always with Bill Allard, the great omnipotent landscapes.

I am reminded of a recent conversation I had with an acquaintance of mine, a native of the Midwest, who runs the Atlanta bureau of one of the nation's largest newspapers. He had been doing a story out in the Delta, and he too had been touched by the patina of this older, inward Dixie. The Delta, of course, had bewildered and intrigued him. "In all the South it's the other extreme from Atlanta," he said. "Southerners hate to be strangers to each other. That's why Atlanta is so traumatic for Southerners to visit. Southerners like to see you and say, "Hi, how are you?" And the Yankees in Atlanta just don't respond to that. As for the native Atlantans, there's a city they remember that no longer really exists. But the Delta! It's still here. I've never seen a place where people talk so much to each other, and not just whites and whites, blacks and blacks. Damned if the whites and blacks don't carry on a conversation together all day long."

Not many months ago, too, I accompanied a noted historian from an Ivy League university on a day's long arc. It was a bitterly cold forenoon of January, so cold that huge shards of ice were in the rivers and the creeks; and under the petulant skies in the seared fields, the cotton stubble lay intractably somber and grey. Since I am by trade a writer, I surreptitiously observed my companion's responses to this unfolding tableau. There was a black funeral in a graveyard near the road. Amid the homemade tombstones with the misspelled inscriptions, the pallbearers were struggling to carry the cheap pine coffin up a frozen incline, and three little children stood crying under a water oak. Farther on, in a sudden wintry wind, was the little all-black village of Falcon with its brand new water tower, black kids with socks on their hands shooting baskets, and lean-to vistas; and then the middle-sized towns laid out in their grid, and greying old black men whittling wood in front of establishments called Lena's Lizard Thicket, Shamie and Shaystana's Beer Place, Maisie's Refreshment Co., Excelsior Pool Hall, Sons and Daughters of the I Will Arise Society. The whole setting was as customary to me as anything I had ever known, or would ever remember.

Then the main street of Alligator, with its boarded-up storefronts. Had everyone migrated to Greenville or Clarksdale? Past schoolhouses with white and black children playing together at recess, and the lily-white private academies, and the abandoned wooden churches at exhausted crossroads, and the big white houses surrounded by pecans and magnolias with croquet lawns and tennis courts and swimming pools, and a couple of Mercedes and pick-up trucks under the porticoes. And on to Drew to visit a friend who had once been runner-up to Miss America; but she had been out in the swamps most of the night killing bullfrogs with a .22 pistol for a frog-fry and had remained at her girlfriend's house in the country. And enroute home to Oxford, the Ivy League scholar commented: "I've never seen such a combination of rich and poor. Only in the Third World. And yet it's so beautiful."

This is the image most outsiders have of the Delta—the extremes, the neglect, the poverty, the joblessness, the illiteracy. Those places in the South experiencing the most salubrious economic growth are patently those whose workers are best educated. The statistics, the latest of them now revealed in the interim report of the Lower Mississippi River Delta Commission, speak for themselves. Unemployment ranging as high as 20 percent to 50 percent. Infant mortality in four counties in 1984 exceeding 25 per 1,000 births—worse than in Cuba, Malaysia, or Panama. The poverty rate in Tunica County the highest in the nation.

Desperate levels of education and poorly supported school systems. Inadequate housing. Scarce capital. Stunning rates of adult illiteracy and the lack of basic skills. And on and on. "Hope is not all we need," Faulkner once wrote of Mississippi in the Depression. "it's all we got."

And yet, and yet. The Delta is not what it used to be, just as Mississippi is not either. "Demographics have changed something of the Delta," the historian Sansing surmises. "Among other things it's raised up a competitor. The Gulf Coast is now the political and economic powerhouse of this state. The Delta doesn't have the pull it once had. It doesn't have the votes it once had, and certain people don't control the votes they do have like they used to."

Politics *in* the Delta has changed dramatically in the last twenty years. Just as Mississippi in 1989 had more black elected officials than any other state in the Union, the largest proportion of these were in the Delta county and city governments. Local government is now in the hands of a new leadership responsive to necessities and priorities quite different from those of the old classic regional aristocracy. Its constituents want better schools, jobs, health care, small business legislation, and a chance at sweeping economic development and diversification—and who will vouchsafe them that? As many of the traditional planters were struck hard by the farm crises of the 1980's, in 1986 the Delta finally elected a black congressman, my fellow Yazooan Mike Espy, a young man destined to have an important role not only in the future of Mississippi Delta, but of the United States. "We need leadership development in the Delta," Espy says, "to make people from all races realize there are really common problems. We're putting antagonism behind us because we're all in the same boat. In order for the Delta to survive and prosper, we realize now we have to pay attention to the bottom third. Whether it's education or job training, I think people realize that's what we have to do."

And are there other, more subtle transformations, of the kind elusive to demographics? Could there be the possibility of some deeper sense of belonging? Of mutuality? Unita Blackwell, the black mayor of Mayersville in Issaquena County, whose very main street ends at the levee of the Mississippi, remembers standing by the roadside as a child, her grandmother waving down a Greyhound to take them north. "And that highway still looks pretty much the same. It was such a thrill because that bus just came out of nowhere, and when you got on it you knew you were going someplace. But now when I go someplace far away, and I'm headed back, I see that road and it looks like home."

One recent Sunday morning I found myself in a Shoney's in Clarksdale having breakfast with my friend the late Alex Haley. As we sat in our booth, the word began to spread that he was there. First the black waitresses began coming up to talk with him and to ask him to sign his autograph for them. Then, one by one, the black workers from the kitchen. The news circulated quickly, and large numbers of black people began drifting in from Highway 61.

In a momentary lull, my companion said, "I apologize for this. It's not me really. It's the effect *Roots* had on black people." "On white people too," I suggested. And in minutes a stream of white Mississippi Deltans entered the establishment to seek a word with Alex Haley.

Can we at last come home together?

As a native son, there is much of the Delta I wish I could escape forever. I wish I could escape the smoldering malevolence behind a Delta coed's racial tirade at my house in Oxford not too long ago. Escape the tenacious righteousness of its "seg academies." Escape the fruitless spleen and irrelevant innuendo of much of its intellectual discourse. Escape the fear and the poverty. To escape the Delta, however, just as the larger South which embraces it, I would have to escape from myself.

The Delta, as the authors of the 1989 report of the Commission wrote, "has tremendous human and natural resources, and its people take great pride in family relationships and a strong work ethic. It is not only worth saving but . . . also could make a major contribution to



*Morris*

the rest of the nation and the world." There should be special pride too; I feel, that out of its burdens and sufferings and paradoxes over the years, an incredible creativity has emerged. Its writers and artists and musicians of both races are symbols of its remarkable courage and resourcefulness and imagination. No matter what the future brings, it will always be a place where the land, the soil, with all that this implies in human intercourse, are prized over all else. The Mississippi Delta will be the last place on earth to be paved over.

Perhaps in the end it is the old, inherent, devil-may-care instinct of the Delta that remains in the most abundance and will sustain it in its uncertain future. The reckless gambler's instinct that fought and lost that war. Archie Manning or Willie Totten calling a bootleg play on fourth down and long; a black mother working 16 hours a day to educate her children. It is gambling with the heart, for it is the human race writ large. It is a profound and tragic land, the Delta, and its in-dwelling earth has indelibly shaped the people who have dwelled there. For all this together, I pray for its better day.

## Chapter

# 2

### ***The Mississippi Delta: Historical Background***

***by Frank Allen Dennis\****

In Mississippi, the area known as the Delta is at once both myth and reality. In fact, more than one historian has referred to the Delta as a "state of mind" rather than a readily identifiable geographic section.<sup>1</sup> There are, indeed, at least two popular myths about the Delta, one held by outsiders and the other held by Deltans themselves.

To non-Deltans, including perhaps many other Mississippians, the Delta is an area of white snobbery and black poverty; of antebellum mores floundering fitfully in modern times; of mosquitoes, allergies, and airborne pesticides. To Deltans, it is a region that is politically progressive and relatively tolerant of diversity; it is an area rich in land and abundant in water; it appreciates literature and culture, refinement and tradition; it seeks a broader industrial base to complement its agricultural heritage; it is home and it is dear.

All stereotypes have at least a degree of accuracy, and perhaps the real truth about the Delta is based more on perception than fact. Yet, the historian and social scientist must attempt to separate fact from myth. Granting at the outset the virtual impossibility of doing so, the Delta beckons, even demands, that we try.

Any study of the Delta's history must begin by identifying the area itself. More than 50 years ago, David L. Cohn coined a phrase that apparently passed almost at once into common usage: The Mississippi Delta begins in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis and ends on Catfish Row in Vicksburg.<sup>2</sup> Like the section it attempts to describe, this phrase is now as much myth as reality. In a 1969 article, William D. McCain maintained that the Delta consisted of 11 counties: Bolivar, Coahoma, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Quitman, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tunica, and Washington.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, the area served

---

<sup>1</sup>William D. McCain, "Theodore Gilmore Bilbo and the Mississippi Delta," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 31 (February 1969): 1; William M. Cash and R. Daryl Lewis, *The Delta Council: Fifty Years of Service to the Delta* (Stoneville, MS: The Delta Council, 1986), 11.

<sup>2</sup>David L. Cohn, *God Shakes Creation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), 14.

<sup>3</sup>McCain, "Bilbo," 1-2.

by the Delta Council has redefined the Delta, adding to McCain's region the counties of Carroll, DeSoto, Holmes, Panola, Tate, Warren and Yazoo.<sup>4</sup> For a time in the 1980's, Grenada County also participated in some of the programs of the Delta Council.<sup>5</sup>

While one may quibble to a degree about what counties are Delta counties, the actual Delta defines itself far better than words can. Anyone who has ever descended the Loess Bluffs at Yazoo City, Grenada, or west of Winona does not need to be told that he or she has entered the Delta. But the boundaries of the area can also be stated very simply: the northern boundary is the Tennessee border; the western boundary is the Mississippi River; the southern boundary is the point at which the Yazoo enters the Mississippi; the eastern boundary is the rim of the Loess Bluffs.<sup>6</sup>

### **Exploration and Settlement**

When Hernando de Soto led his legions into the Delta in 1541, he confronted a primeval forest that bore no resemblance to today's Delta. Laced by swamps and a few Indian trails, only the area's flatness was the same. Spending perhaps 6 to 8 weeks in the region, this first European expedition to enter Mississippi crossed the Great River in May 1541, at a point yet to be conclusively determined. Even now, controversy brews and tourist dollars beckon as Mississippi's De Soto Trail Commission attempts to identify precisely where the Spaniards came to the River's bank. Possible sites include Sunflower Landing in Coahoma County, just west of Tunica in Tunica County, and near Memphis in DeSoto County.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, De Soto and his expedition were not the first people to explore or inhabit the Delta. Indian settlement sites as ancient as perhaps 1700 B.C. have been found on the eastern edge of the Delta near Greenwood; and the stately mounds at Winterville north of Greenville give testimony to an early Mississippi Delta aboriginal culture.<sup>8</sup> Scattered throughout the Delta are other evidences of native population, however sparse and widely separated the towns may have been.

When Europeans first explored Mississippi, many small tribes with lilting names lived in the Delta, especially in the valley of the Yazoo and its major tributaries the Tallahatchie, the Yalobusha, the Coldwater, and the Sunflower. Along the banks of this waterway system lived the Yazoo and the Taposo, the Chakchiuma and the Ibitoupa, and a handful of other tribes. In the upper Delta lived the Tunica, with whom De Soto probably had contact. The far-ranging Chickasaws, although generally confined to the northern part of the state east of the Delta, were also among the region's native population.<sup>9</sup>

In the late 1600's, the French began extensive exploration of the central and lower Mississippi Valley, spreading more unintentional than deliberate havoc among the Delta's native people. With the Europeans came dread diseases unknown to the native population, and against which they had no immunity. By the 1730's, most of the smaller tribes had become extinct or their bloodlines so intertwined with the more powerful Chickasaw and Choctaw as to render them essentially so. With the fall of the Natchez Indians to the French in 1731, the only tribes in Mississippi truly worthy of the term were the Chickasaw and the Choctaw. A

---

<sup>4</sup>*Delta Council Economic Progress Report, 1988* (Stoneville, MS: The Delta Council, 1989), 2-17.

<sup>5</sup>Interview with B.F. Smith, former Executive Vice President of the Delta Council, August 15, 1989.

<sup>6</sup>See Arthell Kelly, "The Geography," in Richard Aubrey McLemore, ed., *A History of Mississippi*, 2 vols. (Jackson: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1973), 1:8-9 for a more complete description of the nature of the Delta.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 15-16; Martha M. Bigelow, "Conquistadors, Voyageurs, and Mississippi," *ibid.*, 99.

<sup>8</sup>Richard A. Marshall, "The Prehistory of Mississippi," *ibid.*, 35-36, 63-64.

<sup>9</sup>Arrell M. Gibson, "The Indians of Mississippi," *ibid.*, 69.

few Quapaw, whose main settlements were near the mouth of the Arkansas in that present-day state, probably lived a tenuous existence in the central Delta. Likewise, a small remnant of the Tunica, numbering about 20 warriors, survived in the northern Delta by the close of the American Revolution.<sup>10</sup>

Even the Chickasaw, Mississippi's strongest tribe militarily, were unable to withstand white encroachment. Numbering perhaps 5,000 in 1700, their estimated strength fell to 1,600 by 1760, following four victorious but costly military campaigns against the French between 1720 and 1752. When the French gave up their land claims in the Treaty of Paris of 1763, the Chickasaw obtained a small respite that enabled them to slowly rebuild their population to perhaps 3,100 by 1790; the tribe gradually increased until its removal in the 1830's.<sup>11</sup>

By 1790, approximately 800 whites and blacks inhabited the area of present-day Mississippi north of the 31st parallel.<sup>12</sup> While a few travelers on the Mississippi tentatively probed the Delta from the riverside, hardly any dared approach it from the east, where the rich valley of the Yazoo tended to satisfy the land hunger of westward expansionists. The interior of the Delta was still too forbidding.

By the Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795, the Spanish, who had acquired the area from the English in the Treaty of Paris of 1783, relinquished all claims to what is now Mississippi north of the 31st parallel. Diminishing Spanish influence and power permitted increased settlement by Americans into the lower Mississippi Valley, and the Mississippi Territory, comprising virtually all of what is now Mississippi and Alabama, except the coastal tips, was created in 1798. Nineteen years and approximately 66,000 people later, Mississippi was admitted to the Union as the 20th state.<sup>13</sup> Following precedents set in the Land Ordinances of the 1780's, surveying and land sales were well underway in certain parts of the state.

By 1820, 17 counties had been formed in Mississippi, all in areas where Mississippi's Indian tribes had legally ceded their lands.<sup>14</sup> The only Delta county formed before 1820 was Warren County, which had been created in 1809 while Mississippi was still in territorial status.<sup>15</sup> With a population of 75,000 in 1820,<sup>16</sup> Mississippi was an immensely attractive site for settlement, especially if the rather fragile land claims of the Chickasaw and the Choctaw could be resolved in the state's favor.

After some negotiation and not a little chicanery, this was accomplished. Choctaw claims were relinquished in the Treaties of Doak's Stand (1820) and Dancing Rabbit Creek (1830), and the Chickasaw ceded the remainder of their lands in the Treaty of Pontotoc (1832). All three of these cessions contained portions of the Delta, and obviously served as the catalyst for expansion into parts of Mississippi where few settlers had previously ventured.

After the last remaining legal obstacles were surmounted by these treaties, county formation, surveying, and land sales began in earnest in parts of the Delta. By 1836, 10 new Delta counties had been formed to join Warren, the only existing Delta county at the time of

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 79; Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley, eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 77.

<sup>11</sup>Wood, Waselkov, and Hatley, *Powhatan's Mantle*, 68-69.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>13</sup>Ben J. Wattenberg, ed., *The Statistical History of the United States: From Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), 30.

<sup>14</sup>Charles S. Sydnor, *The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819-1848* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), 34.

<sup>15</sup>*Mississippi Official and Statistical Register, 1988-1992* (Jackson: Office of the Secretary of State, 1989), 270.

<sup>16</sup>Wattenberg, *Statistical History*, 30.

Mississippi's entry into the Union. Of these counties, five (DeSoto, Tunica, Coahoma, Bolivar, and Washington) bordered the river, and five (Carroll, Holmes, Panola, Tallahatchie, and Yazoo) were interior Delta counties. Therefore, the census of 1840 was the first to contain any of the Delta counties other than Warren, Yazoo (1823), and Washington (1827). Of a total population in these 10 counties of 71,719 people, 44,460 (61.9 percent) were black. Of the total black population, only 208 were free. Only Coahoma, DeSoto, and Tunica Counties were predominantly white. There were probably fewer than 8,000 qualified voters in the entire Delta.<sup>17</sup>

These early Delta settlers faced the usual day-to-day difficulties of any frontiersmen, plus a few that were more or less unique to the area. Always looming large was the Mississippi River itself, a seductive combination of friend and enemy. Untold eons of flooding had deposited on the Delta plain unbelievably thick layers of some of the richest soil on the planet. Yet, this same river could angrily reclaim its gift when wet winters and springs overflowed it and its major tributaries. Few settlements could be risked in the Delta until the fickle Mississippi could be at least somewhat restrained.

At the same time, early Delta settlers confronted a densely forested area that would not yield anything profitable until it was cleared. In the low-lying areas of the Delta, permanent standing water made it virtually impossible to clear forests of cypress and other hardwoods. Clearing areas permitted lands to dry more readily, as the settlers' axes and saws assisted nature's evaporation. Even today, however, small dense swamps and marshlands dot the Delta, reminders of what the earliest migrants to the area must have faced.

### **The Levee and its Complex History**

The history of the levee system that now protects the Delta from the Tennessee border to Vicksburg is an intriguing one. Fraught with controversy, sectional prejudice, and indefatigable heroism, the story of the levee is a complex tapestry. Local pride, hard work, and dedication were pitted against nature and the Mississippi, and with several notable exceptions, 1927 in particular, tamed and disciplined the region to produce in abundance.

Floods, of course, were not new to the Delta. The record of De Soto's expedition describes a massive flood that occurred in March 1543. Even allowing for the usual exaggeration that accompanies explorers' accounts, it was certainly one of the worst floods in the Delta's recorded history.<sup>18</sup>

Until 1845, virtually all responsibility for building and maintaining levees belonged to the owners of the riverfront properties.<sup>19</sup> Known as riparian (riverbank) landowners, these early planters, of necessity, had to cooperate with one another in order to protect their lands adequately. It would do little good to levee one's own property if the adjacent planters had failed to do the same.

From the very beginning of the levee system until today, the cost of building and maintaining the levees has been borne by the counties the levee protects. Although the State of Mississippi has authorized the collection of levee taxes in the Delta counties, funds from the State's general fund have never been used for the levee system. Taxpayers in Oktibbeha

---

<sup>17</sup>*Abstract of the Census Returns of the State of Mississippi, as taken by the Marshals of the Northern and Southern Districts thereof, for the year 1840.*

<sup>18</sup>Robert W. Harrison, "Early State Flood-Control Legislation in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 23 (April 1961): 105-6.

<sup>19</sup>Robert W. Harrison, *Levee Districts and Levee Building in Mississippi: A Study of State and Local Efforts to Control Mississippi River Floods* (Stoneville, MS: Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station, 1951), 1.

County, for example, do not help pay for levees in Bolivar County; Bolivar Countians do that, in cooperation with taxpayers from other Delta counties.<sup>20</sup>

In 1819, the Mississippi Legislature authorized some initial levee work in Warren County, setting the stage for more significant levee legislation in the 1830's when the Delta was first opened for settlement after the Indian cessions.<sup>21</sup> Between 1833 and 1838, the Legislature approved several bills affecting levee work in Washington, Coahoma, Tunica, Bolivar, and DeSoto Counties. These laws specified the height and base width of levees, and made riparian landowners legally responsible for constructing their own levees. Fines were occasionally meted out when landowners neglected their responsibilities.<sup>22</sup> The actual building of levees was done by the planters themselves, although their slaves did most of the physical work. County boards of police (now known as boards of supervisors) administered the levee legislation in conjunction with each county's Board of Levee Inspectors.<sup>23</sup>

This arrangement seems to have worked satisfactorily until the disastrous flood of 1844 demonstrated that voluntary cooperation among the riparian landowners was not enough to protect against such a major catastrophe. Consequently, the Mississippi Legislature again entered the picture, as did the national government in 1850. In the late 1840's, the Legislature authorized the collection of levee taxes in several of the Delta counties, taking some of the burden off the riparians. In 1850, the U.S. Congress adopted the Swamp Land Act, deeding to the state all unsold Delta lands and requiring that the monies realized from the sale of these lands be used for levees and other means of reclamation.<sup>24</sup> By the mid-1850's, Irish work gangs began to replace native slave labor in levee construction.

Perhaps the most significant individual in the development of the antebellum levee system was James Lusk Alcorn. Although vilified after the Civil War with the dreaded term "scalawag," Alcorn's efforts on behalf of a unified levee system laid the groundwork for post-Reconstruction development of the Delta. Although they spoke scornfully of him, postwar Delta planters owed much to the transplanted Kentuckian.

Throughout the 1850's, Alcorn fought for better levees and greater state and national commitment to the system. As a member of the Legislature in 1852, he introduced a bill to sell 100,000 acres of public land at \$2 per acre to raise money for levee funding. Despite the efforts of resentful hill county legislators, the bill passed in February 1852. Unfortunately, local feuds in the Delta counties hindered the proper implementation of this legislation.<sup>25</sup>

While unity and cooperation were always difficult for individualistic antebellum Southerners, the Delta was reasonably protected by levees at the beginning of the Civil War. From the Tennessee border to Brunswick Landing near Vicksburg, 310 miles of unbroken levee (almost half of which was built after 1858) garrisoned approximately four million acres of

---

<sup>20</sup>Smith Interview; interview with Mickey Thompson, Bolivar County Tax Assessor-Collector, August 21, 1989.

<sup>21</sup>Harrison, "Early State Flood Control," 114.

<sup>22</sup>Robert W. Harrison, "Levee Building in Mississippi Before the Civil War," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 12 (April 1950): 64, 66-67.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 64; Walter Sillers, Sr., "Flood Control in Bolivar County, 1838-1924," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 9 (January 1947) : 4.

<sup>24</sup>Harrison, "Early State Flood Control," 118; Harrison, "Levee Building," 71-72.

<sup>25</sup>Lillian Pereyra, "James Lusk Alcorn and a Unified Levee System," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 27 (February 1965): 24-25; Mary Fisher Robinson, "A Sketch of James Lusk Alcorn," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 12 (January 1950): 40.

Delta land.<sup>26</sup> But federal military thrusts and neglect necessitated by a cataclysmic war would require an even greater levee effort in the 1870's and 1880's.

Although levee building and land clearing occupied much of the early Delta settlers' time, other enterprises were also important. Better transportation in this frontier region was always a major concern, and interest in railroads boomed in the 1830's. Between 1830 and 1840, charters were issued for at least six different railroads designed to serve parts of the Delta. These were the Vicksburg and Clinton Railroad Company (1831), the Lake Washington and Deer Creek Railroad and Banking Company (1836), the Tallahatchie Railroad Company (1836), the Yazoo Railroad Company (1836), the Pontotoc, Oxford, and Delta Railroad Company (1837), and the Hernando Railroad and Banking Company (1837).<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, most of these companies went bankrupt during the Panic of 1837. There is no conclusive evidence that any track was actually laid by these companies. By 1840, approximately 50 miles of track had been built to connect Vicksburg and Jackson, but this line scarcely served any of the Delta. The entire State of Mississippi had only 83 miles of track by 1840, and only 95 miles by 1848.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the best access to the Delta continued to be via the Mississippi River to the riparian counties, and up the Yazoo from Vicksburg to the Delta's eastern fringe.

### Politics

With flood problems and inadequate transportation, early Deltans were less concerned with politics than were most other Mississippians. Indeed, the small number of qualified voters in the Delta made it impossible for the Delta to significantly influence state campaigns, let alone national elections. Yet, the evidence is clear that those who were qualified to vote in Mississippi enthusiastically exercised that privilege. In the presidential election of 1840, for example, approximately 88.2 percent of Mississippi's qualified voters cast ballots, a percentage surpassed only once (1860) in the state's history.<sup>29</sup>

Politically, most antebellum Delta voters before 1852 allied with the Whig Party, whose economic policies complemented their aristocratic and conservative ideas. At least until recent years, political democracy has been a scarce commodity in the Delta; and it is little wonder that the financially ambitious Deltans gravitated to the party that was the philosophical descendant of the Hamiltonian Federalists. The Whigs reached their zenith in the 1840's, winning two of the three presidential elections in that decade and very nearly the other. Mississippi cast its four electoral votes in 1840 for the Whig candidate William Henry Harrison.<sup>30</sup> At the state level, however, voters were less inclined to support Whig candidates. Only John A. Quitman, who would later bolt the party in disgust and become a Democrat, was a Whig governor of Mississippi.

In the early 1850's, the Whigs began to disintegrate, victims of their own dignity and conservatism, which were overwhelmed in the era's emotional maelstrom. The death of the Whig Party created a political vacuum that was soon filled by the Republican Party. Branded as abolitionists by most Southerners, the Republicans attracted virtually no antebellum

---

<sup>26</sup>Pereyra, "James Lusk Alcorn," 31-32.

<sup>27</sup>John Edmond Gonzales, "Flush Times, Depression, War and Compromise," in McLemore, *History of Mississippi* 1: 290-91; Charles Ripley Johnson, "Railroad Legislation and Building in Mississippi, 1830-1840," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 4 (October 1942): 197-203.

<sup>28</sup>Gonzales, "Flush Times," 291; Johnson, "Railroad Legislation," 205-6; Sydnor, *Southern Sectionalism*, 274n.

<sup>29</sup>Wattenberg, *Statistical History*, 1072.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 1076.

support in Mississippi, even though their economic policies were similar to those of the Whigs. Accordingly, Mississippi Whigs were faced with two bad choices: become Democrats or sit out elections. From the decline in voter turnouts in the elections of 1852 and 1856 (averaging 70 percent compared to 80.7 percent in 1848 and 89.5 percent in 1860), it appears that they did the latter.<sup>31</sup>

Some antebellum Deltans had opportunities for leisure and recreation that one might think uncommon in an essentially frontier region. Horseracing associations, commonly called jockey clubs, existed on the eastern edge of the Delta at Grenada and in the lower Delta at Vicksburg. Thoroughbreds were raised in Warren and Yazoo Counties for these events.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Vicksburg became quite well known for its Shakespearean plays, performed by various traveling troupes. Richard III appears to have been a particular favorite.<sup>33</sup>

While the vast majority of antebellum Deltans were born in the United States, substantial minorities of foreign-born citizens lived in Warren and Yazoo Counties by 1860, comprising more than 10 percent of the free population. Predominant among these nonnatives were persons of Irish and German origins, while English and Italian groups were also present. John Lambert, a Vicksburg wine merchant from England, was one of the more prominent of these citizens. In Vicksburg, nonnatives composed from one-third to one-half of the qualified voters before 1860, most of whom were Democrats. Shunning the Whiggery of the planter class, these merchants and artisans contributed significantly to the culture and life-style of the Southern, antebellum Delta.<sup>34</sup>

During the 1850's, Southern political fortunes, and consequently those of Mississippi as well, seemed to be in the ascendancy. Stephen A. Douglas' Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 potentially opened new territory to slavery; the Dred Scott decision of 1856, which further strengthened the proslavery position, was received ecstatically in the South; and powerful Southerners held many important positions in the pro-Southern administrations of the 1850's.

It was, indeed, the proverbial calm before the storm. While former Whigs in Mississippi flirted with and often embraced the nativist American (or Know-Nothing) Party, Democrats continued to dominate Mississippi politics (although one U.S. House seat was won by a Know-Nothing in 1855). By the late 1850's, however, the nativists had ceased to be a factor in state politics, leaving former Whigs in the Delta and elsewhere in their usual political dilemma. As the election of 1860 approached and secession talk became more than a whisper, Delta voters wrestled with their consciences and their propinquity for political conservatism.<sup>35</sup>

The presidential election of 1860 was the most consequential in the nation's history. Therefore, it is particularly interesting to analyze the Delta vote in this campaign. Four candidates sought the presidency in 1860: John Bell, John C. Breckinridge, Stephen A. Douglas, and Abraham Lincoln. As the Republican (read abolitionist to Mississippians) candidate, Lincoln did not receive a single vote in Mississippi; his name was not even on the ballot. Douglas, the candidate of the essentially northern Democrats, had little strength in the state or in the Delta. Bell and Breckinridge were the chief contenders in Mississippi.

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 1072.

<sup>32</sup>Laura D. S. Harrell, "Jockey Clubs and Race Tracks in Antebellum Mississippi, 1795-1861," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 28 (November 1966): 304-18.

<sup>33</sup>William Bryan Gates, "Performances of Shakespeare in Ante-Bellum Mississippi," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 5 (January 1943): 28-37.

<sup>34</sup>Herbert Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Mississippi," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 16 (July 1954): 152-63.

<sup>35</sup>For a full discussion of the political machinations of the 1850's, see Glover Moore, "Separation From the Union 1854-1861," in McLemore, *History of Mississippi* 1: 422-38.



Mississippi cast 69,435 votes in 1860. Of these, Breckinridge received 40,464 (58.3 percent), Bell 25,335 (36.5 percent), and Douglas 3,636 (5.2 percent). As the candidate of the southern Democrats, Breckinridge's vote can be interpreted as proslavery and potentially prosecessionist. As the candidate of the Constitutional Union Party, Bell inherited the conservative pro-Union vote that could not accept Lincoln, drawing the vast majority of his vote from former Whigs.<sup>36</sup>

Thirteen Delta counties took part in the election of 1860, casting a total of 12,463 votes, or approximately 18 percent of the state's total. Bell received 5,885 votes from these counties, or 47.2 percent of the area's canvass, compared to 36.5 percent in the state as a whole. Breckinridge ran an extremely close second with 5,780 votes (46.4 percent of the Delta), while Douglas polled only 798 votes, or 6.4 percent of the Delta's total. Bell carried nine of the 13 Delta counties, including all the riverside counties. Breckinridge carried Carroll, Holmes, Sunflower, and Tallahatchie Counties. Douglas ran well only in DeSoto County, where he received more than half his vote from the entire Delta.<sup>37</sup>

Combining the Bell and Douglas votes, it is obvious that the conservative, essentially pro-Union element in the Delta prevailed in this election, winning 53.6 percent of the total Delta vote. On the other hand, Bell and Douglas polled only 41.7 percent of the state's total votes. This indicates the great strength of Breckinridge outside the Delta, where he polled 85.8 percent of his total Mississippi count.

Despite the significant conservative showing in the Delta in this election, the certainty of Lincoln's inauguration pushed most Delta sentiment further toward secession. When Mississippi held its secession convention in January 1861, all intelligent observers knew that secession was a foregone conclusion. Yet, at least three Delta delegates continued to fight for moderation. James L. Alcorn of Coahoma County proposed an amendment advocating that Mississippi should not secede until Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana had done so. J. Shall Yerger of Washington County suggested that a concerted effort be made to resolve constitutional issues short of secession. Walter Brooke of Yazoo County proposed that voters should have the right to approve or reject secession in a popular referendum. All three of these amendments failed decisively, and the convention voted for secession by a margin of 84 to 15.<sup>38</sup>

### **Civil War Years**

Virtually all of the military action in the Delta during the Civil War related in some way to the Federal assault against Vicksburg. The story of the siege itself is too well known and too lengthy to summarize here, affecting as it did only the extreme southern periphery of the Delta. Instead, the two major "back door" moves against the river fortress will be discussed.

Early in the Vicksburg campaign of 1862-63, U.S. Grant and other Federal authorities realized that a direct assault against Vicksburg from the Mississippi River would be difficult and risky. Accordingly, other approaches were tried. An overland push from Memphis through Water Valley to Grenada was aborted when Confederates, under Earl Van Dorn, raided and destroyed the Federal supply depot at Holly Springs in December 1862, discouraging other Federal attempts of that nature. Instead, two innovative amphibious moves against Vicksburg

---

<sup>36</sup>W. Dean Burnham, *Presidential Ballots, 1836-1892* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), 552-70.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>Ralph A. Wooster, "The Membership of the Mississippi Secession Convention of 1861," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 16 (October 1954): 252-53.

were developed early in 1863, both designed to allow Federal forces to approach the city via its Yazoo River back door.

In the northern Delta near the Coahoma-Tunica county line lay an ancient bayou known as Yazoo Pass. Prior to 1856, the bayou connected the Mississippi River to the Coldwater River, which in turn flowed into the Tallahatchie. Farther south, near present-day Greenwood, the Tallahatchie met the Yalobusha to form the Yazoo. But in 1856, a levee was built across the Yazoo Pass, cutting off the old bayou from the Coldwater. Affording flood protection to plants in the northern Delta, the levee was an obstacle to Grant's use of the antebellum waterway to reach Vicksburg via the Yazoo and its tributaries.<sup>39</sup>

On February 2-3, 1863, Federal forces, directed by Lieutenant Colonel James H. Wilson, dynamited this levee, allowing water to rush in toward the Coldwater. After waiting more than a month to allow the natural force of the water to enlarge and deepen the channel, Federal vessels entered the pass in early March. Nature's debris and that placed by wary Confederates impeded the progress of this expedition, giving the Rebels time to construct an ingenious trap near where the Tallahatchie met the Yalobusha.<sup>40</sup> Commanded by W.W. Loring, anxious Confederates awaited the amphibious Federal push at Fort Pemberton on the Tallahatchie.

While the Confederates could put up one river gun braced by a cotton bale and call it a fort, Fort Pemberton was more than that. Located on a peninsula separating the south bank of the Tallahatchie from the north bank of the Yazoo, Fort Pemberton commanded the river well. Looking upstream toward the oncoming Federal vessels, the fort sat on a gentle eastward bend of the south bank of the Tallahatchie, where it commanded several hundred yards of river as straight as a Delta highway.

Into this Confederate shooting gallery steamed several different Federal assaults during March and early April, all unsuccessful. Marshy land and shrewd Confederate positioning precluded an infantry push against Fort Pemberton, and the Federals abandoned their moves in this direction by the end of the first week in April.

Meanwhile, another amphibious expedition was occurring in the lower Delta. On March 14, 13 Federal vessels (including five ironclads), commanded by David D. Porter, entered Steele's Bayou about 7 miles north of Vicksburg via the Yazoo. Their objective was simple: relieve and reinforce the Yazoo Pass expedition by moving up Steele's Bayou to Black Bayou to Deer Creek, and then on to the upper Yazoo. By thus skirting Confederate batteries located at two different points on the Yazoo, some 10 and 12 miles northeast of Vicksburg, this Federal move could assist the effort against Fort Pemberton or descend the Yazoo itself for an assault on the batteries or a flanking infantry movement behind them.<sup>41</sup>

It was a disaster. Confederate forces under Colonel Samuel F. Ferguson were hastily assembled near Rolling Fork, where they beat back Porter's assault on March 19. Reinforced by additional troops under Brigadier General Winfield Scott Featherston, the Confederates chased the retreating Federals southward down Deer Creek. What could have been a major victory for the Confederates was averted when units of William T. Sherman's troops arrived

---

<sup>39</sup>Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative: Fredericksburg to Meridian* (New York: Random House, 1963), 201-2; Bruce Catton, *Grant Moves South* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), 379; Jerry Korn, *War on the Mississippi: Grant's Vicksburg Campaign* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1985), 74-75.

<sup>40</sup>Edwin C. Bearss, "The Armed Conflict, 1861-1865," in McLemore, *History of Mississippi*, 1: 466; Patricia L. Faust, ed., *Historical Times Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 846.

<sup>41</sup>Bearss, "Armed Conflict," 467-68; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 716.

to rescue Porter and his men.<sup>42</sup> Now Grant would try more orthodox means of taking Vicksburg, and he would be successful.

In addition to these major actions in the Delta, several dozen skirmishes occurred throughout the area. Coldwater, Greenville, Friars Point, Hernando, Yazoo City, Greenwood, Prentiss, and Senatobia were among the Delta towns that experienced one or more conflicts at some time during four long years of war.<sup>43</sup>

### **Reconstruction**

To say that the Civil War was devastating to the Delta would be an understatement. The levee system was in tatters by 1865, due to Federal destruction and major flooding in 1862. That, coupled with natural neglect of the land necessitated by the absence of many men away at war, meant that postwar Deltans would face the onerous task of reclaiming and reclearing their lands. Bottomland hardwoods grew extremely fast, and parts of the Delta were as forested as they were when the first settlers arrived. In prosperous times, clearing land was difficult; in the political and economic turmoil of Reconstruction, it was almost impossible.

During the Reconstruction period, four new counties were carved from existing Delta counties. Leflore (1871), Tate (1873), Sharkey (1876), and Quitman (1877) were created, leaving only Humphreys (1918) to complete the Delta roster. And, as new counties were formed, so, for a time at least, was a very different life-style.

In its initial presidential phase, Reconstruction was extremely generous to the South. Most Confederates had to do nothing more to regain their citizenship than swear an oath of future loyalty. The death of slavery was a *fait accompli*, caused not by executive proclamation but by military defeat. Dead also was the concept of secession and the hope of redeeming Confederate securities, along with the faint hope that compensation might be paid for freed slaves. Mississippi, like her sister Confederate states, dutifully complied with Andrew Johnson's enlargement of Lincoln's policies; she confidently awaited full restoration to the Union when Congress convened in late 1865.

Swiftly, however, an angry Congress unraveled Johnson's fabric of restoration. Declaring itself the legitimate maker of Reconstruction policy, Congress saw the South as totally unrepentant and unwilling to partake of the obligatory feast of crow. In particular, the passage of "Black Codes," regulating the behavior of the freedmen, seemed to many Northerners a thinly veiled attempt to restore many of the aspects of slavery. In 1867, martial law was imposed upon 10 former Confederate states, and a new voter registration was held across the South. For the first time, blacks registered to vote in large numbers. At the same time, stricter amnesty requirements were invoked, and many former Confederates found themselves without the franchise.

Consequently, Mississippi and four other former Confederate states had black voter majorities in the late 1860's and early 1870's. Blacks held offices throughout Mississippi, and most did so quite creditably. Blanche K. Bruce of Bolivar County, for example, became the first black to serve a full term in the United States Senate, where he and his white Mississippi colleague L. Q. C. Lamar became good friends. Throughout the Delta, blacks held many city and county offices, for every Delta county had a substantial black voting majority.

But the notion that blacks controlled Mississippi politically during Reconstruction is a myth. As early as 1871, white Democrats began easing back into power in some counties, and by 1873 more counties were controlled by Democrats than by Republicans. Too, the

---

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Edwin C. Bearss, comp., "Calendar of Events in Mississippi, 1861-1865," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 21 (April 1959): 85-112.

Republican Party in Mississippi was far from monolithic. At the risk of using terms that are now out of historical vogue, the party was bitterly factionalized between carpetbaggers and scalawags. Factions led by James L. Alcorn (scalawags) and Adelbert Ames (carpetbaggers) did battle both for officeholding and the allegiance of black voters. White Democrats observed this battle with scarcely restrained joy, knowing full well that their day of victory was not far distant.<sup>44</sup>

Black voters were caught in the triangular crossfire of scalawags, carpetbaggers, and white Democrats. The best promises that Reconstruction offered them were largely unfulfilled, if not broken. In 1876, Democrats regained control of state government, and in less than two decades Mississippi blacks would become legally ensconced in the wilderness of political oblivion, from which they were not allowed to emerge until the 1960's.

Modern Reconstruction scholarship has almost completely debunked the "good white Democrats versus bad black and white Republicans" school of thought that dominated until the 1950's. As previously stated, Mississippi never came close to "black rule" during Reconstruction. Likewise, most Reconstruction officeholders were conscientious if not competent.<sup>45</sup> And when compared to the dishonesty and sleight-of-hand that were commonplace in Mississippi politics during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Reconstruction officeholders appear in a better light.

By 1880, the racial makeup of the Delta had changed little from antebellum times. Blacks composed 72.4 percent of the Delta's population, and every Delta county had a black majority. Issaquena County had the largest percentage of black population (91.7 percent), followed closely by Washington (86.2 percent) and Bolivar (85.6 percent). Tate County was the "whitest" county in the Delta, where blacks numbered only 51.4 percent of the population.<sup>46</sup>

These black majorities might have been somewhat higher had it not been for the "exodus" to Kansas of perhaps five or six thousand black Mississippians in 1879. Caused by a variety of reasons, this movement foretold the much more significant black migrations of the 20th century to cities such as Chicago and Detroit. At the same time some blacks were leaving Mississippi to go to Kansas, blacks from other parts of the state were moving to the Delta, where agricultural employment was more readily available. In the final analysis, any black Delta population lost to this exodus was probably more than compensated for by the black migration to the Delta from within Mississippi.<sup>47</sup>

The 1870's also saw the arrival of the first Chinese to the Mississippi Delta. Touted in the beginning as potential replacements for black manual labor, these new immigrants were usually assigned "black" status by whites. By the late 1950's and early 1960's, however, this was no longer true. Mississippi Chinese began to move into white communities, attend white schools, and were winning their struggle to attain "white" status while retaining their own unique cultural identity. As grocers and members of the professions, they became some of the Delta's most respected citizens, even though they constitute only one-quarter of one percent of the Delta's population. Much more numerous were the Italian immigrants who came into the Delta in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as part of the massive Italian migration to the United States between 1880 and World War I. Arriving upriver via New Orleans and

---

<sup>44</sup>David G. Sansing, "Congressional Reconstruction," in McLemore, *History of Mississippi*, 1: 573-89. See also Professor Sansing's dissertation, "The Role of the Scalawag in Mississippi Reconstruction: (University of Southern Mississippi, 1969).

<sup>45</sup>Eugene R. Mechelke, "Some Observations on Mississippi's Reconstruction Historiography," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 33 (February 1971) : 37-38.

<sup>46</sup>Alfred H. Stone, "The Basis of White Political Control in Mississippi," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 6 (October 1944): 230-36.

<sup>47</sup>Vernon Lane Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890* (New York: Harper & Row, 1947), 109-16.

to a lesser extent by rail and from the North, they usually became sharecroppers. Through frugality and investment, many managed to purchase their own farmlands, and later moved into business and other professions. Most of the Deltans of Italian descent today are concentrated in the riverside counties, especially in such central Delta towns as Clarksdale, Shelby, Cleveland, Rosedale, Shaw, and Greenville. Due in great measure to Delta Italian membership, the Catholic Church in the Delta is stronger and more numerous than in any other part of Mississippi, with the possible exception of the Gulf Coast.<sup>48</sup>

While politics and racial issues were important to post-Civil War Deltans, no less significant was the desperate need to restore the levee system and reclaim the land itself. Abandoned plantations were rapidly overgrown in timber, and a massive flood in 1865 broke the existing levee in many places, inundating most of the western Delta. Returning soldiers were bitterly disillusioned, and hundreds of families abandoned the Delta rather than fight nature again.<sup>49</sup>

### **Containing the River**

By the end of Reconstruction, however, most Deltans were determined to rebuild their levees and clear their lands. In 1877, the Mississippi Levee District was created, and it now includes Bolivar, Washington, Issaquena, and Sharkey Counties as well as part of Humphreys County. Seven years later, in 1884, the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee District was formed, including Tunica, Coahoma, DeSoto, Quitman, Sunflower, and Leflore Counties, along with parts of Yazoo, Humphreys, Holmes, and Tallahatchie Counties. The headquarters of the Mississippi Levee District are at Greenville, while those of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee District are at Clarksdale.<sup>50</sup>

The record compiled by these levee districts is amazing. Not since 1897 has there been a break in the levees maintained by the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee District, which has a broader tax base from which to draw than does the Mississippi Levee District. Even though more levee breaks have occurred in those maintained by the Mississippi Levee District, its record has also been outstanding considering its tax base and the fact that it protects the southern Delta counties, where the water volume of the Mississippi is greater. Major breaks occurred in this levee system in 1882, 1897, 1912, and the 1927 catastrophe.<sup>51</sup>

In 1928, the national government threw its full strength into the fight to contain the Mississippi when it passed the Flood Control Act. Introduced by Mississippi Congressman William M. Whittington of Leflore County, this act set the stage for rebuilding the levees and for future national commitment to flood control in the lower Mississippi Valley.<sup>52</sup> Financed by the Levee Districts and physically maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Mississippi River levees have been remarkably secure since 1927. Indeed, few Deltans now

---

<sup>48</sup>Kit Mui L. Chan, "The Chinese-Americans in the Mississippi Delta," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 35 (February 1973): 29-35; see also James W. Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Harvey Wish, *Society and Thought in Modern America* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1962), 242-43; Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 434-35. (Professor James Robinson of Delta State University conducted extensive interviews with first-generation Delta Italians in the 1970's; some of the information in this paragraph derives from his work.)

<sup>49</sup>Sillers, "Flood Control," 6; Harrison, "Levee Building," 96-97.

<sup>50</sup>Harrison, *Levee Districts*, 2, 52, 63, 75; Cash and Lewis, *Delta Council*, 64.

<sup>51</sup>Sillers, "Flood Control," 14-16; Robert W. Harrison, "The Formative Years of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee District," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 13 (October 1951) : 236; Harrison, *Levee Districts*, 52-74; 140-53; 205-16; 233.

<sup>52</sup>Sillers, "Flood Control," 20; Harrison, *Levee Districts*, 235.

have much concern about their safety from the river. Short of a major earthquake, the levee system seems adequate to protect the Delta from the Mississippi itself.

Ironically, the major threat of flooding in the Delta in recent years has been from the Yazoo and its tributaries. Unable to empty their flow into a well-leveed and full Mississippi River, these streams back up and overflow their own lowlands, most significantly in 1973 and to a lesser degree in later years, including 1989 and 1991. Whether flood control advocates will win their battle with sportsmen determined to preserve certain Delta wetlands is a question yet to be decided.

### **A Push for a New Constitution**

During the last quarter of the 19th century, many Mississippians were advocating the adoption of a new constitution to replace the 1868 Reconstruction document. Although blacks had already been virtually eliminated from political life, as had Republicans, the methods used to accomplish this end were distasteful to many Mississippians. Intimidation, fraud, and violence had become the norm by which white Democrats maintained control, and they freely admitted it.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, the vast majority of white Mississippians wanted blacks eliminated from politics, but the methods used to do so chafed their consciences. They wanted to do it legally with a new constitution, which would also give them an opportunity to abolish the hated 1868 Reconstruction constitution, and add a few antibusiness provisions as well.

The majority of white Deltans opposed calling a new constitutional convention simply because they liked conditions as they were. Few blacks were attempting to vote in the Delta anyway, and the existing apportionment provisions greatly favored the Delta's populous counties. Because blacks were counted in determining a county's population for legislative apportionment, the Delta counties (and other black majority counties) were able to reap the benefits of counting blacks while still denying them the right to vote. This arrangement produced a skewed situation that infuriated voters in the white majority counties.

Specifically, there were 40 white majority counties in Mississippi in 1890, with about 73,000 white voters. At the same time, there were 34 black majority counties (including all 17 of the existing Delta counties) which had about 47,600 white voters. But because representation in the state legislature was based on population, the black counties sent 68 members to the lower house while the white counties elected only 52. Simple mathematics shows that a white Deltan's vote was exactly twice as valuable as a white vote from the white majority counties.<sup>54</sup>

The Delta counties also controlled the state Democratic Party's nominating process, and for the same reasons. Democratic candidates for state offices were chosen by the party convention method, and each county had two delegates to the convention for each of its members in the House of Representatives. Because the black counties controlled the House, they also were able to control the state nominating conventions.<sup>55</sup>

Since non-Delta whites were clearly less powerful politically than Delta whites in the Democratic Party power structure, they occasionally flirted with leaving the Democratic Party. And, in the 1890's, the Populist Party with its agrarian appeal would have welcomed them. Some Mississippi whites did affiliate with the Populists, but most were cowed into Democratic

---

<sup>53</sup>Wharton, *Negro in Mississippi*, 206-8.

<sup>54</sup>Eric C. Clark, "Legislative Apportionment in the 1890 Constitutional Convention," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 42 (November 1980): 299-300.

<sup>55</sup>Albert D. Kirwan, *Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876-1925* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 65-84; Clark, "Legislative Apportionment," 300.

acquiescence when ominously reminded of the possible consequences should the white vote in Mississippi be split between the Democrats and the Populists. Possible black enfranchisement and renewed interest by the national government in black political rights served to discourage mass defection of whites from the Democratic Party.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the fact that most Delta delegates opposed it, a state constitutional convention drafted a new constitution in 1890. Its antiblack provisions were extremely effective, as were those that tended to discourage the establishment of corporations and industries in Mississippi. However, the reapportionment provisions of the new constitution only slightly reduced the influence of the Delta in state politics, and non-Delta whites redoubled their efforts to gain control of the state Democratic Party.

In little more than a decade, they would be successful. Responding to a virtually unanimous outcry from the state's newspapers and reports of rampant election fraud in the Delta counties, the legislature adopted the Primary Law in March 1902. This law provided that party candidates would be nominated by primary elections rather than conventions. This assured that every vote cast in a primary would be of equal value. Since primaries were considered private party functions, the Democratic Party could (and did) declare that no blacks could participate in the primary elections. If perchance some blacks did manage to register to vote and cast ballots in the general election, it would make no difference; their only choice, on the state level at least, would be the Democratic candidate.

The next two decades would witness the full flower of the "redneck" movement in Mississippi, even though the Delta did not decline in power as much as some had expected. Personified by politicians such as James K. Vardaman and Theodore G. Bilbo, the movement was, as one historian has noted, "racist. . . [but] progressive on all other issues."<sup>57</sup> While some Deltans watched in disbelief, Vardaman, Bilbo, and their allies proceeded to beat the dead horse of black political participation into an absolute pulp. Demagoguery reigned supreme, and vestiges of that political approach were present as late as the 1980's.

World War I, the Great Depression, and the New Deal had significant effects on the Delta, but the overall nature of the area changed very little. Overproduction of cotton just prior to World War I caused many Delta planters to advocate that no cotton at all be grown in 1915 in order to stimulate prices. By the fall of 1915, British wartime needs had restored cotton prices and the crisis eased. But the concept of "no crop" as a means of alleviating low cotton prices endured.<sup>58</sup>

In 1931, as Mississippi sank into the Depression with the rest of the nation, the idea was resurrected as the "Cotton Holiday Movement." Various proposals were made in the state to help raise cotton prices. Governor Bilbo proposed that every third row of cotton be left unpicked in order to raise prices and fertilize the fields. Huey P. Long of Louisiana urged that no cotton crop at all be grown in 1932, and many Mississippians supported this idea. Deltans Walter Sillers and W.B. Roberts steered through the legislature in 1931 a bill designed to reduce Mississippi's cotton acreage in 1932 and 1933 to 30 percent of the 1931 acreage. Designed to go into effect when states growing at least 75 percent of U.S. cotton followed suit,

---

<sup>56</sup>Kirwan, *Revolt*, 93-102; Wharton, *Negro in Mississippi*, 208.

<sup>57</sup>John Ray Skates, Jr., "Mississippi," in David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 832.

<sup>58</sup>James L. McCorkle, Jr., "Cotton, War, and Mississippi, 1914-1915," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 45 (May 1983): 91, 97, 115.

the bill was signed by Bilbo in October 1931. Clearly such action was a harbinger of the crop reduction provisions of the New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Act.<sup>59</sup>

Also significant to the development of the Delta was the railroad boom that occurred from the 1880's until the outbreak of World War I. Prior to the 1880's, the Delta had been framed by the north-south Mississippi Central Railroad on the east through Grenada, Oxford, and Holly Springs, and by the Vicksburg and Jackson Railroad on the south. But the interior of the Delta was not being adequately served. This would change in the 1880's, when the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad was built to connect Vicksburg and Memphis, running through the heart of the Delta, giving rise to the development of numerous towns and farming communities. This line, along with its numerous branches, brought rail service to an area hitherto without it. Eventually, most of the track maintained by this railroad was absorbed into the Illinois Central Railroad, the Delta's major rail line in modern times.<sup>60</sup>

By 1940, the racial composition of the Delta was much the same as it was in 1880. Blacks composed 69.9 percent of the region's population in 1940, down slightly from 72.4 percent 60 years before. Every Delta county still had a black majority, with eight counties having a higher percentage of blacks in 1940 than in 1880, and nine having a lower percentage. Humphreys County is not included in these figures since it was not formed until 1918 and is therefore not part of the 1880 statistics.<sup>61</sup>

Changes in the basic Delta way of life were small also. Slavery was dead, of course, but sharecropping was still present, slowly dying because of mechanization and other factors. Mechanization, as beneficial as it was to the agricultural economy in general, made it more difficult for farm laborers to find employment. Industry came slowly to the Delta, at least partially because many planters opposed it. Industry would offer higher wages than planters would, making it difficult to acquire the needed amount of human labor, even though that demand was lessening because of mechanization.

Between 1935 and 1945, at least three identifiable factors contributed to changing the face of the Delta, although such changes came slowly. In 1935, Governor Hugh L. White launched the Balance Agriculture With Industry program, which was the predecessor of today's Mississippi Agricultural and Industrial Board. Secondly, the Delta Chamber of Commerce was created in 1935, changing its name in 1938 to the Delta Council. Arguably the most powerful and influential organization of its type in the state, the Delta Council can justifiably claim credit for a great deal of the agricultural and industrial progress that has been made in the Delta during the last 50 years. Although concerned primarily with cotton agriculture in its early years, the Delta Council showed its flexibility and foresight in 1956 by creating an Industrial and Community Development Department, broadening its appeal and wisely confronting economic reality.<sup>62</sup>

## WW II and Mississippi

A third factor affecting the Delta, more psychologically than these other two, was World War II. In fact, one of the state's most noted historians has asserted that World War II was pivotal in the state's history, after which Mississippians would never be able to return completely to their past. The war took many provincial Mississippians far from home, put

---

<sup>59</sup>Robert W. Snyder, "The Cotton Holiday Movement in Mississippi, 1931," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 40 (February 1978): 24, 28-29.

<sup>60</sup>William F. Gray, *Imperial Bolivar* (Cleveland, MS: *The Bolivar Commercial*, 1923), 39-40.

<sup>61</sup>Stone, "White Control," 225-36.

<sup>62</sup>Ralph J. Rogers, "The Effort to Industrialize," in McLemore, *History of Mississippi*, 2: 240-43; Cash and Lewis, *Delta Council*, 32; *Delta Council Report*, 1.



them in unfamiliar circumstances in a cosmopolitan armed force, and changed their outlooks drastically. While change did not come overnight to the Delta, seeds were sown that could not be uprooted.<sup>63</sup> Speaking of seeds, crop diversification came slowly but inexorably into the Delta after World War II. Where once predominantly cotton grew, catfish now swim and rice, soybeans, and milo thrive.

By the 1950's and 1960's, it was evident that the Delta and most other parts of the South were experiencing a significant social upheaval. Long noted as an area marked by at least superficial racial harmony, the Delta escaped some of the more violent aspects of the Civil Rights Movement. The Emmett Till case of 1955 was a notable exception. One of the bitterest kinds of race prejudice is that felt by poor whites for blacks; in an area where there were relatively few poor whites, the legacy of paternalism tended to soften attitudes.

Among the many significant impacts of the Civil Rights Movement on the Delta and on Mississippi was the tremendous increase in voter participation. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 opened the doors to significant black electoral participation for the first time since the 1870's. At the same time, whites who had grown accustomed to one-party politics and black political exclusion, returned to the polls in record numbers.

In the 18 presidential elections from 1900 to 1968, Mississippi's average voter turnout was 19.58 percent. An average of four out of five Mississippians who were theoretically eligible to vote did not. Only South Carolina (18.8 percent for the same period) had a lower rate of participation.<sup>64</sup> Obviously, several factors produced this apparent apathy. First, the one-party system lulled many voters into a state of apathy. There was no need to vote when the outcome was certain; in most elections, the Devil himself could have run as a Democrat and would have won. Also, the systematic and almost complete denial of black voting rights kept at least half of the state's adult population away from the polls.

The returns from two elections will illustrate this point. In 1948, the candidacy of Strom Thurmond on the States' Rights ticket sparked more white interest in Mississippi than in perhaps any other election in the century up until that time. Yet, only 16 percent of Mississippi's eligible voters cast ballots. Twenty years later, in another hotly contested election, the voter turnout was 53.3 percent, Mississippi's highest since 1876, and more than three times higher than that of 1948. The 1968 election was also the first since Reconstruction in which a significant number of blacks in Mississippi were able to vote.<sup>65</sup> In 1964, for example, only 6.7 percent of the blacks of voting age were registered; by 1970, 68 percent were registered.<sup>66</sup>

It is equally interesting to analyze more recent voting patterns in the Delta. In the gubernatorial election of 1983, for example, Bill Allain carried 55.1 percent of the vote statewide and 58.1 percent of the Delta vote. Clarksdale resident Leon Bramlett actually received a lower percentage of the Delta vote than he did across the state.<sup>67</sup> In the 1986 referendum on the gubernatorial succession amendment, 64.6 percent of the state's voters approved it, while 68.5 percent of the Delta's voters did. An amendment to repeal the section of the 1890 constitution making interracial marriage illegal passed in the state with 51.75

---

<sup>63</sup>John Ray Skates, Jr., "World War II As a Watershed in Mississippi History," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 37 (May 1975): 131-42; John Ray Skates, Jr., "World War II and Its Effects," in McLemore, *History of Mississippi*, 2: 120-39.

<sup>64</sup>Wattenberg, *Statistical History*, 1072.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Billy Burton Hathorn, "Challenging the Status Quo: Rubel Lex Phillips and the Mississippi Republican Party, 1963-1967," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 47 (November 1985): 257-58.

<sup>67</sup>*Mississippi Official and Statistical Register, 1984-1988* (Jackson: Office of the Secretary of State, 1985), 450-51.

percent of the vote and in the Delta with 53.1 percent.<sup>68</sup> Seemingly, Delta voting patterns parallel rather closely those of the rest of the state.

Significant exceptions disprove this generalization, however. In the 1987 gubernatorial race between Ray Mabus and Jack Reed, Mabus carried 53.4 percent of the statewide vote. But he received a larger majority of 61.2 percent in the Delta. Mabus' margin over Reed in the Delta was 48,701; in the entire state his margin was only 49,413. Discounting the Delta vote, Mabus' margin over Reed was only 712 votes out of 596,380 cast in the non-Delta counties.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the 1988 presidential election showed a significant difference in Delta voting patterns and those of the state as a whole. Statewide, George Bush received 59.7 percent of the vote but only 52 percent in the Delta.<sup>70</sup>

Black officeholders in the Delta are numerous, often winning their positions with more than token white support. Congressman Mike Espy, for example, the first black Mississippian to serve in Congress since Reconstruction, won at least 40 percent of the white vote in his 1988 re-election campaign after receiving only slight white support in his initial race in 1986.

### **Delta Uniqueness**

As significant as these political facts are, they are no less important than those that tell the story of the industrial development of the Delta. In an area where population change has been virtually static since 1960, manufacturing employment has more than doubled during the same period. Actual wages paid to these employees have increased almost six times from 1960 to 1987. Median family income has increased nearly 10 times, and per capita income almost 11 times since 1960.<sup>71</sup> Other chapters in this study will analyze these and many other factors more fully.

To discuss culture in the 20th century Delta would require at least an entire chapter. Isolating only one element, the incredible number of outstanding Delta writers, intrigues anyone who has studied the area's history. Concentrated in Greenville, famous Delta authors include Walker Percy, William Alexander Percy, Shelby Foote, Hodding Carter, Jr., David Cohn, Ellen Douglas, and so many others that one hesitates to mention any for fear of omitting some who are equally important. Even William Faulkner, not a native Deltan, found the area so fascinating that much of his work concerns it.

Of necessity, this has been a cursory and selective picture of the Delta. Many significant factors have not been mentioned at all, and none have been discussed thoroughly. Yet, the unique qualities of the area have certainly been demonstrated and, as stated earlier, will be elaborated on more fully in other parts of this work.

Historians have seldom been able to resist the temptation to philosophize and offer predictions. Admitting the risk, a few observations seem in order. In recent years, many rather dire economic and demographic projections have been made about the Delta. They speak of declining population, the exodus of the area's best minds, and economic stagnation. These prophecies may well be proven true.

But, in the words of one revered Deltan, there is absolutely no reason why these predictions should be accepted as fact.<sup>72</sup> The land remains rich; the water remains plentiful;

---

<sup>68</sup>*Mississippi Register, 1988-1992, 571-72, 578-79.*

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid., 494-95.*

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid., 554-55.*

<sup>71</sup>*Delta Council Report, 2-5, 12-13.*

<sup>72</sup>Smith Interview, August 15, 1989.

excellent institutions of higher learning exist throughout the Delta; and the population is still numerous. Opportunity is not only knocking; it has crossed the threshold.

The years since World War II have seen the development of a significant middle-class element in the Delta, keyed to industry and the professions as well as to agriculture. In the last two to three decades, significant numbers of blacks have entered this social layer, and almost every Delta town of any size has a substantial middle-class black community. Clearly, the Delta's future economic prosperity is dependent upon cooperation between middle-class whites and middle-class blacks. The remnant of the white planter class is unlikely to reach out to the black middle class, and the black underclass is unable to identify with the white middle class.

Therefore, middle-class Deltans have a joint obligation and a joint opportunity. Middle-class whites must reach out in good faith to their black counterparts, becoming friends instead of acquaintances, replacing suspicion with trust. By the same token, middle-class blacks must respond in kind, adding one additional duty: they must reach out as role models to the black underclass, for they are the only ones who can. They must share their expertise, successes, and values; not isolate themselves in a kind of narrow limbo.

These goals are not too much to hope for. They are certainly not too much to strive for. If they can be achieved, the Delta's best years are in the future.

## ***Chapter***

# **3**

### ***Race Relations in the Delta***

***by Phyllis Gray-Ray\****

This chapter will present a general overview of race relations between blacks and whites in the United States, the South, and the Mississippi Delta. Subsequent chapters will specifically address how race relations have impacted on important aspects of the social and economic development of the Mississippi Delta region. Therefore, a detailed description of these aspects will not be included in this overview. However, it is important to understand the Delta's race relations, because they affect critical aspects of cooperation and accommodation among its people. The focal concerns of the chapter will be to describe barriers to positive race relations, slavery, Reconstruction, black migration, the impact of racial conflicts on economic development in the South, contemporary industrialization and race relations, costs and benefits of economic development, and Affirmative Action in the Delta.

Antagonistic race relations have always been a barrier to effective communication, coordination, and cooperation between blacks and whites in America, particularly in the South. Mississippi, like other Southern states, has been stigmatized for its racial tensions. These racial problems have hindered social interactions between blacks and whites and have stunted economic development in the state. Mississippi, especially the Delta region, is one of the poorest states in the nation. This is due, in part, to its long history of overt racial conflicts between blacks and whites.

#### **Barriers to Positive Race Relations**

Socialization, which is the process of learning culture (customs, traditions, and beliefs), differs among racial and ethnic groups. During socialization, each person gradually develops a unique personality, which shapes his or her attitudes in terms of feelings, ways of thinking, and behaviors.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, individuals may develop different views toward others and other cultures during the socialization process.

---

<sup>1</sup>Richard T. Schaefer, *Sociology*, 2nd ed. (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1986).

\*Assistant Professor of Sociology, Mississippi State University.

To be sure, one of the most exorbitant costs of poor race relations has been the failure to use the resources of all individuals (blacks and whites), which has resulted in economic stagnation and waste.<sup>2</sup> Racial conflicts have caused the Mississippi Delta's human capital to depreciate significantly. Economic development is made possible only through communication and cooperation between racial and ethnic groups in a region. To discard the potential contributions of a majority of a region's human capital is the equivalent of suicide.

Several barriers hinder positive race relations between blacks and whites in the United States. These may include ethnocentrism, paternalism, prejudice, discrimination, and racism. First, those who develop ethnocentric attitudes strongly believe that their own culture is superior to all others; they tend to judge other cultures in terms of their own.<sup>3</sup>

Second, individuals who develop paternalistic attitudes have a need to control others who are less powerful. They tend to have a master-servant mentality. Those who are perceived as subordinate are thought to be immature and irresponsible, but are tolerated as long as they remain in their places.<sup>4</sup> Hence, whites who have been in superordinate or paternal positions might become angry when blacks "do not appear sufficiently grateful for any [alleged] favors that are given."<sup>5</sup>

Paternalistic attitudes are maintained through social distance of etiquette (i.e., segregation). They are often more apparent when at least two racial groups, mostly in terms of skin color, come into contact. During the initial contact, racial caste systems may develop, which limits mobility between races. For them, race remains the major conflicting factor, and the attitudes of superiority and inferiority of races develop and become ingrained into individuals.<sup>6</sup>

Third, prejudiced people harbor biased beliefs about members of other racial or ethnic groups. These attitudes are expressed through stereotypes, which are negative, mental perceptions of others, and social distance, which refers to the degree of intimacy established in relationships with others. Prejudiced attitudes are also shown through scapegoating, which refers to the tendency to take out one's feelings of frustration and/or aggression on someone other than the true source of the feelings (i.e., the Ku Klux Klan's violence against blacks).<sup>7</sup>

Stereotypes of blacks have always been a strong barrier to positive race relations in the United States. Blacks have been stereotyped and insulted in numerous ways. For example, in 1906, during an exhibit by the New York Zoological Society, a small African, Ota Benga, was displayed in a cage among monkeys at the Bronx Park Zoo. He was viewed by thousands. Although several blacks protested the inhumane degradation of the African, many whites thought it was great entertainment.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Arnold Rose, The Roots of Prejudice (Paris: UNESCO, 1951).

<sup>3</sup>Vincent A. Parrillo, Strangers to These Shores: Race and Ethnic Relations in the United States, 2nd ed. (NY: MacMillan, 1985); Harry H. Kitano, Race Relations, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985).

<sup>4</sup>Pierre L. Van den Berghe, Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective, (NY: Wiley, 1967); Kitano, 1985.

<sup>5</sup>Roger Daniels and Harry Kitano, American Racism: Exploration of the Nature of Prejudice, (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985).

<sup>6</sup>Van den Berghe (1967); Kitano (1985).

<sup>7</sup>Daniel J. Curran and Renzetti M. Claire, Social Problems: Society in Crisis (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1987); Kitano (1985); Parrillo (1985).

<sup>8</sup>Joe R. Feagin, Racial and Ethnic Relations, 3rd ed. (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989).

Blacks were also stereotyped as being mentally and morally inferior to whites, and had happy-go-lucky Sambo attitudes. In addition, their dark skin color was considered unusual and/or ugly. These stereotypes existed in slavery as well as today, and they continue to influence race relations in America.<sup>9</sup>

Prejudiced people may also engage in discrimination, which involves any actions, policies, or practices that deny individuals or groups equal access to a society's resources and/or rewards. There are two types of racial discrimination, individual and institutional. The former is intentional actions against other ethnic or racial groups by individuals or small groups. The latter, also known as institutional racism, occurs when policies and practices of major institutions (i.e., government, education, economy) discriminate against ethnic and racial groups. This type is harder to identify and eradicate because it is built into the system.<sup>10</sup>

There is also a temporal dimension in relations to discrimination; it can be either current or past. Current discrimination may refer to disparities in pay and underemployment. Whereas, past discrimination refers to behavior enacted in the past that continues to hinder the progress of members of the target group. Examples of past discrimination include tracking and encouraging nonschool attendance.<sup>11</sup>

Fourth, racism encompasses all of the aforementioned barriers to positive race relations. Racist individuals believe that their race is superior to others and that there is no such thing as racial equality. They assume that their color, culture, mental, and physical capabilities are superior to other races. Racists have prejudiced beliefs and discriminate against other racial and ethnic groups. These beliefs are justified because of their racist perceptions.<sup>12</sup>

Institutional racism entered the system during European colonization of America. In the beginning, Europeans had paternalistic and ethnocentric attitudes toward people in other parts of the world. Hence, there has been much evidence indicating that racist attitudes preceded slavery. So, when Africans were brought to the United States in chains, they were immediate targets of racism.<sup>13</sup>

The main objective of European colonization of America was economic gain. For instance, the English came to America to establish permanent colonies. They became threatened and felt a need to protect themselves as others immigrated there. Thus, they instituted quotas to restrict immigration of others, and developed the ethnocentric view that Northern Europeans were the superior racial group. These quotas and attitudes led to the English domination of America. Gradually, members from other white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant groups became a part of their dominance.<sup>14</sup>

## Slavery

As life in America began to expand, the exploitation of Africans was sought because of the insatiable demand for labor and whites' religious views of them as heathens. As a result,

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Parrillo (1985); Kitano (1985); Curran and Renzetti (1987); Feagin (1989).

<sup>11</sup>Schaefer, *Sociology* (1986).

<sup>12</sup>Parrillo, *Strangers to These Shores: Race and Ethnic Relations in the United States*, 2nd ed. (1985); Kitano, *Race Relations*, 3rd ed. (1985); Feagin, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, 3rd ed. (1989).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Feagin, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, 3rd ed. (1989).

the degradation of Africans took place, and the onset of white exploitation of African labor began. Slavery was instituted and became a part of Southern culture.<sup>15</sup>

The Southern Company, the first joint-stock company in America, was organized in Jamestown, a settlement where the primary goals were economic gains. This same English colony bought slaves from the Dutch in 1619, thereby providing the foundation for racial oppression of blacks in America.<sup>16</sup> Blacks share a unique history unlike any other ethnic or racial group in America. Most did not immigrate to the United States of their own free will. Instead, they were brought to this country through the triangular trade, which was one of the most dehumanizing actions in United States history.<sup>17</sup>

Blacks entered the United States as involuntary immigrants, or more specifically as slaves. The voyage across the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to America was called the "middle passage," because it was the middle of the triangular trade. This involved shipping European manufactured goods to West Africa and exchanging them for human slaves; then shipping human slaves to America and exchanging them for sugar, tobacco, cotton, and rum; and then shipping these commodities back to Europe. The triangular trade, though outlawed by England and America in 1808, continued until the Civil War. This dreadful voyage, "the middle passage," is probably incomprehensible today.<sup>18</sup>

Institutionalized slavery was primarily concentrated in the South. Its justification grew out of ethnocentric, stereotypic, and racist ideologies. Whites considered Africans subhuman and justified slavery on that ground. Thus, slaves were treated as property and not as humans. Slavemasters intentionally tried to rid Africans of their culture, thereby stripping them of their true identities. They broke up African families, forbade them to speak their own language, forced them to abandon their own religion and to adopt Christianity, and would not allow them to become educated. The only skills Africans acquired were those associated with being slaves.<sup>19</sup>

African slaves were mostly responsible for the South's wealth. Hence, whites clearly believed that the perpetuation of slavery was financially beneficial to them. Racism and slavery went hand-in-hand with one another, and laws governing the masters' rights over African slaves were enacted.<sup>20</sup> In other words, slavery was legally protected by the United States Constitution. During slavery, a few blacks had their freedom, but were never as free as were whites. Unfortunately, they were still treated as second-class citizens. Nonetheless, by the time of the Civil War, there were close to four million African slaves in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Today, remnants of slavery are embedded in the fabric of the Mississippi Delta region. Many blacks are still regarded as second-class citizens and the paternalistic attitudes and behaviors still exist. This is evident in the educational and occupational domains.

---

<sup>15</sup>Parrillo, Strangers to These Shores: Race and Ethnic Relations in the United States (1985); Feagin, Race and Ethnic Relations, 3rd ed. (1989).

<sup>16</sup>Feagin, Race and Ethnic Relations, 3rd ed. (1989).

<sup>17</sup>Joseph Hraba, American Ethnicity (Itasca, ILL: F.E. Peacock, 1979); Parrillo, Strangers to These Shores: Race and Ethnic Relations in the United States, 2nd ed., (1985); Kitano, Race Relations, 3rd ed., (1985); Feagin, Racial and Ethnic Relations, 3rd ed., (1989).

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Curran and Renzetti, Social Problems: Society in Crisis (1987); Parrillo, Strangers to These Shores: Race and Ethnic Relations in the United States, 2nd ed., (1985).

## Reconstruction

After the Civil War, the U.S. Constitution was amended. Several amendments supposedly gave rights to blacks. The 13th amendment abolished slavery, the 14th gave equal protection under the law, and the 15th gave them the right to vote. Nevertheless, blacks quickly realized that any rights that had been given them were only on paper and nothing more.<sup>22</sup> Many blacks did not even know they had been freed, and therefore, some remained in slave-like positions. These conditions are found among some black Americans today, particularly in the Mississippi Delta.

White Southerners were thought to constitute a distinct regional group that emphasized "whiteness" above all else. For Southerners, the important fact was whether they were white or black; everything else was secondary.<sup>23</sup> Being white was the primary indicator of self-worth and status; their race, it was thought, entitled them to powers and rights beyond those of other racial groups. To some extent, these attitudes are still present in the Mississippi Delta.

During Reconstruction (approximately from 1865-1877), Southern whites were especially bitter, because they lost the war and also lost their slaves; thus, their economy and self-pride were devastated. Slaves had become one of the prized possessions by which white Southerners were stratified along class lines.

At the same time, blacks experienced some freedom as citizens. However, after a brief period of political participation, blacks in the South were faced with policies and practices designed to preserve white dominance. These included poll taxes, literacy tests in order to vote, white primary elections that excluded blacks, and grandfather clauses that only allowed voting to those and their descendants who had been eligible voters before the Civil War.<sup>24</sup> These conditions subtly persisted in the Mississippi Delta until the 1980's when Mike Espy became the first black U.S. Congressman from that region since Reconstruction.

Additionally, the Jim Crow Laws of etiquette were instituted in the South. This apartheid, caste system insured the segregation of whites and blacks in all aspects of life (i.e., education, occupations, public accommodations and transportation, restaurants, recreational facilities, and cemeteries). To legalize this system, the United States Supreme Court, in 1896, ruled in the case of *Plessy versus Ferguson*, that the principle of "separate but equal" was not unconstitutional. One important point, which escaped them, was that facilities for blacks were never equal to those for whites. For example, black students were often provided textbooks that were discarded by the white schools who purchased new ones.<sup>25</sup> Currently, segregation is still very much a part of the Mississippi Delta region. For example, many private white academies exist and are well-funded, while most of the public schools are predominantly black and underfunded.

As Reconstruction dreadfully wore on, whites continued to disenfranchise, coerce, and exploit the already oppressed blacks. Barely out of institutionalized slavery, the overwhelming majority of blacks were impoverished, and poverty would haunt them for many years to come. Plus, land reform plans (i.e., 40 acres and a mule) were never carried out, and most former field laborers became sharecroppers, which was merely advanced slavery.<sup>26</sup> Many of these

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Feagin, *Race Relations*, 3rd ed., (1989).

<sup>24</sup>Curran and Renzetti, *Social Problems: Society in Crisis* (1987); Hraba, *American Ethnicity*, (1979); Kitano, *Race Relations*, 3rd ed., (1985); Parrillo, *Strangers to These Shores: Race and Ethnic Relations in the United States*, 3rd ed., (1985).

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.



conditions are still very much a part of the Mississippi Delta, and most of the blacks in the region suffer from severe poverty that continues to haunt them in the 1990's.

Also during Reconstruction, the concept of sharecropping was popularized. Sharecropping, for the most part, was a subtle system of forced dependency. Sharecroppers farmed tracts of land owned by whites. The plantation owners also supplied seeds, tools, animals, and shacks (homes) in return for sharecroppers' labor. Supposedly, sharecroppers would receive half the profits from the sale of crops. Since whites controlled the books, most blacks did not stand a chance of profiting from sharecropping. When sharecroppers were too old to work, plantation owners no longer cared for or took responsibility for them.<sup>27</sup>

After the Civil War, Southern whites quickly restored a dismantled, war-torn, slave-plantation society and intentionally structured the "New South" to keep blacks "in their place." Keeping blacks in their place referred to sub-par education, blocked economic and political opportunities, and public humiliation. To make matters worse, the Ku Klux Klan further exploited, terrorized, and murdered blacks.<sup>28</sup> The Mississippi Delta is a prime example of the "New South." Thus, it would appear that blacks were not much better off during Reconstruction than they were during slavery. For some members of this oppressed group, the only way out was to leave the South.

### **Black Migration**

By the early 1900's, approximately 90 percent of all blacks still resided in the South. About 75 percent were living in rural areas under extreme oppressive conditions (this is also true today in parts of the Mississippi Delta). However, between 1916 and 1918, over a half million blacks left the South in what is commonly called the "Great Migration." Most of them migrated from Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas and settled mostly in Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois.<sup>29</sup>

The migration escalated in response to better economic opportunities in the North and legally enforced racial discrimination in the South. Blacks were allowed to participate in nonagricultural economic positions in the North. In the Deep South, in 1950, blacks constituted about 43 percent of the population, but only 21 percent held nonagricultural positions. Those who did were mostly in custodial services, requiring little or no marketable skills.<sup>30</sup> These conditions have not improved much for blacks in the Mississippi Delta region. Although many blacks left the South during the Great Migration, many remained. For those who were trapped and left directionless, life continued to worsen. By the 1950's, many blacks had had about as much of the apartheid, caste system as could be tolerated. In response, the Civil Rights Movement began when blacks openly protested white racism, domination, and exploitation during the 1950's and 1960's.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the South was desperately trying to develop economically.

The next section of this chapter will examine the impact of racial conflicts upon economic development in the South, especially during the Civil Rights Era. It was mostly during this period that the South got further behind, as its racial problems intensified and stunted its economic growth. This was devastating for rural areas, and particularly for the Mississippi

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Jonathan H. Turner, Joyce Singleton, Jr., and David Musick, Oppression (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1984).

<sup>30</sup>Turner, Singleton, and Musick, Oppression, (1984); Alabert K. Karing and Paula D. McClain, "The New South and Black Economic Development: Changes from 1970 to 1980," Western Political Quarterly 38 (1985), 538-550.

<sup>31</sup>Aldon D. Morris, "The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement," (NY: The Free Press, 1984).

Delta which has virtually remained the same despite the gains of the Civil Rights Movement.

### **Racial Conflicts and Economic Development in the South**

By the time the South realized the importance of attracting industry, its racial conflicts were omnipresent; nonetheless, within its industrial recruitment plan, it appeared that improving race relations was never a part of the strategy.<sup>32</sup>

The Civil Rights Movement sought to challenge racism. Hence, each of the following cases will demonstrate how racial conflicts in the South impacted on its social and economic development. This section will also help to explain why places like the Delta have had difficulty in attracting new industries.

The first major event of the Civil Rights Movement occurred in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In 1953, blacks successfully accomplished the first major bus boycott against the segregated system. Two years later, in 1955, the arrest of Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama, sparked the real beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. The Montgomery Bus Boycott, organized by E.D. Nixon, head of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), but carried out by Martin Luther King, Jr., lasted for more than a year.<sup>33</sup>

Earlier in 1955, about four months before Mrs. Parks' refusal to give up her bus seat, the brutal murder of a 14-year-old black American, Emmett Till, in Money, Mississippi, located in the Delta region, received national and worldwide attention. Two white men admitted to murdering Till but were acquitted of all charges by an all-white jury in what appeared to be a mock trial. Till was accused of "wolf-whistling" at a white woman, which allegedly violated her honor. He was kidnapped from his uncle's house by Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, who then murdered him.<sup>34</sup>

Emmett Till's body was found by Floyd Hodges in the Tallahatchie River, 25 miles north of Greenwood. His corpse was floating upside down among driftwood with his feet protruding from the water. Till's face was badly mutilated. He was shot above the right ear, and the rest of his face was cut up and beaten. The murderers had wired a cotton-gin fan to his neck to keep the body submerged in the river.<sup>35</sup>

This tragic incident in the Mississippi Delta is one that blacks and whites cannot forget, as justice was truly never served. It was a clear indication that blacks had no protection under the law and that their mere existence as a human race meant nothing to some whites in the Delta, or in other parts of Mississippi and the South. For many whites, Till's murder was probably an embarrassment at the most. What normally would have been a quiet lynching in the Delta had received worldwide attention.<sup>36</sup> For blacks, it was an eyeopener for what would come within the next decade, as they struggled for civil rights as human beings in the apartheid, "American-style" South.

The death of young Emmett Till did nothing to improve Mississippi's external image; it brought negative attention to the Delta. The conditions surrounding the Till case were perceived as high risk factors by industries that were considering to build or to relocate in the state. However, Mississippi was not the only Southern state to experience the negative impact

---

<sup>32</sup>Gavin Wright, *Old South New South* (NY: Basic Books, 1986).

<sup>33</sup>Morris, "The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement," (1984); "Special Edition," *Life Magazine* Spring, 1988, p. 8-66.

<sup>34</sup>"Land of the Till Murder Revisited," *Ebony Magazine*, March, 1986, 53-58.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

of racial conflicts on economic development. As Civil Rights tensions mounted, industry began to shy away from the South.<sup>37</sup>

In 1955, after the second *Brown versus Board of Education* decision, which dealt with school desegregation, industrialists seriously considered not relocating in the South. For example, a large manufacturing electrical equipment facility refused to build in Georgia after personnel were concerned about moving to the South with all the racial tensions about school desegregation. Another business machines firm decided to relocate in New York instead of Kentucky because of racial concerns. In May 1956, the Fantus Factory Locating Service reported that "at least twenty major factory moving projects were being seriously reconsidered in light of the situation in the South."<sup>38</sup>

Little Rock, Arkansas, that state's capital, had a fair reputation in terms of race relations, and appeared to be a favorable site for industrial growth. Between 1950 and 1957, Little Rock had attracted about five new plants a year. Moreover, in the early part of 1957, before the violence erupted over school desegregation, eight new plants were opened.<sup>39</sup> Later that year, Winthrop Rockefeller, chairman of Arkansas' Industrial Development Commission, warned "that if a state or a community developed an 'unhealthy reputation' in regard to race relations, industry would be scared away."<sup>40</sup> His warning was not taken seriously, and in that same year, nine black students had to be escorted by National Guardsmen as they integrated Central High School. Angry mobs of whites resisted and attacked the students, but they were finally admitted. From that point on, Little Rock's image was damaged and its economic future came to a blistering halt.<sup>41</sup> Everett Tucker, director of Little Rock's Industrial Development Commission, when describing the impact of racial violence on economic development, stated that, "In the early four years since the start of the school troubles there has not been a single major industrial expansion."<sup>42</sup>

At the onset of the 1960's, race relations had not improved, and industrialization was nearly at a standstill in most of the South. Cities like Atlanta and Augusta had managed to keep racial tensions at a minimum, and prospered. Consequently, Atlanta was, and still is, considered the city too busy to hate.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike Atlanta, cities in Alabama experienced much racial tensions as the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum. In May 1961, the Freedom Riders, which consisted of blacks and whites and headed by James Farmer, who was the director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), left Washington, DC, in two buses on their way to New Orleans, attempting to challenge the Jim Crow system of segregation.<sup>44</sup> When they arrived in Anniston, Alabama, they were attacked. One of the buses was firebombed, and people were brutally beaten. This prompted Robert Kennedy, head of the United States Justice Department, to provide protection for the riders. In the meanwhile, a third bus left for Montgomery, Alabama. It encountered some violence, but was protected by the National Guard until it reached Jackson,

---

<sup>37</sup>James C. Cobb, "The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development 1936-1980," (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., The Wall Street Journal, (1961), 1-21.

<sup>40</sup>Cobb, "The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development," (1982), 123.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>The Wall Street Journal, (1961), 21.

<sup>43</sup>Robert Bullard, ed. In Search of the New South: The Black Urban Experience in the 1970's and 1980's, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1989).

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

Mississippi, where many of the Freedom Riders were thrown in jail for breaking segregation laws.<sup>45</sup>

During the Freedom Riders incident, Birmingham was negotiating a major steel products plant. The attention and violence associated with Alabama and the Freedom Riders caused the company to quickly withdraw from the negotiations. The company relocated to Tennessee.<sup>46</sup>

Alabama, like other Southern states, had its share of racial violence during the industrialization of the South. In 1962, blacks were jailed, chased and attacked by dogs, water-hosed, beaten, and even killed as they struggled for their civil rights. A black church was bombed and four young girls were killed, because of white resentment over the court-ordered desegregation of the University of Alabama. As a result, Birmingham lost out to New England on a big Ohio company that considered locating a pilot plant there. Businessmen were astonished by companies' refusals to locate in Alabama because of the racial unrest. It is likely that blacks were used as scapegoats to account for the loss of economic development in Alabama.<sup>47</sup>

Also, in 1962, the State of Mississippi apparently stood ready to go to war with the United States Federal Government over the admission of a black American, James Meredith, to the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss). Ross Barnett, governor of Mississippi at that time, urged whites to "stand up like men and tell them never."<sup>48</sup> The violence which resulted at Ole Miss "reinforced popular images of Mississippi as the most savage and backward of the southern states and seemed certain to undermine the state's efforts to attract industry."<sup>49</sup>

By 1964, in the heat of the Civil Rights struggle, Mississippi was still burning when the bodies of three Civil Rights workers were found buried in Philadelphia. Consequently, Mississippi experienced a loss of at least 12 firms that decided to go elsewhere. An executive for a Cleveland, Ohio, firm expressed to a Mississippi developer that, "We won't consider expanding in Mississippi again until the state and its people join the Union again."<sup>50</sup> Likewise, to avoid having a Mississippi address, a small factory moved across the state line into Louisiana.<sup>51</sup>

With regards to economic development, the entire southern region suffered from racial conflicts and violence during the Civil Rights Era. Several states lost out on prospective industries because of their strong resistance to social change. As a result, the South, particularly the rural areas, continued to lag behind the rest of the nation, both socially and economically.<sup>52</sup> The Mississippi Delta is perhaps the best example of resistance to social and economic changes.

---

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Cobb, "The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development," (1982).

<sup>47</sup>The Wall Street Journal (1961).

<sup>48</sup>Life (1988), 18.

<sup>49</sup>Cobb, "The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development," (1982), 134.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

### **Contemporary Industrialization and Race Relations in the Delta**

Although the Civil Rights Movement removed legal obstacles to employment opportunities, thus opening up jobs once closed to blacks, most of these jobs continue to be menial. In addition, blacks continue to suffer socially and economically from racism in the rural South. New industry, especially those with the better jobs, tends to locate in areas with the lowest proportion of blacks in their population.<sup>53</sup> As a result, Mississippi Delta counties and towns that are majority black (which includes most of them) will have a very difficult time attracting new industry.

In 1985, at a conference in Birmingham, Alabama, William Winter, former governor of Mississippi, expressed, "There remains that other South, largely rural, undereducated, and underproductive and underpaid, that threatens to become a permanent shadow of distress and deprivation in a region that less than a decade ago had promised it better days."<sup>54</sup> Mr. Winter appeared to have had the Mississippi Delta in mind, but failed to mention how this other South came about—racism. However, in 1987, Mississippi passed a comprehensive economic development planning act (Senate Bill No. 2839, 1987), specifically addressing the need for special economic programs for its rural areas and those areas with extremely high unemployment and low per capita income.<sup>55</sup> With this act, the state appeared to be concerned with the Delta and other underdeveloped areas.

Traditionally, economic development in the rural South, particularly in the Delta, has been controlled by certain elite groups that are sometimes hard to identify. They, unfortunately, have an impact on whether industry will be allowed to locate in a particular area. Firms that are perceived to be competitive with existing ones will rarely be sought. Fearing an upset of the existing status quo, firms that may improve conditions for blacks in the Delta will also be met with resistance.<sup>56</sup>

The elite groups in the Delta favor attracting industry as long as they can keep control over it. Therefore, only specific types of firms that require specific types of skills will be sought to locate there, as long as they do not pose threats to the elite power structure. These elite groups are only interested in firms that will utilize the existing unskilled labor supply.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Costs and Benefits of Economic Development in the Delta**

Strategies, such as unionization, that have benefitted whites and to some extent educated skilled blacks, may not work in the Delta. The problem of racism in labor unions is just as explicit as it is in the open job market. Traditionally, labor unions were mostly segregated. Although the general policies of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) do not discriminate, these policies are often discriminatory at

---

<sup>53</sup>Louis E. Swanson, "The Human Dimensions of the Rural South in Crisis," in The Rural South in Crisis, Lionel J. Beaulieu, ed. (Boulder: CO: West View, 1987), 92-98; James L. Walker, Economic Development and Black Employment in the Non-metropolitan South (Austin: TX: Center for the Study of Human Resources, The University of Texas) 1977; Stuart A. Rosenfeld, Edward M. Bergmon, and Sarah Rubin, After the Factories: Changing Employment Patterns in the Rural South (NC: Southern Growth Policies Board, 1985).

<sup>54</sup>Stuart A. Rosenfeld, "The Tale of Two Souths," in The Rural South in Crisis: Challenges for the Future, Lionel J. Beaulieu, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988).

<sup>55</sup>Thomas A. Lyson and William W. Faulk, "Two Sides to the Sunbelt: Economic Development in the Rural and Urban South," in New Dimensions in Rural Policy: Building Upon Our Heritage, Johnson J. Jahr and R. Wimberley, eds., (Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress, Washington, D.C., 1986).

<sup>56</sup>Brian Rungeling, Lewis H. Smith, Vernon M. Briggs, and John F. Adams, Employment, Income and Welfare in the Rural South, (NY: Praeger Publisher, 1977).

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

local levels.<sup>58</sup> Because labor unions are the main avenues for entry into most skilled and unskilled, blue-collar jobs, racism in the unions has detrimental consequences for blacks. This is particularly profound because the vast majority of blacks who are employed are blue-collar workers and desire labor union membership.<sup>59</sup>

In the Mississippi Delta, where most of the labor force is relatively unskilled and black, unions may or may not be beneficial. The fact that stronger labor unions imply higher wages is encouraging; but the reality that most of the labor force in the Delta is unskilled is distressing. Generally, unskilled workers may end up gaining nothing with union membership because, if a union contract forces a business to raise its wages, then inevitably the business may attempt to retaliate by eliminating workers through automation, direct layoffs, or attrition.<sup>60</sup> This can be devastating to poor blacks in the Delta, and may cause more harm than good.

Elites in the Delta generally gain economically from discriminating against blacks and, therefore, would most likely try to continue this practice.<sup>61</sup> For example, the Delta is composed of a dual labor market: one for blacks and one for whites. Blacks are often found in low-paying, dead-end jobs, such as frontline factory workers in a popular food industry, that are undesirable to whites. By contrast whites are found in more prestigious positions, such as managers in the same popular food industry, with better wages.<sup>62</sup>

The prejudice attitudes of some white employers in the Delta cause them to resist hiring blacks, even when they could use them to produce greater profits for less pay. Because of these attitudes, white workers have a greater chance of benefitting from white employers' discrimination against blacks.<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, some employers in the Delta actually prefer to hire blacks so that they can exploit them to increase profits and decrease labor costs. In this sense, white employers gain, but white workers lose. Therefore, white workers resist this practice because they fear job displacement or lower wages. Thus, this practice causes the working class, white and black, to be at odds with each other, and increases the chance of racial conflict between them. This type of manipulation stems from elite groups having the power to control employment opportunities in the Delta. Exploitation of this sort will be harder to eradicate, since it is built into the Delta's economic and social structures.<sup>64</sup>

Also, wage differentials exist in the Delta. It is a known fact that racism restricts blacks to low-paying jobs. In addition, whites earn more than blacks in the same occupations. These differences will continue to exist as long as little attention is directed at investigating equal

---

<sup>58</sup>Turner, Singleton, Jr., and Musick, Oppression, (1984); Feagin, Racial and Ethnic Relations, 3rd ed., (1989).

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Thomas H. Naylor and James Clotfelter, Strategies for Change in the South, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

<sup>61</sup>Gary S. Baker, "The Economics of Discrimination," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Norval Glenn, "Occupational Benefits to Whites from Subordination of Negroes," American Sociological Review 28 (1963), 443-448; Lester Thurow, Poverty and Discrimination, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1969); Albert Szymanski, "Racial Discrimination and White Gain," American Sociological Review 41 (1976), 403-414.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Michael Reich, "The Economics of Racism," in Problems in Political Economy, David M. Gordon, ed., (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1971).

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

opportunity cases.<sup>65</sup> The elite power structure has shown little interest in black social issues and economic problems in the Delta.

### **Affirmative Action in the Delta**

It is time for industrial policy makers in Mississippi to pay attention to the rural areas of the state where the most disadvantaged laborers are found.<sup>66</sup> This includes the Delta, which is highly populated with unskilled blacks. Sociologist William Julius Wilson (1985) described the Delta precisely by stating that the current position of Americans today is a classic case of the rich getting richer (whites) and the poor getting poorer (blacks).

The federal-assisted programs and antidiscrimination policies (i.e., Affirmative Action) of the 1960's and 70's helped primarily middle-class blacks. They were not designed with the problems of lower-class blacks in mind, who are faced with racism and with classism and economic oppression. Therefore, these programs and policies were mostly ineffective in the Mississippi Delta, where there is no viable black middle class. As such, Affirmative Action programs, in their present forms, are somewhat irrelevant to the problems of the Mississippi Delta, since many of the low-paying, undesirable jobs do not prompt racial competition between whites and blacks, and because these jobs are commonly referred to as "black" jobs.<sup>67</sup>

In fact, the condition of blacks in places like the Delta probably worsened during the period of antidiscrimination policies and federal-assisted programs. This is mainly due to the fact that these policies and programs did not specifically address the fundamental causes of poverty, underemployment, and unemployment among blacks. Even if all racism in economic development was eliminated, unless there was a serious charge to eliminate structural barriers to meaningful employment, the socioeconomic status of blacks in the Delta will not improve significantly. Nonetheless, the lack of economic opportunities for blacks in the Delta suggests that they are likely to remain in economically oppressed areas, their children will continue to attend economically depressed school systems, and the pool of uneducated and unskilled black laborers will continue to expand.<sup>68</sup> These factors will also continue to discourage industrial development in the region.

Some people in the Delta would argue that affirmative action programs would not work because of the already strained race relations. However, economic development will never advance much beyond the present situation if something is not done to improve the life chances of the disadvantaged blacks. In addition, in many circumstances, whites in the Delta have discriminated against blacks simply because of racism, and also it has been the norm not to hire or promote them. Another factor that would be present in the minds of whites in the Delta is that affirmative action programs would involve "reverse discrimination," in which there is discrimination against qualified whites, who may be arbitrarily excluded.<sup>69</sup>

The final factor includes the argument that whites in the Delta should not be held responsible for their ancestors' past actions. This may be valid, but they are responsible for their own actions of prejudice and discrimination, since some continue to operate through

---

<sup>65</sup>Runneling, et al., Employment, Income, and Welfare in the Rural South, (1977); Naylor and Clotfelter, Strategies for Change in the South, (1975).

<sup>66</sup>Thomas A. Lyon, "Economic Development in the Rural South: An Uneven Past and Uncertain Future," in The Rural South in Crisis: Challenges for the Future, Lionel J. Beaulieu, ed., (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988).

<sup>67</sup>William Julius Wilson, "The Black Community in the 1980's: Questions of Race, Class, and Public Policy," in Majority and Minority, 4th ed., Norman R. Yetman, ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1985), 490-501.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Curran and Renzetti, Social Problems: Society in Crisis, (1978).

institutionalized racism. They also continue to reap the social and economic benefits associated with exploiting blacks.

The discussion on Affirmative Action was meant to illustrate the intended and unanticipated consequences of a social policy that was implemented, supposedly, to help alleviate racism. What the discussion highlighted was that efforts to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the Delta will be perceived differently by whites and blacks. Because of the history of race relations in the Delta, the two groups may not trust each other. For instance, blacks are likely to believe that whites are simply trying to exploit them in another way; while whites, on the other hand, are likely to perceive blacks as wanting additional handouts at their expense. To be sure, unless improvements are made in communications between blacks and whites, life in the Delta will continue to be as it always has been, from slavery to the present—uncooperative, oppressed, and unaccommodated.

### Conclusion

The mid-1970's was considered the beginning of the so-called "New South." Nonetheless, its discriminatory practices, both legal and informal, continue to handicap blacks and whites. Hence, Southern racial problems are still persistent despite the economic resurgence in some parts of the South during the 1970's and 1980's.<sup>70</sup>

Over the last two decades, race relations and economic opportunities have somewhat improved in the South, but mostly in the urban areas. Hence, the South experienced an influx of blacks returning to those areas; but fewer migrants actually returned to states with sizable black populations (Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Alabama).<sup>71</sup> Besides, blacks who returned to the South were those with the relatively high educational levels; and they were less likely to return to rural areas, and especially to the Delta.<sup>72</sup>

At the same time, the Delta is faced with the out-migration of young, educated people, creating a "brain drain" in the area. While helping the individual person advance economically, this pattern inhibits the emergence of an educated, skilled labor force. For those unskilled and uneducated individuals who remain behind, they will continue to rely strongly on government assistance. When the educated people leave, those unskilled individuals who stay are not attractive to prospective industry.<sup>73</sup>

In the Delta today, as in slavery, social institutions influence race relations between whites and blacks. It would seem that slavery was so devastating that little African heritage survived it. Therefore, the black subculture present in the Delta is likely a consequence of white domination and rejection and not a product of African culture.<sup>74</sup> Thus, most of the poverty was created by slavery, enforced by Jim Crow, and continued by racism.

Racial conflicts have always been a part of the South's social fabric, particularly the rural South and especially the Mississippi Delta. This chapter has pointed out the importance of having a healthy racial climate when trying to attract industry. The ability to attract and maintain industry will depend on the Delta's ability to become a place in which residents can live and work together peacefully. Nonetheless, the race relations problem remains at the core

---

<sup>70</sup>Margaret Edds, Free at Last: What Really Happened When Civil Rights Came to Southern Politics, (Bethesda, MD: Alder and Alder, 1987).

<sup>71</sup>Daniel Lichter, "Race and Underemployment: Black Employment Hardship in the Rural South," in The Rural South in Crisis: Challenges for the Future, Lionel J. Beaulieu, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988).

<sup>72</sup>Albert K. Karning and Paula D. McClain, "The New South and Black Economic Development: Changes from 1970 to 1980," Western Political Quarterly 38, (1985), 538-550.

<sup>73</sup>Runneling et al., Employment, Income and Welfare in the Rural South, (1977).

<sup>74</sup>Curran and Renzetti, Social Problems: Society in Crisis, (1987).



*Gray-Ray*

of the economic development problem in the Delta. Barriers based on race will have to be lessened if the Delta is to advance with the rest of Mississippi, the South, and the Nation.

***Pictures of the  
People***

## ***Chapter***

# **4**

### ***Demography of the Delta***

***by John Saunders\****

An area's past, present, and future are intimately tied to the qualities of the people who live in it. Will the area be prosperous, its inhabitants enjoying good health, adequate diets, and satisfactory housing, or will it be poor and miserable in these respects? The answer lies to a very great extent in the people who reside there. Natural resources, often cited as the basis of prosperity and the hope for the future of given areas, are only incidental. Switzerland and Japan have virtually no natural resources; yet they are among the most prosperous of nations. Their wealth is derived from the caliber of their people.

It is from this perspective that I wish to describe the population of that portion of the Mississippi River Delta that is found within the State of Mississippi, part of the lower Mississippi River Valley flood plain. Referred to herein as the Delta, the Mississippi portion is part of the larger flood plain that encompasses parts of the states of Arkansas and Mississippi, as well as Louisiana, Illinois, and Missouri. The Mississippi Delta is on the east bank of the Mississippi River, Vicksburg at its southern end, and the Tennessee border at the northern. It is bounded on the west by the Mississippi River and on the east by the Blue Hills, which are closely paralleled by the Coldwater, Tallahatchie, and Yazoo Rivers. The area is extensively covered by rich alluvial soils deposited over millennia, that are among the most fertile to be found anywhere.

Because the Delta flooded annually, significant settlement did not occur until after the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> Until fairly recently it had large wild areas in which Theodore Roosevelt is said to have hunted bear. When lands were drained and cleared, levees built as protection against flooding, and agriculture organized, it was the plantation system of agricultural production that was instituted.

Wherever in the world plantation systems have been established, social systems have developed that share with each other a number of characteristics. Ownership of the land, the principal source of wealth, is concentrated in but a few hands, and extremes of wealth and poverty prevail. There is a low general level of skills and abilities. Even though those at the apex of the social pyramid may be quite accomplished, their knowledge is diluted by the lack of it among the many who constitute the large pool of unskilled labor necessary for the functioning of the system.

---

<sup>1</sup>John Ray Skates, *Mississippi: A History* (New York: W.U. Norton, 1979), 7.

\*Professor of Sociology, Mississippi State University.

There are barriers to upward social mobility that prevent all but the very exceptional from rising in the social scale. Persons who are in positions of power believe that the social and economic arrangements that maintain their positions are the correct ones, and therefore they resist change.

When plantations are sold they are almost always sold in their entirety. It is not in the interest of either the seller or the buyer to sell or to acquire less than the whole. Consequently, plantation systems have been persistent; albeit in recent times, labor has often been replaced by chemicals and machines. In the Delta and elsewhere, the size of agricultural holdings has remained essentially the same or tended to increase regardless of war, insect depredation, and economic calamity, although ownership has changed frequently over the years.

### **The Delta: Core and Periphery**

The flood plain on the east bank of the River, in Mississippi, is similar to the corresponding flood plain on the west bank, located principally in Arkansas. Thus, although this discussion is limited to the Mississippi Delta, its findings are often applicable to the Arkansas Delta as well.

Strictly speaking the Mississippi Delta ends at the edge of the Blue Hills. In the discussion that follows, those Mississippi counties that lie entirely or mainly in the flood plain are referred to as core Delta counties, and those that lie mostly to the east of it as peripheral Delta counties.

DeSoto County is omitted from the tables that follow, because it is entirely atypical. DeSoto County is part of the Memphis Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area as defined by the Bureau of the Census. It has experienced rapid population growth as Memphis has expanded toward the South. Because of this expansion, its population tripled between 1960 and 1990. Except for its status as a Mississippi county, it is linked to Tennessee rather than to Mississippi, to Metropolitan Memphis rather than the rural Delta.

The remaining peripheral counties are not geographically part of the Delta but are included in this analysis because, since they adjoin the core counties, they offer a convenient point of comparison with them. In addition, they have membership in the Delta Council.

A major contrasting feature of the core and periphery is the difference in the average size of farms (Table 1). This difference arises from the fact that the core counties historically have been the province of planter and sharecropper, while the peripheral counties have more typically been farmed by yeomen. Information on average farm size in acres for 1987 is displayed for each set of counties.

Six of the 11 core counties have farms that average more than 900 acres in size, 4 more than 1,000. Tunica County farms average no less than 1,514 acres. The lowest average farm size among the core counties is 647 acres in Humphreys County. In contrast, the highest average size of farm of the peripheral counties is 646 in Yazoo County. This is not surprising since of all the counties, Yazoo is most nearly divided between the alluvial lands of the core and the Blue Hills. The unweighted averages for the two groups are 984 acres for the core counties and 440 for the peripheral ones. The statewide average farm size is 315 acres. These data mirror the basic difference in the organization of agriculture in the two areas.

**Table 1. Average farm size in Delta counties, 1987.**

Core counties	Average farm size	Periphery counties	Average farm size
Bolivar	843	Carroll	402
Coahoma	1,097	Holmes	563
Humphreys	647	Panola	369
Issaquena	1,131	Tate	291
Leflore	986	Warren	482
Quitman	780	Yazoo	646
Sharkey	1,401		
Sunflower	786		
Tallahatchie	903		
Tunica	1,514		
Washington	903		
Unweighted average: core = 984 acres, periphery = 459 acres.			

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1987, Advance Report. Washington, DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1989.

### Population Change

Population decline has prevailed in the Delta for at least four decades. These losses have been the result of the exodus of farm and other labor that began during the First World War, was brought to a near standstill by the Great Depression, resumed during the Second World War, and continued thereafter. The Second World War in particular created great demands for labor in other regions, notably in the urban Midwest and Pacific and in cities in and out of the South. People from the Delta, as well as from other areas of the state, were attracted by the higher wages and the greater accessibility of public services offered in these centers.

Agricultural labor, made scarce in the Delta by this out-migration, was increasingly replaced by machines and chemicals that, in turn, further reduced the demand for labor. Alternative sources of employment for those who remained developed slowly, if at all. New entrants into the labor force, the youth of the region, often had little choice but to seek employment elsewhere than in the Delta, moving to urban areas in and out of the South in search of work. By this process, the average age of the population tended to increase.

The consequences of these forces, as they affected population size, are shown in Table 2. Between 1940 and 1990, while the population of the United States grew by 91 percent and that of Mississippi by 22 percent, the population of the Delta declined by 29 percent.

Among the peripheral Delta counties, growth occurred in Tate and Panola. Tate, just to the south of DeSoto and probably also affected by the growth of Memphis, increased by 20 percent from 1960 to 1990; while the population of Panola just to the south of Tate increased by three percent. Of the remaining peripheral counties, Carroll, Holmes, and Yazoo experienced population decreases of a third or more between 1940 and 1990. On the other hand, Warren County, the location of Vicksburg, increased by 29 percent. Some losses in the core counties, such as that experienced by Issaquena whose population shrank by two-thirds, were quite severe.

**Table 2. Number of persons 1940, 1960, 1980, and 1990<sup>^</sup> and percent change 1940-1990, 1960-1990, and 1980-1990, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta by county.**

Area	Population				Percent Change		
	1940	1960	1980	1990	1940-1990	1960-1990	1980-1990
United States <sup>^^</sup>	131,699	174,464	226,546	251,080	90.6	43.9	10.8
Mississippi	2,183,796	2,178,141	2,520,638	2,666,287	22.1	22.4	5.8
Delta	623,737	524,568	455,478	441,212	-29.3	-15.9	-3.2
Core Delta Counties							
Bolivar	67,574	54,464	45,965	43,302	-35.9	-20.5	-5.8
Coahoma	48,323	46,212	36,918	34,270	-29.1	-25.8	-7.2
Humphreys	26,257	19,093	13,951	13,363	-49.1	-30.0	-4.2
Issaquena	6,433	3,576	2,513	2,129	-66.9	-40.5	-15.3
Leflore	53,400	47,142	41,525	41,004	-23.2	-13.0	-1.3
Quitman	27,191	21,019	12,636	10,237	-62.4	-51.3	-19.0
Sharkey	15,433	10,738	7,964	7,331	-52.5	-31.7	-8.0
Sunflower	61,007	45,730	34,844	36,517	-40.1	-20.2	4.8
Tallahatchie	34,166	24,081	17,157	15,604	-54.3	-35.2	-9.1
Tunica	22,610	16,826	9,652	8,648	-61.8	-48.6	-10.4
Washington	67,576	76,638	72,344	68,798	1.8	-10.2	-4.9
Peripheral Delta Counties							
Carroll	20,651	11,177	9,776	9,733	-52.9	-12.9	-0.4
Holmes	39,710	27,090	22,970	21,962	-44.7	-18.9	-4.4
Panola	34,421	28,791	28,164	29,748	-13.6	3.3	5.6
Tate	19,309	18,138	20,119	21,766	12.7	20.0	8.2
Warren	39,585	42,200	51,627	51,110	29.1	21.1	-1.0
Yazoo	40,091	31,653	27,349	25,690	-35.9	-18.8	-6.1

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1980, Number of Inhabitants, Mississippi, Table 2. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1987, Table 1. Washington, DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982 and 1986; Woods and Poole Economics, Inc., Economic and Demographic Data Files, Washington, DC, 1989.

<sup>^</sup>1990 data are estimates.

<sup>^^</sup>Numbers are in thousands.

When these data are looked at from the standpoint of the difference between core and periphery, a further distinction arises. Only one core county, Washington, location of Greenville, grew from 1940 to 1990. The increase in Sunflower from 1980 to 1990 is a consequence of the enlarged prison population at Parchman Penitentiary. When core and periphery counties are separated, the following result is obtained:

<i>Area</i>	<i>Population in 1940</i>	<i>Population in 1990</i>	<i>% Change</i>
Core counties	429,970	281,203	-34.6
Peripheral counties	193,767	160,009	-17.4

Core counties lost more than a third of their populations from 1940 to 1990; while peripheral counties lost only half as much.

### **Black and White**

Mississippi's legacy as a slave-holding state and the Delta's legacy as the location of one of the major plantation regions of the South are reflected in the proportion of the population of each that is black and white. Table 3 details this information as of 1990. The national population is estimated to be about 13 percent black. Of Mississippians, about 33 percent belong to this appearance group, while 54 percent of the population of the Delta is black. In the Delta as a whole (both core and periphery), the proportion white varied from a high of 64.0 percent in Tate to a low of 22 percent in Tunica. Overall, the Delta was 40.3 percent white.

**Table 3. Number and percentage of population by race, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta by county, 1990 estimates.**

Area	White <sup>^</sup>		Black <sup>^</sup>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	210,948,401	87.1	31,353,785	12.9
Mississippi	1,670,515	63.1	976,543	36.9
Delta	176,801	40.3	262,411	59.7
Core Delta Counties				
Bolivar	14,005	32.5	29,134	67.5
Coahoma	10,672	31.5	23,408	68.5
Humphreys	3,443	25.9	9,870	74.1
Issaquena	1,130	53.2	996	46.8
Leflore	14,954	36.7	25,748	63.3

(continued)

**Table 3 (continued). Number and percentage of population by race, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta, by county, 1990 estimates.**

Area	White <sup>^</sup>		Black <sup>^</sup>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Core Delta Counties				
Quitman	3,126	30.6	7,075	69.4
Sharkey	1,950	26.7	5,347	73.3
Sunflower	11,929	32.8	24,489	67.2
Tallahatchie	5,868	37.9	9,634	62.1
Tunica	1,909	22.1	6,719	77.9
Washington	25,761	37.7	42,606	63.2
Peripheral Delta Counties				
Carroll	4,773	49.1	4,942	50.9
Holmes	5,098	23.2	16,843	76.8
Panola	15,340	51.6	14,375	48.4
Tate	13,855	63.9	7,827	36.1
Warren	30,063	59.4	20,577	40.6
Yazoo	12,835	50.0	12,821	50.0

Source: Woods & Poole Economic & Demographic Data Files, Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. Washington, DC, 1989.

<sup>^</sup>Persons whose appearance or ethnicity is other than white or black are not included. They are estimated to number 8.8 million in the U.S., 19,229 in Mississippi and 2,132 in the Delta.

Here, too, the distinction between the core and the periphery of the Delta is instructive. It is clear that the heavy dependence on the agricultural labor of black persons has had a significant impact on the composition by race of the population of the core Delta counties. In 1990, the peripheral counties were 51 percent white while the core counties were 66 percent black, so that the proportions black and white are nearly reversed in the core and in the periphery.

<i>Area</i>	<i>Percent White</i>	<i>Percent Black</i>
Core	33.9	66.1
Periphery	51.4	48.6



The black population has declined historically as a result of out-migration. In 1990, the proportion black in Mississippi was about 60 percent, almost the same as the proportion black in the core Delta counties at present. In the Delta, the proportion black in 1900 was much higher.

### The Dependency Burden

The sustenance and education of the young and the care of the old are provided for in large measure by those persons who belong to neither category, adults who are not old. The adequacy of the resources available to provide for these needs is determined primarily by the income produced by this group and by the number of dependents, young and old, to be cared for. The ratio in a population of the sum of old and young dependents (persons under 15 and over 64 years old) to those who are in the intermediate ages of 15-64 (contributors) is known as the *dependency ratio*.

The black population of the United States, as a result of a higher birth rate than whites, has a somewhat higher dependency ratio, 57.6 dependents for every 100 contributors (Table 4). The dependency ratio of Mississippi's white population (55.0) is 10 percent higher than that of the United States, while that of Mississippi's black population is one-third greater than that of the United States. Higher birth rates and the out-migration of persons in the contributing years, especially between the ages of 15 and 30, contribute to a high dependency ratio. While the dependency ratio of the white population of the Delta is nearly the same as that of all white Mississippians, the black population of the Delta has a ratio (88.7) that is 60 percent greater than the dependency ratio of whites.

<i>Area</i>	<i>Dependency Ratio</i>	
	White	Black
Core	54.9	92.0
Periphery	56.3	82.3

Substantially higher dependency ratios for blacks than for whites prevail in both the core Delta counties and in the periphery counties. In the core, the black dependency ratio is two-thirds greater than the white. The white ratio varies but little from the state figure; while the black ratio in the core counties is higher than the state's.

In practical terms, this means that black providers of care for the young and the old in the Delta must do so with far fewer resources, because their income is low, for a much larger number of dependents. Every 100 black contributors living in the core Delta counties must provide for 92 persons in the dependent ages, relying on household incomes that are less than two-thirds as large as those of Mississippi households and less than one-half as large as those of United States households. The dependency burden for white residents of the core counties (55 dependents per 100 contributors) is much smaller and the income available much larger. Some of the consequences of the conditions outlined above are to be found in the pages that follow.

**Table 4. Dependency ratios by race for the United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta by county, 1980.**

Area	Dependency Ratio	
	White	Black
United States	50.1	57.6
Mississippi	55.0	77.0
Delta	55.5	88.7
Core Delta Counties		
Bolivar	52.5	91.9
Coahoma	54.1	95.6
Humphreys	58.4	92.5
Issaquena	54.4	81.9
Leflore	81.6	88.1
Quitman	58.6	95.3
Sharkey	61.6	88.1
Sunflower	53.6	76.7
Tallahatchie	60.6	92.1
Tunica	60.7	96.3
Washington	52.3	98.5
Peripheral Delta Counties		
Carroll	61.3	76.2
Holmes	55.8	87.1
Panola	58.7	86.1
Tate	51.3	74.1
Warren	52.7	79.8
Yazoo	57.4	82.3

Source: United States Census of Population 1980, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Mississippi, Table 45 and United States Statistical Abstract, 1987, Table 20. Washington: DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983 and 1986.

### **Social and Economic Consequences**

The black population of Mississippi has been oppressed, first by slavery, then by sharecropping which replaced it, and, until very recently, by the denial of opportunity for political participation and of equal opportunities for education and employment. The Delta is no exception to these conditions and, indeed, it may be presumed that they were especially

applicable there. These institutions and policies have exacted a toll from black Mississippians and, by extension, from all Mississippians, that has only begun to be reversed. Reduced levels of educational achievement of both blacks and whites (as measured by the proportions completing high school and college) and reduced incomes (as measured by median household income), and by the proportions with incomes below the poverty level, are among consequences of this system.

### **Educational Attainment**

In 1980 two-thirds, 66.5 percent, of all residents of the United States who were 25 or more years old had completed high school, and 16.5 percent, one-sixth, had completed college (Table 5). The comparable figures for Mississippi were 54.8 and 12.3. In the Delta, however, less than half had completed a high school education and barely a tenth college. In Tunica County, just 30 percent had completed high school and only 7 percent college. Perhaps not by coincidence, this is the Delta county with the largest average size of land holdings.

<i>Area</i>	<i>Percent Completing High School</i>	<i>Percent Completing College</i>
Core	40.8	10.1
Periphery	46.1	10.3

The core Delta counties, which have a significantly higher proportion of black residents, have correspondingly lower levels of high school completion. In the core, 41 percent of persons 25 or more years have completed high school, while the corresponding figure for the periphery is 46 percent. The proportions completing college in each area are nearly the same.

**Table 5. Percentage of persons 25 or more years old completing high school and completing college, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta by county, 1980.**

<i>Area</i>	<i>High School<sup>^</sup></i>	<i>College<sup>^^</sup></i>
United States	66.5	16.5
Mississippi	43.8	12.3
Delta	40.9 <sup>^^^</sup>	10.1 <sup>^^^</sup>
Core Delta Counties		
Bolivar	45.8	10.2
Coahoma	43.8	12.1
Humphreys	38.7	9.1
Issaquena	37.9	5.7
Leflore	44.7	13.2
Quitman	36.5	8.2

(continued)

**Table 5 (continued). Percentage of persons 25 or more years old completing high school and completing college, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta by county, 1980.**

Area	High School <sup>^</sup>	College <sup>^^</sup>
Core Delta Counties		
Sharkey	42.2	13.3
Sunflower	41.1	11.3
Tallahatchie	6.9	8.6
Tunica	30.8	6.5
Washington	50.0	12.5
Peripheral Delta Counties		
Carroll	40.3	7.3
Holmes	39.6	10.3
Panola	40.9	7.7
Tate	49.7	9.2
Warren	59.5	15.7
Yazoo	46.5	11.5

Source: United States Census of Population, 1980, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Mississippi, Table 53, and Detailed Population Characteristics, U.S. Summary, Table 262. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office 1983.

<sup>^</sup>Includes those who have completed college, population 25 or more years old.

<sup>^^</sup>Population 25 or more years old.

<sup>^^^</sup>Unweighted average.

When the proportions of blacks and whites completing high school are compared, the contrast is stark (Table 6). The difference in the fraction of whites in the United States and in the Delta completing high school is only seven percentage points. Proportionally 90 percent as many whites in the Delta as in the United States have completed high school, 62 percent as compared to 69 percent. The disparity between blacks completing high school in the Delta and in the nation (the difference between 51 percent for the United States and 24 percent in the Delta) is on the order of more than 100 percent. That less than one-quarter of black adults living in the Delta have completed high school cannot but have adverse consequences for the economy of the region.

The comparison between core and periphery with regard to high school completion by blacks and whites appears below. The figure for whites in the core Delta counties is somewhat compromised because data are missing for Humphreys, Issaquena, and Tunica. Yet, the sharp difference between white and black high school completion rates is unchanged.

<i>Area</i>	<i>Percent Completing High School</i>	
	White	Black
Core (11 counties)	61.4	25.1
Periphery	54.2	23.9

While nearly one-third (32.7 percent) of the black population of Mississippi had completed high school in 1980, less than one-quarter (23.8 percent) of those in Delta counties had done so.

**Table 6. Percent of persons 25 or more years old completing high school, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta, by race and by county, 1980.**

Area	Whites	Blacks	Blacks as a percentage of whites
United States	68.6	51.2	74.4
Mississippi	60.9	32.7	53.7
Delta	61.4 <sup>^</sup>	23.8 <sup>^</sup>	38.1
Core Delta Counties			
Bolivar	67.4	27.8	41.2
Coahoma	63.8	26.2	39.8
Humphreys	...	23.1	...
Issaquena	...	20.1	...
Leflore	64.0	24.5	38.3
Quitman	51.3	19.4	37.8
Sharkey	61.5	26.4	42.9
Sunflower	62.6	22.1	35.3
Tallahatchie	53.0	18.6	35.1
Tunica	...	14.8	...
Washington	67.4	31.8	47.2
Peripheral Delta Counties			
Carroll	50.6	23.9	47.2
Holmes	64.4	25.2	39.1
Panola	54.7	20.7	37.8
Tate	62.1	22.8	36.7

(continued)

**Table 6 (continued). Percent of persons 25 or more years old completing high school, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta, by race and by county, 1980.**

Area	Whites	Blacks	Blacks as a percentage of whites
Peripheral Delta Counties			
Warren	72.8	33.2	45.6
Yazoo	63.8	24.7	38.7

Source: United States Census of Population, 1980, General Social and Economic Characteristics, U.S. Summary, Table 92; Mississippi, Tables 61 and 182.

^Unweighted average.

...Data withheld due to small number of persons to protect the confidentiality of the information.

### Household Income

The amount of money available to households is one of the best indicators of the level of well-being of its members. Household income supports essential items of consumption (such as food, shelter, clothing, and health care) and provides for needs (education and training) that expand the abilities of the population, particularly the young. Income also reflects the capacity of the society and of the economy to provide opportunities for employment and for the exercise of entrepreneurship. It is, therefore, with more than passing interest that income data should be viewed.

Median household income is given in Table 7. This is the middle figure in that half of the households have incomes above it and half have incomes below it. Median household income for the United States in 1988 was \$27,310, that of Mississippi \$19,523 (70 percent of the figure for the United States), and that of the Delta \$13,684 (70 percent of the figure for Mississippi, but 50 percent of the figure for the United States).

**Table 7. Median household income in 1988 and percentage of families and of persons below the poverty level in 1979, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta by county.**

Area	Median household income <sup>^</sup>	Percent below poverty level	
		Persons	Families
United States	\$27,310	12.4	9.6
Mississippi	19,523	31.4	18.7
Delta	13,683 <sup>^^</sup>	46.9 <sup>^^</sup>	30.0 <sup>^^</sup>
Core Delta Counties			
Bolivar	13,433	49.1	31.8
Coahoma	12,906	49.9	30.6

(continued)

**Table 7 (continued). Median household income in 1988 and percentage of families and of persons below the poverty level in 1979, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta by county.**

Area	Median household income <sup>^</sup>	Percent below poverty level	
		Persons	Families
Core Delta Counties			
Humphreys	11,158	53.9	35.1
Leflore	13,593	43.1	27.0
Quitman	11,775	51.6	30.9
Sharkey	12,203	56.9	37.0
Sunflower	13,951	49.4	30.0
Tallahatchie	11,400	52.0	34.4
Tunica	8,801	63.5	44.8
Washington	15,815	41.4	26.3
Peripheral Delta Counties			
Carroll	13,591	38.5	25.0
Holmes	9,953	55.8	39.1
Panola	14,136	41.9	27.6
Tate	19,184	34.0	20.8
Warren	23,166	23.6	13.9
Yazoo	14,070	45.3	27.6

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1980, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Mississippi, Tables 61.80 and 161. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983. D&B Donnelley Demographics, Donnelley Marketing Information Services, 1989.

<sup>^</sup>Family householder.

<sup>^^</sup>Unweighted average.

<i>Median Household Income, 1988</i>	
Core	\$12,592
Periphery	\$15,684

Neither the median income of the core nor of the periphery is at a par with the state figure. However, income is larger in the periphery than in the core.

The poverty level is a measure set by the U.S. Government. It is adjusted for family size and age of family members and is corrected for inflation from year to year. Its basis is the amount of money that is required to provide a minimum adequate diet as defined by the Department of Agriculture's economy food plan. It is based solely on cash income and does not reflect income from sources such as medicaid and food stamps. It is, nevertheless, a useful indicator of a household's ability to provide not only essential foods to its members but also clothing, shelter, and other necessities.

In 1979 only 12 percent of the population of the United States and 10 percent of its households lived in poverty as defined in this fashion. The comparable figures for Mississippi were 31 percent of individuals and 19 percent of families. In the Delta these fractions rise to 47 percent and 30 percent, respectively. Poverty is nearly four times more prevalent among individuals in the Delta than in the nation. It is three times more prevalent among families in the Delta than in the United States (Table 7).

Half of the individuals in the population and nearly one-third of the families of the core counties live in poverty. While these levels are quite high in the periphery (40 and 26 percent, persons and families, respectively), they are considerably lower than in the core.

<i>Area</i>	<i>Percent Below Poverty Level, 1979</i>	
	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Families</i>
Core	50.7	32.3
Periphery	39.9	25.7

Household income data are available separately for the white and for the black populations (Table 8). In 1979, for the United States, the income of black households (\$10,943) was 62 percent of that of white households (\$17,680). In Mississippi, black household income (\$7,414) was 50 percent of white household income (\$14,786).

Viewed slightly differently, the median household income of white Mississippians (\$14,786) was 84 percent of that of all white households in the United States; and the household income of white households in the Delta was on a par with those of Mississippi. With regard to the income of black households, Mississippians had a median income that was only 68 percent of that of black households in the United States. The Delta's black household income (\$6,190) was but 44 percent of that of whites in the Delta and 35 percent of whites in the nation.

Incomes of black households in the periphery are higher than those of black households in the core counties. The data for white families in core and periphery are compromised by the lack of data for several core counties. However, the income of white counties in the periphery also appears to be higher than those in the core.



<i>Area</i>	<i>Median Household Income</i>	
	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>
Core	\$14,541 (Data for 7 out of 11 counties)	\$5,968 (Data for 10 out of 11 counties)
Periphery	\$14,942	\$6,560

**Table 8. Median household income by race, and black income as a percentage of white income, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta by county, 1979 (1979 dollars).**

Area	White	Black	Black as a percent of white
United States	17,680	10,943	61.9
Mississippi	14,786	7,414	50.1
Delta	13,994 <sup>^</sup>	6,190 <sup>^</sup>	44.2 <sup>^</sup>
Core Delta Counties			
Bolivar	15,253	5,873	38.5
Coahoma	16,484	5,711	34.6
Humphreys	...	4,952	...
Issaquena	4,476	...	...
Leflore	14,797	6,076	41.1
Quitman	13,249	5,674	42.8
Sharkey	...	6,566	...
Sunflower	15,208	6,679	43.9
Tallahatchie	10,511	6,355	60.5
Tunica	...	5,120	...
Washington	16,284	6,674	41.0
Peripheral Delta Counties			
Carroll	12,919	6,468	50.1
Holmes	12,398	5,399	43.5
Panola	12,551	6,604	52.6
Tate	15,414	7,506	48.7

(continued)

**Table 8 (continued). Median household income by race, and black income as a percentage of white income, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta by county, 1979 (1979 dollars).**

Area	White	Black	Black as a percent of white
Peripheral Delta Counties			
Warren	20,765	7,666	36.9
Yazoo	15,604	5,718	36.6

Source: United States Census of Population, 1980, General Social and Economic Characteristics, U.S. Summary, Table 92 and Mississippi, Tables 61 and 186. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1983.

...Data withheld due to small number.

^Unweighted average.

### Infant Mortality

No statistical measure is more sensitive to the economic and social well-being of a population than the infant mortality rate. The conditions that favor the births of healthy babies and their survival following birth are strongly influenced by the circumstances in which their mothers live and into which they are born. The quality of prenatal care for the mother, the absence of health conditions, such as malnutrition, that affect the development of the fetus, the adequacy of nutrition, sanitation, postnatal medical care, and shelter following birth affect the survival of the newborn. For these reasons, the *infant mortality rate*, or the number of deaths of children under one year of age per every thousand live births, is of great significance.

There is but a small difference in the infant mortality rates of the black population of Mississippi and of the United States and of the white population of the United States and of Mississippi (Table 9). The infant mortality rate for Mississippi as a whole, however, is higher since blacks constitute a higher proportion of its population than of the United States, and the black infant mortality rate is higher than the white.

**Table 9. Infant mortality rates by race, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta, 1981-1985.**

Area	Total	White	Black
United States^	11.2	9.7	19.2
Mississippi	14.5	9.8	19.6
Delta	19.9	10.8	23.6

(continued)

**Table 9 (continued). Infant mortality rates by race, United States, Mississippi, and Mississippi Delta, 1981-1985.**

Area	Total	White	Black
Core	20.4	9.8	29.2
Periphery	18.2	12.1	23.2

Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1987. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986, Table 112. Maternal and Infant Health Reference Manual, Mississippi, 1981-1985, 2 Vols. Jackson: Office of Public Relations, Mississippi State Department of Health, n.d.

^For 1983.

The population of the Delta, however, offers a contrast to these observations. The black infant mortality rate in the Delta is substantially higher than that of blacks in either the state or the nation. This is especially true in the core counties in which 29.2 black infants die for each thousand births. Interestingly, the white infant mortality rate is higher in the periphery than in the core, while the reverse is true for the black infant mortality rate. This suggests that levels of well-being are higher for whites in the core counties than in the periphery but higher for blacks in the periphery counties than in the core, a reflection, perhaps, of the relative socioeconomic positions occupied in each area by each group.

The black infant mortality rate in the Delta is higher than that of Taiwan (17), Costa Rica (17), Panama (23), Yugoslavia (25), and Albania (28), to name but a few. It is virtually the same as that of Guyana (30) and Malaysia (30). The overall rate in the Delta of 19.9 is larger than that of Taiwan and Costa Rica and not far removed from that of Panama. The fundamental causes are the same in all these areas low income and education, poor housing, poor nutrition, poor sanitary conditions, and inadequate medical care. It is not far-fetched to claim that, with respect to infant mortality, the Delta is a "Third World" area in a "First World" nation.

### **Conclusion**

The data presented raise a number of questions. Why has the size of the population of the core Delta counties declined so steeply? Why are the educational and economic levels of the population of the core Delta so far below those of the state? Why do the core counties, with the sole exception of high school completion rates for whites, score lower on measures of education and income, than the peripheral counties? Why does Warren County, with few exceptions, consistently outscore the remaining counties? Why do the periphery counties, although they adjoin the core counties and even though their soils and agricultural resources are inferior to those of the core, almost always score higher on these measures than the core counties?

The paradox of the poverty of the Mississippi Delta amidst an abundance of rich soils and of economic underdevelopment within the richest economy in the world must be explained in terms of the social and economic history of the region as it relates to the organization of agriculture.

Agrarianism, a world view and way of life born of plantation agriculture, hindered economic progress in the South, in Mississippi, and in the Delta in a number of ways. Status,

prestige, and wealth flowed from the possession of land. The investment of human and of material capital was channeled into agriculture rather than into business or industry.<sup>2</sup> This strengthened the hold the agricultural elite had over the affairs of the community and gave them the power to block or, at least, hinder the investment of capital in nontraditional enterprises (manufacturing plants and railroads) that might have eroded the basis of their power. It gave them access to the centers of decision making in the state legislatures and in county courthouses, from which vantage point they could influence the adoption of policies that were in favor and that contributed to the perpetuation of the existing social and economic arrangements; not least among these was the subordinate status of the black population and, many would add, of the poor whites as well.

The low levels of educational attainment and the poverty of the black members of the population and of many whites have an effect on all. Low educational levels mean members of the labor force are unskilled or semiskilled and untrainable. This circumstance makes it unlikely that manufacturing enterprises that require skilled labor and are willing to pay high wages for it will move to the Delta. Instead, inducements, such as free land and a moratorium on taxes, that are used to attract industry often bring in marginal operations that require cheap labor and move elsewhere as soon as the benefits expire. It also means that there is a much smaller pool of potential entrepreneurial talent that could create new home-grown enterprises, while the survival of agrarian values militates against its exercise.

If Mississippi's black population had the same educational, occupational, and income levels as the white, Mississippi would rise significantly in the ranking of the states. The core Delta, the area of the state and, probably, of the nation, with the highest proportion of black residents would benefit the most.

A comparison of Mississippi and of Iowa is instructive in this regard (Table 10). The two states share an important similarity. Both have economies in which agriculture has been dominant in the past and remains in the present a very significant source of income. Both have populations that are among the most rural in the nation. In fact, a greater proportion of the white population of Mississippi than of Iowa lives in cities, although overall Iowa is somewhat more urban. However, Iowa was settled by homesteaders, and family farms have been the norm. This difference in social and economic history has produced arresting contrasts between the two states.

Among the more notable contrasts are the following: Iowa's population is 1.4 percent black while that of Mississippi is 35.2 percent black. The percentage of whites completing high school in Mississippi and in Iowa is much the same. The proportion of whites completing college in Mississippi is, indeed, above the comparable figure for Iowa. However, when the total populations of the two states are compared, the disparity in high school completion increases and the relative proportions completing college are reversed, Iowa's being higher. The difference in median household income between the white population of the two states is just over \$2,000, Iowa's being larger. However, when the total population of the states is compared, Iowa's advantage is \$4,700. The same pattern persists with regard to per capita income and the proportions living below the poverty level.

This is in no way to argue that blacks are the cause of the relative economic and social backwardness of the Delta and of Mississippi this would blame the victim. Rather, it is to say that if economic and social levels are to be raised in the Delta and in the state, it will be necessary to create conditions that enable the black population to benefit as much from

---

<sup>2</sup>I am indebted to Nichols 1990 for an extensive discussion of the influence of agrarianism on the economic growth of the South.

membership in the society as do whites. This will not happen soon; nor will it be done easily. The welfare of both groups is at stake.

**Table 10. Selected characteristics of the white and total populations of Mississippi and of Iowa, 1980.**

Characteristic	Total population		White population	
	Mississippi	Iowa	Mississippi	Iowa
Percent Completing High School <sup>^</sup>	54.8	71.5	63.9	70.3
Percent Completing College <sup>^^</sup>	12.3	13.9	14.4	13.9
Median Household Income	\$12,096	\$16,799	\$14,786	\$16,880
Per Capita Income of Persons in Households	\$5,983	\$7,294	\$6,583	\$7,349
Percent of Families Below Poverty Level	18.7	7.5	10.1	7.2
Percent Urban	47.3	58.6	64.1	56.3
Public Higher Education Appropriation Per Student Equivalent (1986)	\$2,525	\$3,390	.-	.-
Teacher's Average Salaries (1986)	\$18,442	\$21,690	.-	.-
Percent Black	35.2	1.4	.-	.-

Sources: United States Census of Population, 1980, General Social and Economic Characteristics, volumes for Mississippi and Iowa, Tables 56, 57, 62, 66, 71, 76, and 82. Number of Inhabitants, volumes for Mississippi and Iowa, Table 1. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1987, pp. xx, xxii. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983 and 1986.

<sup>^</sup>Population 25 or more years old. Includes those completing college.

<sup>^^</sup>Population 25 or more years old.

## **Chapter**

# **5**

### ***Perceptions and Attitudes of Mississippi Delta Residents***

***By Stephen D. Shaffer\****

Mississippi and other Southern states often were viewed as having traditionalistic political and social cultures resistant to change. In such cultures, a socially advantaged class of higher socioeconomic status whites wields political power directed towards protecting the status quo rather than towards implementing needed social programs to help disadvantaged citizens. Lower-status whites and blacks are essentially powerless groups not expected to be active in political matters.<sup>1</sup> The Mississippi Delta often is viewed as the seat of Mississippi's traditionalistic culture.<sup>2</sup> In examining the political conflict between Delta and "hills" residents in the first half of the century, V.O. Key, Jr. cited the popular image of the state as a "backward culture, with a ruling class both unskilled and neglectful of its duties." He also termed the state's politics one of "frustration not only because of the race question . . . [but because] the state is miserably poor."<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, the political and social attitudes of Delta residents are examined with the most comprehensive and representative public opinion poll conducted in that region to date. It is critically important to examine people's perceptions of and attitudes toward their social, economic, and political environments, since such orientations shape their behavior in making contributions to their community on decisions to relocate. Given the historical image of the Delta's traditionalistic culture, it is especially interesting to examine the extent to which public opinion (by the late 1980's) reflected or contradicted this traditionalistic image. We now turn to an examination of the attitudes of a number of Delta social groups toward their community, social environment, race relations, public spending programs, and political reform.

---

<sup>1</sup>Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 118-22.

<sup>2</sup>Dale A. Krane and Stephen D. Shaffer, *Mississippi Government and Politics* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup>V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics* (New York: Vintage, 1949), 229-253.

\*Associate Professor of Political Science, Mississippi State University.

## Attachment to the Community

Southerners are generally happier to be living in their states and communities than are non-Southerners.<sup>4</sup> Delta citizens reflect this regional pride, being relatively satisfied with the overall quality of life in their communities and fairly attached to their communities. Thirty-four percent say they will definitely be living in their communities 5 years from now, and 41 percent say they probably will. Only 7 percent say they definitely will not be living in their communities in 5 years, and 18 percent say probably not. Yet Delta citizens are somewhat less attached to their communities than are people in the rest of Mississippi. Outside of the Delta, 39 percent say they definitely will be living in their communities in 5 years, and 44 percent say they probably will be, in contrast to 7 percent who say definitely not and 11 percent probably not. Thus, Delta citizens are about 8 percent more likely than other Mississippians to indicate an intention to move from their communities within the near future.

Another indicator of community attachment is personal reaction to departure from the community. Once again, Delta citizens demonstrate significant attachment to their communities, though to a lesser degree than other Mississippians. Thirty-four percent indicate they would be very sorry to leave their community and 29 percent somewhat sorry; while only 6 percent say they would be very pleased and 8 percent somewhat pleased to leave. To 23 percent, it would not make any difference. Community attachment is even higher outside of the Delta; as 40 percent of non-Delta citizens would be very sorry to leave their communities and 31 percent somewhat sorry, in contrast to 7 percent who would be very pleased, and 5 percent somewhat pleased to leave. Seventeen percent say it wouldn't make any difference. Hence, the percentage of citizens who would be sorry to leave their communities is 8 percent greater outside the Delta region.

Nationally, job satisfaction is a major source of satisfaction with one's community and general way of life.<sup>5</sup> Job satisfaction also is extremely important to Mississippians; the primary reason given for considering relocation is to find a better job. Fifty percent of Delta citizens cited employment improvement as a reason for leaving their communities. Yet, the need to attract industry offering high-paying jobs is not confined to the Delta, in that 53 percent of non-Delta citizens also cited better jobs as a reason for relocation. Among other reasons given by Delta residents for relocating were personal safety (cited by 8 percent), the desire for better schools, and more recreational opportunities (cited by 7 percent each). Twenty-eight percent concluded that they would not relocate for any reason.

One reason that some Delta residents would like to relocate may be related to their socially disadvantaged status. Delta residents who are black or who have lower incomes appear less attached to their communities than are whites or higher income groups. Greater black discontent with their communities is not unique to the Delta, however; it is found across Mississippi and in most northern states.<sup>6</sup> Thirty-five percent of Delta blacks and 33 percent of non-Delta blacks say they plan to relocate in 5 years, compared to only 18 percent of Delta whites and 12 percent of non-Delta whites (Table 1, page 81). In contrast, 69 percent of Delta whites and 75 percent of non-Delta whites say that they would be sorry to leave. A desire for better jobs is a special concern for blacks; 56 percent both inside and outside of the Delta say

---

<sup>4</sup>Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 221-29.

<sup>5</sup>Alex C. Michalos, "Job Satisfaction, Marital Satisfaction, and the Quality of Life," in Frank M. Andrews (ed.) *Research on the Quality of Life* (University of Michigan: Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, 1986), 2; Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, and Willard L. Rodgers, *The Quality of American Life* (New York: Russell Sage, 1976), 317.

<sup>6</sup>Black and Black, *Politics and Society*, 2:6-227. In the South as a whole, Earl and Merle Black find that blacks are slightly more attached to their communities than are whites.

\*Associate Professor of Political Science, Mississippi State University.

they would leave for a better job in contrast to a more modest 44 percent of Delta whites and 51 percent of non-Delta whites.

A related factor encouraging relocation is poverty, which appears especially important in the Delta compared to the rest of the state. While family income is not related to expected movement out of the community in the rest of the state, it is a significant factor in the Delta. Thirty-two percent of the families with incomes below \$10,000 a year expect to leave their Delta communities within 5 years, compared to only 18 percent of those families making more than \$20,000 a year. Yet, regardless of income level, Delta residents would be equally sorry to have to depart. The major reason Delta residents give for expected relocation, once again, is to find a better job, cited as a reason for leaving by 47 percent of the under \$10,000 income group, 52 percent of the \$10,000-\$20,000 group, and 57 percent of the over \$20,000 income group. While not specifically examined in this study, national studies suggest that the poor housing structures of lower income residents may be an important impetus for geographic relocation.<sup>7</sup>

Another reason for relocating is greater opportunities, a motivation for both the socially advantaged and disadvantaged. An important concern for Delta citizens has to be the possible departure of the younger generation. Fifty-seven percent between the ages of 18 and 30 expect to relocate in the next 5 years, a figure far greater than the 39 percent similarly inclined young adults in the rest of the state. Other age groups appear far more satisfied with their communities, as only 16 percent of Delta residents between ages 31 and 60, and 10 percent of residents over age 60, expect to relocate in 5 years. Only 37 percent of 18 to 30-year-old Delta residents say they would be sorry to leave, significantly fewer than the 62 percent in the rest of the state. Once again, older age groups express more attachment to their communities, as 69 percent of Delta residents between 31-60 (and 77 percent over 60) would be sorry to leave. The key motivation for young people to leave the Delta, and the rest of Mississippi, once again is better jobs. Seventy-two percent of Delta adults under age 30 (and 70 percent of young adults in the rest of the state) cite better jobs as the reason for moving. Nationally, high school seniors are placing increased emphasis on job security, status, and income, due to a growing concern over their diminishing hope of attaining a high enough living standard to support their goals of marriage and family.<sup>8</sup> Jobs are also a major concern of the more intermediate age group (59 percent of Delta residents in the 31-60 age group cited jobs), though not of older residents (only 7 percent of Delta residents over 60 mentioned jobs as a reason for leaving their communities).

In addition to the young, those with some college education appear very concerned about maximizing their opportunities; though the high aspirations of the well-educated are equally evident across the state. Among Delta residents, 26 percent of the college-educated expressed a likelihood of moving from their communities in 5 years, compared to a more modest 19 percent of high school dropouts. In the rest of Mississippi, 23 percent of the college-educated are likely to be moving, compared to only 12 percent of high school dropouts. While 68 percent of Delta high school dropouts would be sorry to leave their communities, a somewhat lower 63 percent of Delta residents with some college would be sorry. Once again the key motivation for departure is better jobs, a reason cited by 62 percent of both the Delta and non-Delta college-educated group, in contrast to a more modest 41 percent of high school dropouts in both

---

<sup>7</sup>Campbell, Converse, and Rogers, *American Life*, 261-65.

<sup>8</sup>Jerald G. Bachman, Lloyd D. Johnston, and Patrick M. O'Malley, "Recent Findings from Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of the Lifestyle and Values of Youth," in Frank M. Andrews, ed., *Research on the Quality of Life* (University of Michigan: Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, 1986), 215-34.



regions. Greater disillusionment of the college-educated with their community, relative to the less-educated, also reflects a national phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> It may reflect the process of formal education, which sharpens critical reasoning skills and raises people's expectations.

Given the state's traditional history of racial segregation and discrimination, it is important to examine attitudes of blacks more fully. Figure 1, page 87 details the results of a recursive path analysis (using multiple regression), with race as the "earliest" predictor and education, income, and age as intervening variables seeking to explain intended departure from the community. Despite the history of racial discrimination, blacks do *not* appear motivated to leave their Delta communities for unique, racially identifiable reasons. The key reason for greater black than white intended emigration appears to be the higher black than white birth rate, resulting in the presence of greater numbers of young blacks. The young of both races are especially likely to consider moving in order to find better jobs. A second source of greater black than white emigration is the disproportionate number of low income blacks, compared to whites, since lower income groups, regardless of race, are more likely to express an intent to move away from their communities.

To summarize, Delta residents, both black and white, are significantly attached to their communities and would generally be sorry to have to leave; greater job opportunities would be especially helpful in keeping them from moving out of their communities. Despite economic and social problems facing Delta citizens, they are only modestly less attached to their communities than those in the rest of the state. A major concern is the possible departure of the younger generation, as the 18-30 age group was the only social group in which a majority indicated an intention to leave their communities within the next 5 years. Indeed, age appears to dwarf other factors as a predictor of intended emigration (Figure 1). Other social groups somewhat less attached to their communities are the poor, blacks, and college-educated. Public attitudes clearly support efforts to attract industries that would provide Delta citizens higher paying jobs—industries that would benefit all Delta residents.

### **General Social Attitudes**

The decision to relocate also may be affected by people's general attitudes toward their lives, so it is important to examine these general perceptions and attitudes. People in the Delta region are generally satisfied with their lives, though they express some concern about the trustworthiness of public officials, as do Mississippians across the state.

Twenty-eight percent of Delta residents say their lives are very happy and 52 percent say they are pretty happy, while 20 percent say that they are not too happy. While personally satisfied with their lives, Delta residents are somewhat less satisfied with their financial situations than are other Mississippians. Twenty-five percent of Delta residents say they are dissatisfied with their personal finances, compared to only 17 percent of residents in the rest of the state. Nevertheless, 39 percent of Delta residents indicate they are pretty well satisfied with their financial situations, and 36 percent say they are more or less satisfied.

Once again, certain groups are less satisfied with their personal situations than are others. In the Delta, blacks, high school dropouts, and those with family incomes under \$10,000 are more likely to be unhappy with their lives than are whites and higher socioeconomic status groups. Twenty-seven percent of Delta residents who are high school dropouts, 25 percent of blacks, and 23 percent of the under \$10,000 income group say that they are unhappy, compared to only 16 percent of whites, 15 percent of those with some college education, and 9 percent of those with family incomes over \$20,000 (Table 2, page 82). These

---

<sup>9</sup>Black and Black, *Politics and Society*, 228-29.

\*Associate Professor of Political Science, Mississippi State University.

sources of discontent are not unique to Delta residents, however. Outside of the Delta region, 30 percent of blacks, 24 percent of the under \$10,000 income group, and 23 percent of high school dropouts indicate lower socioeconomic status discontent also exists throughout the nation, as studies have consistently found blacks and lower income groups significantly more dissatisfied with their lives than whites and higher income groups.<sup>10</sup> A more unexpected finding is the slightly greater personal unhappiness of elderly Delta residents, since national studies find the elderly tend to report more satisfaction with their lives than do young adults.<sup>11</sup>

Given the history of race relations in the Delta, it is important to more carefully examine race to try to explain why blacks report less personal happiness than do whites. Figure 2, page 87 details a recursive path analysis with race as the earliest predictor and job satisfaction (operationalized by mention or nonmention of "to get a better job" as a reason for intended departure from the community) and income as intervening predictors seeking to explain personal happiness. National studies find race differences in people's satisfaction with the quality of their lives persist even after adjusting for the lower socioeconomic status of blacks.<sup>12</sup> While Mississippi Delta blacks remain less happy with their lives than do whites after similar adjustments, racial differences narrow to such an extent as to be statistically insignificant. The primary reason Delta blacks are less happy than are whites is their disproportionate number with lower incomes than whites. Lower income people, regardless of race, report less personal happiness than do high income groups. An additional but weaker source of black disillusionment with life is their lower job satisfaction than whites.

A more pressing problem concerns the disillusionment of some groups of Delta residents with their financial situations. Thirty-nine percent of blacks, 29 percent of those under 30 years of age, and 39 percent of the under \$10,000 family income group are dissatisfied with their personal financial situations (Table 2). This dissatisfaction compares to only 15 percent of whites, 18 percent of those over 60, and 11 percent of the over \$20,000 income group. While similar patterns for race and income exist throughout the state, the disillusionment is especially evident for these demographic groups in the Delta. For example, outside the Delta region more modest numbers of blacks (22 percent), those under 30 (12 percent), and the under \$10,000 income group (23 percent) express dissatisfaction with their financial situations. The significant number of young adults who are dissatisfied with their finances is especially troublesome since it reinforces earlier findings that this group is most likely to want to move out of their communities in search of greater opportunities.

Another problem facing the Delta region and the rest of the state is the distrust that many Mississippians feel toward their neighbors and toward public officials in particular. Only 31 percent of Delta residents feel most people can be trusted, while 60 percent say that "you can't be too careful in dealing with people," and 9 percent give other responses. Public officials are especially distrusted, as only 7 percent of Delta residents say that they can "almost always" trust public officials in their community to do what is right, and 29 percent say they

---

<sup>10</sup>Melvin E. Thomas and Michel Hughes, "The Continuing Significance of Race: A Study of Race, Class, and Quality of Life in America, 1972-1985," *American Sociological Review* 51 (December 1986), 836; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, *American Life*, 136-41, 345, 464; Frank Clemente and William J. Sauer, "Life Satisfaction in the United States," *Social Forces* 54 (March 1976), 627-629.

<sup>11</sup>A. Regula Herzog and Willard L. Rodgers, "Satisfaction Among Older Adults," in Frank M. Andrews (ed.), *Research on the Quality of Life* (University of Michigan: Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, 1986), 235; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, *American Life*, 151-64; Clemente and Sauer, "Life Satisfaction," 628.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas and Hughes, "Significance of Race," 836; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, *American Life*, 464.

can trust them "most of the time." In contrast, a sizable 47 percent feel public officials can be trusted only "some of the time," and 17 percent feel they can "rarely be trusted." These figures merely mirror the apprehensions people throughout the state have toward public officials. Outside the Delta, similar percentages indicate that officials can rarely be trusted (14 percent) and can be trusted only some of the time (45 percent). Six percent say they always trust officials, and 34 percent trust them most of the time.

Mississippians of lower socioeconomic status are especially distrustful of officials and people in general. In the Delta, 73 percent of blacks, 70 percent of high school dropouts, and 67 percent of the under \$10,000 income group feel you can't be too careful in dealing with people, in contrast to only 49 percent of whites and those with at least some college education and 43 percent of those earning over \$20,000 a year. Regarding public officials, 22 percent of Delta blacks, high school dropouts, and under \$10,000 income group say that public officials can rarely be trusted, compared to only 14 percent of whites, 12 percent of college educated, and 13 percent of the over \$20,000 income group. These patterns once again are not unique to the Delta; lower-socioeconomic-status people across the state express similar views about the public officials and other people in their communities.

Delta blacks report less satisfaction with their financial situations and less trust of public officials and people in general in contrast to whites; but is that because of their lower incomes and educational levels, or because of the fact they are black? Multiple regression analyses, controlling for possible explanatory factors, yield conflicting results. On the one hand, their lower income is the key reason that blacks are less satisfied with their financial situation than are whites (data not shown). Yet, the lower educational and income levels of blacks, compared to whites, only partially explain why blacks are less trustful of public officials and people in general. The partial regression coefficients reflecting the impact of race on distrust of public officials and on people in general remain substantively and statistically significant after socioeconomic status controls are introduced. Greater black distrust of people in general is hardly unique to the Mississippi Delta, however, as national studies find a similar relationship even after controlling for socioeconomic status factors.<sup>13</sup>

To summarize, Delta residents are generally satisfied with their lives and somewhat satisfied with their standards of living. Like other Mississippians, they have reservations about the actions of public officials. Lower-socioeconomic-status people, including blacks, express less satisfaction with their lives, financial situations, and public officials than do higher-socioeconomic-status groups, however. The key concern of young adults in the Delta is with improving their financial situations, situations which may motivate some to relocate to communities they believe offer more opportunities.

### **Race Relations**

Historically, race was a major preoccupation in Mississippi and the South, as these traditional cultures sought to maintain white supremacy in political and social matters. This situation is documented in V.O. Key's *Southern Politics*. . . the beginning and the end of Mississippi politics is the Negro." Some assert that the fundamental situation has not changed much, as shown by the title of Lamis' chapter on a contemporary Mississippi in *The Two-Party South*: "Mississippi: It's All Black and White." Others argue important improvements were

---

<sup>13</sup>Thomas and Hughes, "Significance of Race," 836-38; Campbell, Converse, and Hughes, *American Life*, 455-64.

made in race relations in the state in recent years.<sup>14</sup> Hence, it is important to examine briefly the attitudes of different groups of Delta residents toward race relations to determine how relations between the races changed in recent years to contribute to an improved quality of life in the region.

Most Delta residents believe improvements have been made in race relations. Seventy-one percent say opportunities for blacks to get ahead improved in the last 5 years, while 19 percent say they have remained the same, and 10 percent indicate they've gotten worse, responses very similar to those existing statewide. Yet, attitudes toward the future are somewhat more restrained. Sixty-two percent believe opportunities for blacks will improve, 25 percent say they will remain the same, and 13 percent believe they will get worse. The greater pessimism of Delta residents is evident when one considers that only 5 percent of residents in the rest of the state believe that black opportunities will get worse in the next 5 years. Despite improvements in race relations, many residents believe equality in job opportunity has yet to be attained. While 60 percent of Delta residents agree with the statement, "Blacks have as good a chance as white people to get any kind of job," some 40 percent agree with the alternative statement, "White people have the first chance at any kind of job." A similarly large 37 percent of Mississippians in the remainder of the state believe that opportunities are unequal.

Delta residents who appear most sensitive to inadequate opportunities for blacks are blacks themselves, women, young adults, and lower income people. Racial polarization is quite evident on the question of whether equal job opportunities exist for both races, as 67 percent of blacks say "no" while 80 percent of whites say "yes" (Table 3, page 83). This racial polarization is also quite evident across the state. Similar percentages of blacks outside of the Delta felt that job equality did not exist (68 percent) in contrast to non-Delta whites who felt it did (74 percent). While a majority of Delta blacks felt opportunities for blacks had improved (53 percent) and would continue to improve (56 percent), 17 percent felt that things had gotten worse, and 16 percent said they would continue to get worse. (Among Delta whites, 85 percent felt opportunities had improved and only 4 percent felt they had gotten worse; 65 percent were similarly optimistic about the future while 11 percent were not.) The lower incomes and lower trust in people held by Delta blacks, in contrast to Delta whites, account for their expectations of fewer minority opportunities. Perceptual and demographic factors were unable to account for race differences in perceptions of equal job opportunities and recent changes in minority opportunities.<sup>15</sup> Hence, an important source of perceived racial discrimination and limited opportunities for minorities is "being black in a society which is only beginning to accord blacks equal recognition as citizens and neighbors."<sup>16</sup>

Other group differences were less striking. Young adults appeared more sensitive to possible racial discrimination, as 40 percent of Delta residents under age 30 indicated job opportunities were unequal (compared to 32 percent of those over age 60). Lower income groups also were more concerned in that 48 percent of Delta residents with incomes under

---

<sup>14</sup>Key, *Southern Politics*, 229; Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 44; Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics* (New York: New American Library, 1977), 187; Krane and Shaffer, *Mississippi Government*.

<sup>15</sup>Three multiple regression analyses were conducted with each of the dependent variables (perceptions of changes in minority opportunities, expectation of future minority opportunity changes, and perceptions of existing job discrimination) regressed on the predictors of race, income, education, personal happiness, trust in public officials, and trust in people generally.

<sup>16</sup>Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, *American Life*, 464.

\$10,000 volunteered that job opportunities were unequal, in contrast to only 32 percent of those with incomes over \$20,000. Lower income Delta residents also were less likely to feel opportunities for blacks had improved and would continue to improve than were upper income residents. While sex differences did not exist on perception of current job discrimination, women were less likely to feel opportunities for blacks had improved and would continue to improve. (A more modest 66 percent of women felt opportunities had improved, compared to 78 percent of men; 56 percent of women felt things would continue to improve, compared to 68 percent of men.) Contrasted to all other Delta residents, full-time workers were most likely to perceive unequal opportunities for the races in employment, as 47 percent said opportunities were unequal, compared to 33 percent of all other groups (retirees, housewives, part-time workers, students, etc.) who felt opportunities were not equal.

One barrier to continued progress in race relations that merits examination is the possible persistence of segregationist attitudes among certain social groups. When asked about attitudes toward school integration, 75 percent of Delta residents said that "white and black students should go to the same schools," while 18 percent said they should go to "separate schools," and 7 percent gave other responses. The significance of this overwhelming support for the general concept of school integration is reduced when one considers that only 10 percent of residents outside of the Delta supported school segregation. Furthermore, significant numbers of Delta whites (30 percent) compared to Delta blacks (only 4 percent), and Delta residents over 60 years of age (35 percent) compared to those age 30 and under (only 5 percent) supported segregated schools (Table 4, page 84). Finally, while many whites say they support the general concept of integration, some may simply be expressing what they believe has become the socially desirable response rather than their actual opinions. Fewer Delta whites appear willing to make a personal commitment to accomplish integration, as 37 percent said that they would object to sending their children to a school where more than half of the children were black.

Another type of integration examined was residence. Even as late as 1988, 31 percent of Delta residents agreed with the following statement designed to measure latent segregationist sentiments: "Whites have a right to keep blacks from moving into their neighborhoods if they want to, and blacks should respect that right." Segregationist sentiment is less evident in the rest of the state where 23 percent of residents support the segregationist statement. Once again, older people and whites are more segregationist than are blacks and the young. Thirty-seven percent of Delta whites and 38 percent of those over age 60 agree with the segregationist statement, compared to only 23 percent of blacks and 20 percent of young adults under age 30. Clearly, younger Mississippians who have grown up in an integrated society are more supportive of equal opportunities for minorities than are older residents who grew up under Jim Crow laws.

As a final overview of the past and future of the Delta region, it is interesting to reexamine regional as well as generational differences. Apparently, the past political and social cultures of the Delta led both races to be less supportive of racial integration, compared to residents in the rest of the state. Fifty-nine percent of Delta whites support integrated neighborhoods, compared to 68 percent of non-Delta whites. Sixty-six percent of Delta whites support integrated schools, compared to 82 percent of non-Delta whites. While more blacks in the Delta, compared to whites, support integration, blacks outside of the Delta are even more supportive of integration. A more modest 77 percent of Delta blacks support integrated neighborhoods, compared to 91 percent of non-Delta blacks. Eighty-seven percent of Delta blacks support integrated schools, compared to 95 percent of non-Delta blacks. The lower level of public support for racial integration in the Delta persists even after adjusting for the greater numbers of more segregationist elderly and high school dropouts living there, compared to the

rest of the state (Figure 3, page 88).<sup>17</sup> The future appears brighter in the area of race relations when one considers that the sentiment for integration is strongest among the young and well-educated, and weakest among the elderly and high school dropouts, suggesting that generational change will continue to transform social and political attitudes.

### **Spending on Public Programs**

After detailing some of the problems facing the Mississippi Delta region, it is informative to learn that Delta residents are very supportive of state and local government spending to help solve some of those problems. Delta residents are very supportive of increased spending on public education at the elementary, secondary, and college and university levels. When cautioned that "most of the money government spends comes from the taxes you and others pay," and then asked whether state and local governments in Mississippi should be spending more, less, or about the same as now, strong majorities of Delta residents supported increased spending on education.<sup>18</sup> Three-quarters of those interviewed felt more should be spent on public grade schools and high schools (78 percent) and public colleges and universities (74 percent). When asked about their school districts in particular, 43 percent said taxpayers were spending too little to educate students, while 42 percent said about the right amount was being spent, and 15 percent said too much was being spent.

Delta residents' support for improving education was so widespread it was evident in all social groups examined. Support was highest among more liberal groups, though it was also very strong among more conservative groups. While 87 percent of blacks, 84 percent of Democratic Party identifiers, and 82 percent of self-identified "liberals" felt that more should be spent on public elementary and secondary education, so too did 74 percent of conservatives, 71 percent of whites, and 65 percent of Republicans (Table 5, page 85). Increased spending on higher education was supported by 88 percent of blacks and 78 percent of Democratic identifiers, in contrast to somewhat lower but significant support from whites (63 percent) and Republican identifiers (55 percent). While all age and gender groups supported improving education, women and young adults were especially supportive, suggesting some self-interest at work. Eighty percent of women supported spending more on higher education (compared to 67 percent of men); and 54 percent of women felt that taxpayers spent too little on education in their school districts (compared to 30 percent of men). While only 29 percent of those over age 60 felt that too little was spent on education in their districts, a significant 48 percent of those under age 30 felt that too little was spent. This overwhelming public support for improving education also has been found nationally, where the quality of local public schools is believed to be one of the most critically important sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's community.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>One possible explanation for greater segregationist sentiment among Delta whites, compared to non-Delta whites, is the political context. Many studies have found a relationship between Southern white support for racial policies and candidates and the percentage of the population that is black (Wright, 1977: 497). Blacks comprise a significantly higher percentage of the population in the Delta than outside of the Delta.

<sup>18</sup>Precise wording of questionnaire items can significantly affect the level of support for spending on public programs. The national General Social Survey items fail to mention the linkage between taxes and spending, leading to an even greater tendency for people to register support for increased spending than they do when asked the items in this study. On the other hand, questionnaire items that caution respondents that increased spending on a program would result in an increase in a specific tax by a specific amount would presumably decrease the level of support voiced for each program.

<sup>19</sup>Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, *American Life*, 261-65, 506.

Delta residents are equally supportive of spending on streets and highways and efforts to attract industry that would provide better paying jobs. Seventy-eight percent of Delta citizens felt state and local governments should spend more on streets and highways, and 76 percent felt those governments should spend more on industrial growth and development. Once again, support for increased spending in both areas was widespread across all social groups—it never falls below 60 percent. For example, while 85 percent of self-identified liberals, 83 percent of self-identified Democrats, 86 percent of blacks, and 84 percent of high school dropouts said that more should be spent on streets and highways, so too did 74 percent of self-identified conservatives, 72 percent of self-identified Republicans, 73 percent of whites, and 67 percent of those with some college education.

Residents of the Delta also are very supportive of increased state and local spending on programs for the poor, health care, and hospitals, reflecting their self-interest. Seventy-four percent support increased spending on health care and hospitals, while 65 percent support increased funding on poverty programs, exceeding the 57 percent for non-Delta residents who support more spending for poverty programs.

Very clear differences in opinions about these human resource programs exist between different social groups. More liberal and lower-socioeconomic-status groups are significantly more supportive of increased spending on poverty and health care programs than are more conservative and higher status groups. Regarding poverty programs, 76 percent of self-identified liberals, 79 percent of self-identified Democrats, 90 percent of blacks, 73 percent of high school dropouts, and 88 percent of those with incomes under \$10,000 say state and local governments should be spending more. On the other hand, more modest figures of 56 percent of self-identified conservatives, 41 percent of self-identified Republicans, 47 percent of whites, 56 percent of those with some college, and 40 percent of those with incomes over \$20,000 indicate more should be spent on poverty programs. On health care programs, 81 percent of self-identified liberals, 87 percent of the under \$10,000 income group, and 86 percent of self-identified Democrats, blacks, and high school dropouts say spend more, while more modest figures of 61 percent of conservatives, 45 percent of Republicans, 65 percent of whites, 64 percent of college educated, and 55 percent of the over \$20,000 income groups say spend more. Young people are also a voice for change; among those under 30, 75 percent support spending more on health care and 76 percent want to spend more on poverty programs, compared to 67 percent and 57 percent, respectively, of those over 60.

Yet another priority is improved child day-care facilities, which is a greater priority in the Delta than in the rest of the state. Fifty-nine percent of the Delta residents feel the state and local governments should spend more on day-care facilities, while 28 percent say spend the same amount and 13 percent say spend less. In the rest of the state, a more modest 48 percent feel that more should be spent, while 38 percent say spend the same and 14 percent say spend less. Once again, self-identified liberal and lower-socioeconomic-status groups are especially supportive of day-care spending, as are 83 percent of blacks, 77 percent of those with incomes under \$10,000, 69 percent of self-identified Democrats, and 63 percent of high school dropouts. Only 36 percent of self-identified Republicans, 38 percent of whites, 54 percent of the college educated, and 47 percent of those with incomes over \$20,000 expressed support for increased spending. Women are more supportive than are men of increased spending on day-care, with 67 percent of the former and 49 percent of the latter supportive, perhaps because so many women head single-parent households. The greater willingness of women to spend more than men on child care and other social programs may reflect an emerging gender gap

in Mississippi politics, one similar to that which exists nationally, in which women generally have more liberal political opinions than do men.<sup>20</sup>

Many of the factors related to increased support for social welfare programs (such as poverty, health care, and day-care programs) are themselves interrelated, so it is important to attempt to disentangle their differing effects on support for government spending. Figure 4, page 88 illustrates how the most change-oriented groups in the Mississippi Delta are the more socially disadvantaged citizens. The greater support for increased spending to alleviate poverty is found among the young, lower income, and black citizenry. More health-care funding is especially sought by the lower income, less educated, and Democratic Party identifiers of both races. Blacks and women are most supportive of increased funding for day-care programs. Ironically, however, these are groups that historically have been less politically active than the more socially advantaged groups, leading to national concerns that public policy may fail to adequately reflect the opinions of the disadvantaged.<sup>21</sup>

Delta residents also support more spending for police forces, but express less widespread support for programs such as protecting the environment, promoting tourism, and funding the prison system. Regarding police forces, 64 percent feel more money should be spent, while 29 percent feel the same should be spent, and 7 percent feel less should be spent. Fifty-six percent support spending more on environmental programs, 33 percent say spend the same amount, and 11 percent spend less. Fifty-five percent of Delta residents want to spend more to encourage tourism, while 29 percent want to spend the same amount, and 16 percent prefer to spend less. The lowest spending priority for Delta residents is jail and prison facilities, where increased spending is supported by only 48 percent.

While Delta residents support increased funding for specific public programs, they are less supportive of general tax increases for unspecified public programs. When asked the following question: In order to increase spending on education and raise teachers' salaries to the Southeast average, the legislature will have to raise taxes or cut spending on other programs. What would you support, raising taxes, cutting other programs, or doing some of both? Delta residents are very flexible. Only 13 percent feel taxes should be raised and only 23 percent feel other programs should be cut. The majority want to do some of both (56 percent). These data suggest people may feel they lack sufficient detailed information to make such decisions, and they would accept necessary sacrifices decided by political leaders provided that they were clearly and carefully justified to them.

Our survey data from the Delta and the remainder of the state reflect little public support for a key component of the state's traditional political culture outlined earlier—support for a weak government dedicated to the preservation of the status quo.<sup>22</sup> Instead, Delta residents generally are very supportive of improving their communities by increased government funding of education, economic development, and social welfare programs. A major goal of political leaders who support such programs is to fully inform the public about the need for increased taxes to pay for such improvements. One important barrier to such investment decisions discussed earlier is the relatively high level of public cynicism toward public officials. Some residents (e.g., Republicans) will be receptive to the argument that increased taxes are not required until the alleged waste and fraud in government are eliminated.

---

<sup>20</sup>Keith T. Poole and L. Harmon Zeigler, *Women, Public Opinion, and Politics* (New York: Longman, 1985).

<sup>21</sup>Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

<sup>22</sup>Elazar, *American Federalism*, 118-19.



### **Political Reform**

Delta residents support other political reform measures as well; but in many instances public opinion is more divided and many residents lack opinions. Opinions are divided on the issue of women's roles in society, with 43 percent agreeing with the statement, "Women should take care of running their homes and leave running the country up to men," and a modest 57 percent disagreeing with that statement. Generational and educational differences on the role of women in society are especially noticeable. While 70 percent of the Delta residents under age 30 disagree with the statement restricting women's roles in society, opinions are reversed among those over age 60, where 60 percent agree with the statement (Table 6, page 86). A similar pattern emerges for education, as 65 percent of those with at least some college but only 40 percent of high school dropouts disagree with the statement. As one might expect, gender is also a factor, as 63 percent of women disagree with the statement compared to only 50 percent of men. While support for women's rights is more limited in the Mississippi Delta, compared to the rest of the country, a similar situation exists throughout the State of Mississippi. The data suggest that, while strides have been made in civil rights in recent decades, the cause of women's rights has a greater distance to travel.

Delta residents provide relatively greater support for the concept of labor unions, approved of by 57 percent, while 30 percent disapprove. Lower-socioeconomic-status groups are especially supportive of labor unions: blacks (77 percent), those with incomes under \$10,000 (71 percent), women (69 percent), and those under age 30 (75 percent). On the other hand, only 37 percent of self-identified Republicans, 41 percent of whites, 36 percent of those over age 60, 43 percent of those with incomes over \$20,000, and 46 percent of men express approval.

Despite the overall support for political reform and improved governmental programs found in this report, public apathy is a major barrier to implementation of such programs. For example, only 9 percent of Delta residents supported the county beat system and 20 percent the county unit system, while a substantial 71 percent indicated they never heard about the issue or had no opinions about it. Lower-socioeconomic-status groups were especially likely to lack opinions on the issue. Eighty-three percent of blacks, 78 percent of those under age 30, 83 percent of high school dropouts, 83 percent of those with incomes under \$10,000, and 78 percent of women (a group having lower incomes than men) lacked opinions, compared to more modest levels of 63 percent for whites, 70 percent of those over 60, 61 percent of the college educated, 50 percent of those over \$20,000, and 63 percent of men. The higher-socioeconomic-status citizens were more likely to favor the county unit system, suggesting that people gained greater appreciation for the unit system as they learned more about it. Thirty-one percent of self-identified Republicans favored the unit system compared to 13 percent of self-identified Democrats; 28 percent of whites favored it compared to 8 percent of blacks; and 27 percent of the college educated and 39 percent of those with incomes over \$20,000 favored the unit system, compared to 12 percent of high school dropouts and 8 percent of the under \$10,000 income group.

The key sources of political apathy (measured by political knowledge about the unit system) in the Delta appear to be those in lower educational and income levels (Figure 5, page 89). The greater apathy among blacks compared to whites is almost entirely explained by their lower income and educational levels. An additional factor is gender, since the greater apathy of Delta women compared to men is only partly explained by their lower incomes. This suggests that the traditional political culture of the area, which historically relegated women to the societal role of homemaker, may have depressed their political skills and interest.

More specific indicators of public apathy included in the study are political knowledge (ability to recall the name of their U.S. Representative) and political interest (operationalized by interest in the coming elections for President and U.S. Senator). These data involve larger

sample errors since they were asked only of those Delta residents included in the statewide sample. However, they do suggest that more self-identified liberal and lower-socioeconomic-status groups and those more oriented toward progressive policies are harder to mobilize to be politically active. For example, 77 percent of blacks (compared to 64 percent of whites) were unable to recall the name of their U.S. Congressman. Seventy-nine percent of high school dropouts (55 percent of college educated), 76 percent of those with incomes under \$10,000 (55 percent of those in the over \$20,000 group), and 71 percent of the 18-30 age group (56 percent of those over age 60) also were unable to recall their Congressman's name.

Higher-socioeconomic-status groups also expressed more interest in the upcoming political campaigns. Sixty-five percent of those in the over \$20,000 income group said they were very interested, compared to 56 percent in the under \$10,000 group. Fifty-eight percent of the college educated and only 46 percent of high school dropouts also indicated they were very interested. While 61 percent of those over age 60 expressed high interest, only 47 percent of those under age 30 did. Indeed, many lower-socioeconomic-status groups were unable to understand ideological terms or unable to apply them to themselves. Forty-eight percent of high school dropouts and 48 percent of the under \$10,000 income group were unable to identify themselves in ideological terms, compared to 35 percent of the college educated and 34 percent of those in the over \$20,000 income group. Forty-six percent of those under age 30 and 51 percent of women were unable to employ ideological terms, compared to only 36 percent of those over 60 and 27 percent of males.

These findings suggest that public apathy and a lack of public understanding of the complexities of politics may be major barriers to political reform in the Delta. While many residents express support for progressive policies, many lack trust in their public officials. They, therefore, may be reluctant to trust officials' judgments regarding the possible need for increased public sacrifices in the form of taxes in order to improve the region. Furthermore, in contrast to more conservative high-socioeconomic-status groups, who tend to be more knowledgeable and interested in politics, they remain rather unknowledgeable. Regardless of socioeconomic status, many residents are apathetic and unknowledgeable about politics.

## Conclusion

Residents of the Mississippi Delta generally are satisfied with their lives; but they also are aware of the problems facing their region and the state, so they express strong support for governmental efforts to solve those problems. Delta residents are especially supportive of increased spending to improve education, attract industry, and to help the socially disadvantaged. In this sense, public support for the region's traditional political culture that called for minimal governmental efforts to improve society has faded, continuing a trend observed earlier by Bass and DeVries who concluded, "The transformation in Mississippi in recent years has been more swift than in any other state."<sup>23</sup>

A key problem that may cause many people (especially the young and others desiring greater opportunities) to move out of their communities is a desire for better jobs. It is likely that this is the major motivation behind Delta citizens' support for improved education and economic development activities. Public and private efforts to promote these goals should be very popular politically in the Delta region.

A few barriers to political change are illustrated by this study. First, more privileged social groups are somewhat less supportive of progressive programs compared to the socially disadvantaged; hence the people of the region are not completely united in their political and

---

<sup>23</sup>Bass and DeVries, *Transformation*, 118-19.

social views. Second, disadvantaged social groups are the least knowledgeable about and least interested in politics, which may lead to fewer efforts to influence public policy. This can pose a serious problem, as public policy may better reflect the views of more materially well-off citizens instead of the disadvantaged who have a greater need of governmental assistance.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, many citizens are cynical about their public officials. They may feel that waste and inefficiency exist in government, or that their leaders are unfair, insensitive, or unresponsive to their needs. Such attitudes can lead to disbelief that higher taxes are really necessary to solve important social problems, or to the fear that increased revenue would be spent on programs upon which the public does not place a high priority.

---

<sup>24</sup>Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, 339.

## Methodological Appendix

These data were collected through telephone surveys conducted by the Survey Research Unit (SRU) of the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University. Interviewers were trained and supervised from the SRU's centralized location and used a computer-assisted, telephone-interviewing system to collect the data. Interviewing was from April 11-24, 1988; 348 adult residents of the Delta region were interviewed, as well as 517 residents outside the Delta region (for comparison purposes). This results in possible sample errors of approximately 6.5 percent in the Delta and 5.3 percent in the remainder of the state.

Residents were selected through the process of a two-stage, random digit-dialing procedure, which permitted the inclusion of unlisted numbers and others not listed in telephone directories. An unlimited number of callbacks were permitted, and no substitutions were allowed. The difficulties of conducting interviews in a more socially disadvantaged area were reflected in the modest response rate of 60 percent relative to some statewide surveys that are characterized by 70 percent response rates. The samples were weighted by education, race, and sex using estimates drawn from census data so that all demographic groups were represented in the sample in rough approximation to their presence in the population.

### Questionnaire

1. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?
2. Taken all together, how would you say things are these days? Would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?
3. We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. So far as you and your family are concerned, would you say that you are pretty well satisfied with your present financial situation, more or less satisfied, or not satisfied at all?
4. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Women should take care of running their homes, and leave running the country up to men?
5. Do you approve or disapprove of labor unions?
6. How much of the time do you think you can trust public officials in your community to do what is right: almost always, most of the time, only some of the time, or rarely?
7. How likely do you think it will be that you will be living in your community five years from now: definitely no, probably no, probably yes, or definitely yes?
8. Suppose that, for some reason, you had to move away from your community. Would you be very sorry to leave, somewhat sorry, somewhat pleased, very pleased, or wouldn't it make any difference one way or the other?

9. Which of the following best describes why you would leave your community to live somewhere else? To get a better job, to find better schools, to find a safer place to live, to find a place with more recreational opportunities, or I wouldn't leave for any reason.
10. [Asked only of statewide sample] What is the name of the United States Representative who represents your congressional district in Washington?
11. [Asked only of statewide sample] How interested are you in the coming elections for President and U.S. Senator: not at all, a little, somewhat, or very interested?
12. Now I'm going to ask about issues facing state and local governments. As you know, most of the money government spends comes from the taxes you and others pay. For each of the following, please tell me whether you think state and local governments in Mississippi should be spending more, less, or about the same as now.
  - 12A. Environmental Programs
  - 12B. Programs for the Poor
  - 12C. Public Grade Schools and High Schools
  - 12D. Streets and Highways
  - 12E. Police Forces
  - 12F. Public Colleges and Universities
  - 12G. Health Care and Hospitals
  - 12H. Industrial Growth and Development
  - 12I. Encouraging Tourism
  - 12J. Child day-care Facilities
  - 12K. Jail and Prison Facilities
13. In order to increase spending on education and raise teacher salaries to the southeast average, the legislature will have to raise taxes or cut spending on other programs. What would you support: raising taxes, cutting other programs, or doing some of both?
14. Do you favor the county unit system, or the county beat system, or haven't you heard anything about this subject?
15. Would you say taxpayers are spending too much, too little, or about the right amount to educate students in your school district?
16. Turning to some broader issues: Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?

17. In politics today, do you think of yourself as a liberal, a conservative, or as middle-of-the-road, or don't you think of yourself in these terms?
18. Do you think that the opportunities for blacks to get ahead have improved in the last five years, remained about the same, or gotten worse?
19. In the next five years, do you think that opportunities for blacks to get ahead will improve, remain about the same, or get worse?
20. Do you think blacks have as good a chance as whites to get any kind of job, or do you think whites have the first chance at any kind of job?
21. And now, some final questions. How many years have you lived in Mississippi?
22. In what county do you live?
23. What was the last grade in school you completed?
24. Not counting extension phones, how many different telephone numbers does your household have?
25. In what year were you born?
26. Last week, were you working full time, part time, going to school, keeping house, or what?
27. Is your race white, black, or other?
28. [Asked only of whites] Would you have any objection to sending your children to a school where more than half of the children are black?
29. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: Whites have a right to keep blacks from moving into their neighborhoods if they want to, and blacks should respect that right?
30. Do you think that white and black students should go to the same schools or to separate schools?
31. Last year, what was your total family income, before taxes? Please stop me when I am on the right level. Under \$5,000, between \$5,000 and \$10,000, between \$10,000 and \$15,000, between \$15,000 and \$20,000, between \$20,000 and \$25,000, between \$25,000 and \$30,000, over \$30,000.
32. Respondent's sex.

**Table 1. Views toward geographic relocation.**

	Live in community 5 years from now? (% no)	Sorry to leave community? (% yes)	Leave community for better job? (% yes)
All Delta Residents	25	63	50
Race			
Blacks	35	54	56
Whites	18	69	44
Family Income			
Under \$10,000	32	61	47
\$10-20,000	27	56	52
Over \$20,000	18	70	57
Age			
18-30	57	37	72
31-60	16	69	59
61-98	10	77	7
Education			
< High School	19	68	41
High School	32	58	50
Some College	26	63	62

Source: April 1988 Mississippi poll conducted by the Survey Research Unit of the Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University.

**Table 2. Attitudes toward life in general.**

	Personal happiness (% unhappy)	Financial situation (% dissatisfied)	Trust people (% low)	Trust public officials (% rarely)
All Delta Residents	20	25	60	17
Race				
Blacks	25	39	73	22
Whites	16	15	49	14
Education				
< High School	27	29	70	22
High School	16	27	57	17
Some College	15	18	49	12
Family Income				
Under \$10,000	23	39	67	22
\$10-20,000	25	27	69	21
Over \$20,000	9	11	43	13
Age				
18-30	15	29	69	21
31-60	22	27	56	15
61-98	21	18	56	17

Source: April 1988 Mississippi Poll conducted by the Survey Research Unit of the Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University.

\*Associate Professor of Political Science, Mississippi State University.



**Table 3. Equal opportunity opinions.**

	Black opportunity has improved (% yes)	Black opportunity will continue to improve (% yes)	Equal job opportunity (% no)
All Delta Residents	71	62	40
Race			
Black	53	56	67
White	85	65	20
Sex			
Women	66	56	40
Men	78	68	39
Age			
18-30	66	61	40
31-60	70	64	44
61-98	79	58	32
Family Income			
Under \$10,000	59	50	48
\$10-20,000	73	66	45
Over \$20,000	86	70	32
Employment			
Full Time Worker	71	63	47
Non-Full Time Worker	71	60	33

Source: April 1988 Mississippi poll conducted by the Survey Research Unit of the Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University.

\*Associate Professor of Political Science, Mississippi State University.

**Table 4. Racial integration views.**

	School integration (% against)	Object to sending own children to majority black school [whites only] (% objecting)	Neighborhood integration (% against)
All Delta Residents	18	37	31
Race			
Blacks	4	-	23
Whites	30	37	37
Age			
18-30	5	41	20
31-60	17	38	32
61-98	35	33	38
Education			
< High School	20	33	41
High School	22	39	24
Some College	11	40	23

Source: April 1988 Mississippi poll conducted by the Survey Research Unit of the Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University.

**Table 5. Spending on public programs(percent saying spend more).**

	Public grade and high school	College and univer- sities	Attract industry	Streets and high- ways	Program for poor	Health care/ hospital	Day Care
All Delta Residents	78	74	76	78	65	74	59
Race							
Blacks	87	88	81	86	90	86	83
Whites	71	63	73	73	47	65	38
Party Identification							
Democrats	84	78	82	83	79	86	69
Independence	78	75	74	72	53	72	51
Republicans	65	55	60	72	41	45	36
Ideology							
Liberal	82	64	73	85	76	81	59
Moderate	87	78	85	79	68	74	57
Conservative	74	67	67	74	56	61	53
Sex							
Men	75	67	76	80	60	74	49
Women	81	80	77	77	69	75	67
Age							
18-30	71	73	67	77	76	75	59
31-60	84	76	84	80	63	78	60
61-98	75	70	71	75	57	67	57
Education							
< High School	73	80	76	84	73	86	63
High School	82	69	78	81	64	70	58
Some College	80	72	75	67	56	64	54
Family Income							
Under \$10,000	76	77	76	81	88	87	77
\$10-20,000	86	76	84	80	72	85	57
Over \$20,000	77	68	73	77	40	55	47

Source: April 1988 Mississippi poll conducted by the Survey Research Unit of the Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University.

\*Associate Professor of Political Science, Mississippi State University.

**Table 6. Support for political reform.**

	Women should stay at home	Labor unions	Attitude toward county unit system		
	(% disagree)	(% approve)	(% for)	(% against)	(% don't know)
All Delta Residents	57	57	20	9	71
Age					
18-30	70	75	12	5	83
31-60	59	57	21	11	68
61-98	40	36	27	12	61
Sex					
Men	50	46	26	11	63
Women	63	69	14	8	78
Party Identification					
Democrats	55	69	13	11	76
Independents	61	49	27	7	66
Republicans	55	37	31	6	63
Race					
Blacks	56	77	8	9	83
Whites	58	41	28	9	63
Family Income					
Under \$10,000	50	71	8	9	83
\$10-20,000	56	61	9	8	83
Over \$20,000	61	43	39	11	50

Source: April 1988 Mississippi poll conducted by the Survey Research Unit of the Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University.

\*Associate Professor of Political Science, Mississippi State University.

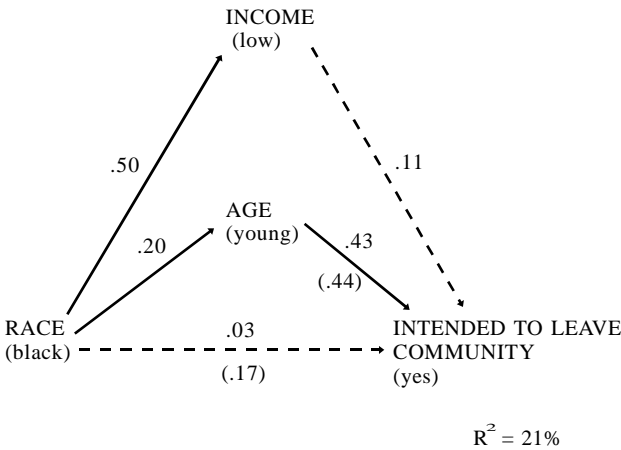


Figure 1: SOURCES OF INTENDED EMIGRATION

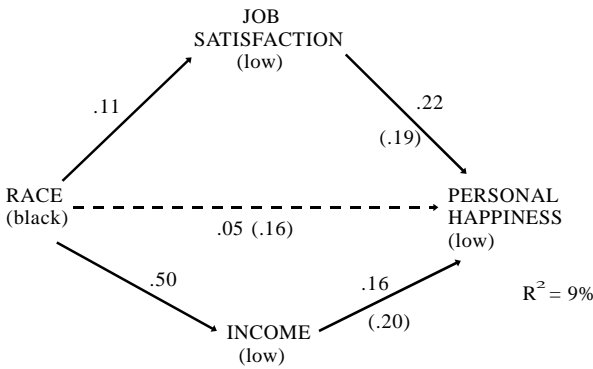
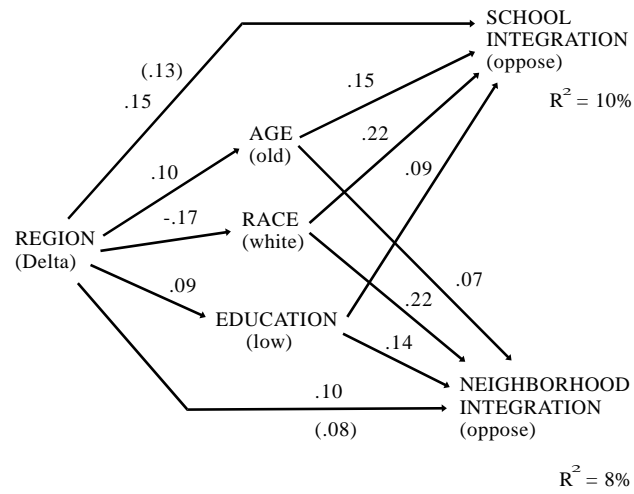
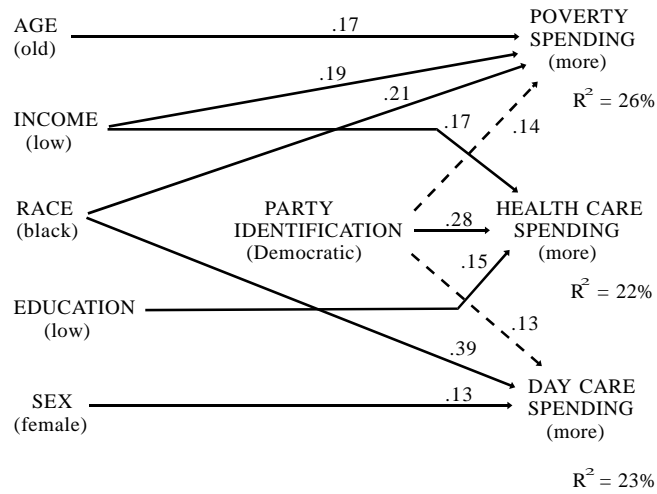


Figure 2: SOURCES OF RACE DIFFERENCES IN PERSONAL HAPPINESS

Note: Path coefficients are standardized regression coefficients. Solid lines denote statistical significance at .05 level. Values in parentheses are bivariate regression coefficients, all of which are statistically significant at .05 level.



**Figure 3: REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN SEGREGATIONIST SUPPORT**



**Figure 4: SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL WELFARE SPENDING**

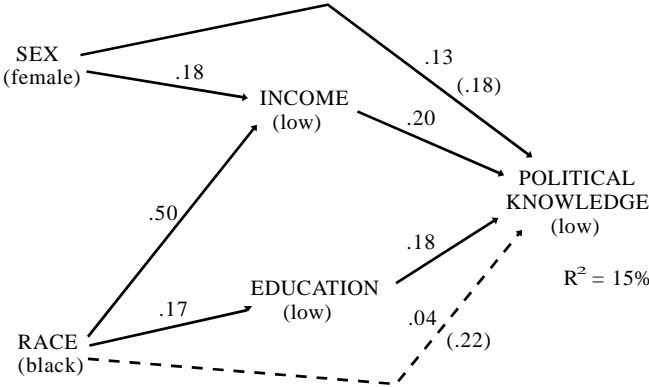


Figure 5: SOURCES OF POLITICAL APATHY

## *Chapter*

# 6

## *Educational Attainment in the Delta*

*by*  
*Reid Jones\**  
*John Thornell*  
*Gene Hamon*

Mississippi has a long tradition of low educational attainment, and the problem is most severe within the Delta. This chapter first addresses the history, extent, and possible causes of low educational attainment in the Delta. Secondly, the chapter focuses on the long-range impact of low educational attainment, on what has been done to improve, and what can be done to improve.

For purposes of this study, “educational attainment” shall be defined in terms of test scores, opportunities for diplomas and degrees, and actual number of degrees attained. In general, data will compare the Mississippi Delta counties to the rest of the state. It is assumed that a first goal for advancing educational attainment in the Delta should be to bring the Delta in line with statewide performance. However, that goal must be interpreted within the national and international context; that is, even after the Delta has approached statewide levels, there will be much left to do. The state still falls far behind national and international levels of educational attainment.

All data and conclusions are based on more sophisticated statistical procedures than are reported here. Occasional technical notes on methodology are included, and details may be obtained from the senior author. Finally, it should be noted that there is reason for some optimism. While the Delta and Mississippi are far behind, clear evidence will be presented to demonstrate that we have turned the corner and are advancing.

### **Historical Context**

Agriculture has dominated the economy of the Delta since the antebellum period. Earlier, this economy resulted in prosperity for some, since the Delta was richly endowed with fertile

\*Reid Jones is Associate Professor of Psychology and Academic Research Coordinator; John Thornell is Dean of Graduate Studies and Research and Professor of Education; and Gene Hamon is Professor of Behavioral Science, all of Delta State University.



soil, level farm lands, and a subtropical climate. To a great extent, this prosperity also depended on slave labor. Even following emancipation, cheap labor was available for agriculture. Historically, educational attainment was a luxury, available only to the prosperous. Most of the population of the Delta neither needed nor wanted education for all children. In fact, compulsory education has only become statutory within the last decade. As a result, adults in Mississippi have the poorest high school completion rate (54.8 percent) in the United States.

Within this context, several important trends have further undermined educational attainment. First, automation of agriculture has increased, thus eliminating jobs for some workers. Consequently, many families who had depended on field work for a livelihood found themselves unemployed and unemployable. Agriculturally based economies have suffered generally over recent decades, leaving Mississippi on the bottom of most economic comparisons among the 50 states. While Mississippi also has the lowest cost of living index in the country, McMahon reports that the state still ranks 49th of 50 in “adjusted per capita” personal income.<sup>1</sup> Second, the emergence of early federal programs to support the needy was a mixed blessing. The programs did produce short-term improvement. Many Delta counties now depend on aid, and their primary economic resources come from “transfer” payments—federal programs designed to provide direct assistance to the needy. Educational attainment has been further devalued in this situation. Only in the broadest sense could one assume that jobs are created by transfer payments, and higher levels of educational attainment might actually disqualify a person from getting the low-level jobs that are available. Third, federal efforts to integrate public schools have resulted in the “flight” of many prosperous white families to private schools within the Delta. This has weakened community and financial support for the public schools. Fourth, the “flight” has not ended with the public schools. A poorly supported school system and a weak economy have resulted in the “flight” of younger, more talented persons from the Delta and from the state. Aside from the spectre of poverty within the region, better jobs and opportunities for advancement are available in other locations and states. Many of our best have been leaving, further undermining education and the economy.

These brief historical comments may be summarized as follows:

1. For many in the Delta, educational attainment has historically been a low priority.
2. Local support for public education has eroded, and many influential persons feel no obligation to public schools, sending their own children to private schools.
3. The prevailing low levels of educational attainment have become a cause and an effect of a weakened economy.

During the last decade, the Delta and the state have recognized this interdependence of education and economy, addressing these issues aggressively.

In 1982, the Mississippi Legislature passed the Education Reform Act (ERA), providing new funding and insisting on greater accountability from public school districts.<sup>2</sup> One provision of this act made funds available for the development of a statewide curriculum structure in all content areas and for achievement testing to monitor progress in the basic

---

<sup>1</sup>W.W. McMahon, *Geographical Cost of Living Differences: An Update*, Paper 1491 (Urbana-Campaign: Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Illinois, 1988).

<sup>2</sup>Neil G. Amos, *An Analysis of the Mississippi Performance Based Accreditation Model (Symposium Abstract) in Proceedings of the Midsouth Educational Research Association*, 1986.

skills of reading, mathematics, and written communication. A Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) was instituted at grades 3, 5, 8 and 11. In addition, nationally normed tests are now used in grades 4, 6, and 8. Increased accountability was proposed, based on a combination of BSAP scores and nationally normed scores for each district. After several "trial" years of testing, the school district's accreditation and a student's high school diploma were made contingent on test results. Overviews of the impact ERA has had are reported by Jones, Messer, and Hart-Hester and by Ward, Hart-Hester, and Hebbler.<sup>3</sup> Additional provisions of the Educational Reform Act of 1982 will be discussed later.

### **Overview of Test Results**

BSAP test scores have improved since the Education Reform Act was initiated, statewide and in the Delta. The results for the Delta and the remaining school districts (non-Delta) in Mississippi are presented in Table 1 (page 104) for grades 3, 5, and 8. Four trends are noteworthy:

1. The average percentage correct for Delta school districts is substantially below the scores for non-Delta school districts, in every year, at every grade, for virtually every subtest.
2. Delta school districts are behind non-Delta districts from the initial testing in grade three.
3. The proportion that the Delta is behind dramatically increases by grade five, and school districts where this has happened are rarely able to reverse the trend.
4. Test scores in every content area at every grade level have improved in Delta and non-Delta Schools.

The trend is definitely encouraging, particularly since 32 of a possible 36 comparisons (18 for the Delta and 18 for the non-Delta) show a year-to-year gain. The consistency of these gains demonstrates a broad-based effort to increase educational attainment in all basic skills areas.

Reporting results for 11th grade testing is somewhat more complicated, since originally there were two tests and now there is only the Functional Literacy Examination (FLE). Further, the FLE uses a standardized score format that is not readily interpreted by a general audience of readers. For that reason, Table 2 (page 104) shows the percentage failing at least one area of the FLE during each year of administration of that test. Failing one content area (reading, mathematics, or written communication) results in overall failure of the FLE. This criterion is now used to determine whether or not the student receives a high school diploma. It should be pointed out that lowering the *failure* rate is, of course, a sign of improving performance. Three trends are noteworthy:

1. The dramatic improvement in 1988 (lower failures) is certainly the result of making high school graduation dependent on satisfactory FLE scores for that group of students.
2. Again, the Delta is behind the non-Delta in every year of testing.

---

<sup>3</sup>J.R. Jones, P. Messer, and S. Hart-Hester, "School District Variables as Predictors of Mathematics Achievement," in *Resources in Education, ERIC Document #TM012725*; 1989; C.A. Ward, S. Hart-Hester, and S.W. Hebbler, abstract in *Proceedings of the Midsouth Educational Research Association*, (Memphis, 1988).

3. Again, both the Delta and the non-Delta are improving every year.

Clearly, statewide progress in functional literacy has occurred.

Statewide testing has used the nationally standardized Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) at grades K, 1, 4, 6, and 8. As this aspect of the testing program has evolved, there have been many changes in the grades where tests are given and in the content areas tested. One early finding can no longer be replicated. In the spring of 1985 and 1986, the SAT was given to kindergarten children in Mississippi. Table 3 (page 105) shows that Delta school children are already substantially behind the rest of the state in every area. This decrement must be attributed to the preschool environment of children in the Delta, and it undoubtedly affects them for years to come. The kindergarten tests were eliminated after one use, because they seemed an undue pressure on very young children.

In the spring of 1988, all public school districts were administered the SAT at Grade Four and again at Grade Six. Results are presented in Table 4 (page 105). The score report format involves the use of Normal Curve Equivalents (NCE). However, the NCE's reported appear to place Mississippi at the national average, which is certainly not the case. The score report format will change for the next administration of the SAT, making Mississippi scores comparable to national norms. For the present report, Table 4 is presented to demonstrate again that the Delta school districts fall behind non-Delta districts on nationally normed achievement tests.

High school seniors in Mississippi usually take the American College Test (ACT) as a measure of their academic potential for college. Table 5 (page 105) shows ACT results for Delta and non-Delta schools in 1988. The national average on the ACT subtests and composite scores changes with each administration, although the reader may assume that a score of about 19 is typically obtained on the tests by high school seniors in the United States. That score will be used as a reference point for the discussion that follows. The averages reported in Table 5 are suitable for comparison of Delta with non-Delta, and for comparison of Mississippi with the national averages. However, the ACT is given several times each year with slightly differing averages at each administration. School districts report all scores of all students within a given year, even though the students may have taken the ACT at different times. Thus, giving a precise national average for the ACT and subtests is impossible. Delta students average far below (about 19 percent) students from non-Delta schools on the ACT. Further, non-Delta students fall about 9 percent below the national average.

Considerable concern has been expressed over the fact that 1989 ACT scores are lower for the state. First, this decline is quite small and may simply be the result of a somewhat less select group taking the ACT than in previous years. Second, arguments have been made that the declines are related to low percentages of students taking the college core preparatory curriculum. While we will later argue that taking the college core preparatory curriculum helps, it is true that many students are simply not ready for these courses. In either case, it is neither desirable nor possible to stop them from taking the ACT. Further, it seems more likely that the low percentage of students taking college core courses in Delta schools is more likely to be an effect of low achievement prior to high school than it is to be the cause of lower ACT scores.

Despite improvements in achievement and ability, test results of Delta students remain substantially below those of other students in Mississippi. Further, there remains a substantial performance decrement between non-Delta students and national averages.

### Factors Associated with Low Educational Attainment

Previous studies that have compared the Delta to the non-Delta have consistently identified economic factors as the most significant issue separating these regions. Caston demonstrated that economic factors were the most important variable in her study of the Functional Literacy Examination. Kitchings demonstrated that economic factors were more closely related to reading achievement than were other variables such as teacher experience or salaries. Jones demonstrated the same for overall achievement. In fact, economic conditions were the most closely related to a broad variety of factors, including high school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, and even health care utilization.<sup>4</sup>

A detailed analysis of the relationship between economic factors, other demographic factors, and achievement reveals more about the nature of this problem. Hamon has developed extensive databases comparing schools in the Delta with other schools in the state on over 100 variables. Information in the databases includes basic demographics, characteristics of the school districts and teachers, characteristics of the students, information concerning sources and amount of support, and three years of results on the BSAP, the SAT, and the ACT. Data were obtained primarily from *District Profile Sheets*, *Pupil Performance*, and data from an extensive survey of teachers in the Mississippi Delta.<sup>5</sup>

Generally, data consist of district and school average scores on these variables. More detailed analysis (e.g., student by student or teacher by teacher) would be a formidable task, from a standpoint of cost effectiveness. It is true that the more detailed analysis would also be a more desirable analysis in terms of statistical assumptions. However, such a study would be most unlikely to reveal any major finding not included in the present discussion. From the beginning, however, several cautions must be included. First, the use of district averages as a unit of observation places too much weight on smaller districts in the overall analysis. For example, a district average based on 700 students will carry equal weight to a district average based on 2,000 students. Because of the cost effectiveness of using readily available data, this procedure is widespread in the education literature. A second caution must be made concerning the limited number of Delta districts (36) in relation to the relatively large number of variables studied (8). Nothing can be done to avoid this problem other than to study fewer variables. However, all relationships discussed exist when all districts in the state (N=154) are considered for analysis. This latter observation/variable ratio (about 20 to 1) is in line with rigorous statistical standards.

The following variables are all significantly ( $p < .05$ ) related to test scores and are also significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) in the Delta and non-Delta school districts in Mississippi. Please note that these data are reviewed more extensively by Hailey.<sup>6</sup> They are reviewed here only for a discussion of educational attainment.

---

<sup>4</sup>B. Caston, "A Study of the Relationship of Six Variables to Results on the Eleventh Grade Basic Skills Assessment Program in Mississippi School Districts, unpublished dissertation, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS, 1988; J. Kitchings, *The Relationship Between Reading Achievement of Mississippi Fourth Grade Students and Selected School Variables*, unpublished dissertation, University of Mississippi; Oxford, 1988; J.R. Jones, *Mathematics Needs Assessment for the Mississippi Delta* (Jackson, MS: State Department of Education, Bureau of School Improvement, 1988); C.L. Jones and J.R. Jones, "Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Teenage Pregnancy in Rural Mississippi (Abstract)," *Journal of the Mississippi Academy of Sciences* 33 (1988), 37; and J.R. Jones and C.L. Jones, "Socioeconomic and Psychological Factors Affecting Women's Health in the Rural Southeast," paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Atlanta, 1988.

<sup>5</sup>G. Hamon, "Educational Databases for the Mississippi Delta," paper presented to Midsouth Educational Research Association, Little Rock, AR, 1989; Mississippi State Department of Education, *District Profile Sheets* (Jackson: Bureau of Assessment and Compliance, 1986, 1987, and 1988); Mississippi State Department of Education, *Pupil Performance* (Jackson: Bureau of Assessment and Compliance, 1987, 1988, and 1989); and Jones, *Mathematics Needs Assessment*.

<sup>6</sup>Jones, Messer, and Hart-Hester, "School District Variables as Predictors of Mathematics Achievement"; L. Hailey, "The Capacity of the School Systems," in *A Social and Economic Portrait of the Mississippi Delta* (this volume).

Total enrollment for the district is considerably smaller in the Delta. The Educational Research Service, Inc., conducted an extensive literature review of this variable in national journals, concluding that the optimum size for a district was about 10,000 students. They recommended that district size should never be smaller than about 2,000.<sup>7</sup> Many Delta and non-Delta districts are below 2,000 enrollment, K-12. In fact, 6 of Mississippi's 82 counties do not even have 2,000 K-12 students. A report by the State Educational Finance Commission identified Mississippi school district size as an important predictor of many variables affecting school district quality, from achievement test scores to cost effectiveness. Very small districts (under 1,000 students K-12) were found to have:

- (1) Many more teachers teaching out of their certified areas.
- (2) Very high administrative and instructional costs per pupil.
- (3) Far fewer offerings in science, mathematics, music, and arts.
- (4) Very low achievement and ability test scores, including the ACT.

Additionally, the state's municipal districts were larger and had more favorable results on these same variables than did the county or separate districts.<sup>8</sup>

The percentage of the district budget from local sources is lower in the Delta. This statistic reflects the weak economy of the Delta and the dependence on federal and state sources for support. It is also probable that districts with lower local financial support receive less community support in other ways, such as number of parent volunteers, PTO attendance, and extracurricular support.

The percentage of students eligible for free lunch is much higher in the Delta, reflecting the low socioeconomic status (SES) of children in public schools. As might be expected, there is overlap between this variable and the percent local budgetary support variable. However, their association is far from perfect (40 percent shared variance), and they represent different characteristics of a given district. In this analysis, we include students eligible for free lunches as a student variable and percentage of local support as a variable more indicative of conditions within the district.

The percentage of nonwhite students in the districts is much higher in the Delta. Part of this may be explained by reference to historical and geographical trends. Further, the cost-of-living index in the Delta is quite low, limiting the mobility of many poor, black children. Finally, some of the effect is due to the higher percentage of students enrolled in private schools in the Delta, when compared to the rest of the state. Since the overwhelming majority of private school enrollment is white, there is a proportional decrease in white enrollment for public schools in the Delta. Although not very large, the effect on proportions can be important and will be discussed as a separate issue in this paper.

The percentage of teachers with more than 20 years experience has been identified in previous analyses<sup>9</sup> as an important predictor of low achievement test scores. This variable must be interpreted with caution—we are not suggesting that more experienced teachers are necessarily less effective than less experienced teachers. This initially puzzling relationship is better understood by realizing that a district that cannot effectively recruit younger teachers will automatically have a high percentage of older, more experienced teachers. This is certainly

---

<sup>7</sup>Educational Research Service, Inc., *Effective Schools: A Summary of Research* (Arlington, VA: Educational Service, Inc., 1983).

<sup>8</sup>State Education Finance Commission, *School District Reorganization and School Consolidation Report* (Jackson: State Department of Education, 1985).

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Jones, *Mathematics Needs Assessment*.

the case in many of the poor school districts in the Delta. Thus, we are arguing that poor districts are not appealing to younger teachers for a variety of reasons that also affect achievement test scores.

The percentage of students enrolled in college core curriculum is lower in Delta schools. This issue limits the educational advancement of Delta school children in many important ways. Many of the students do not believe they are capable of college work, while others do not believe that college would improve the quality of their adult life. Unfortunately, we think that the same beliefs are sometimes shared by some teachers and administrators. Proving that would be very difficult, and our judgment is based on anecdotal information. Another reason for the low college orientation of Delta students can be traced to the low availability of mathematics and science teachers at the secondary level. Since many of the college core courses involve these content areas, students often do not have adequate access to sufficient preparation. Finally, all of these reasons are aggravated by the fact that noncollege core courses are less demanding on the student. In short, if the student does not believe in himself or herself, teachers are not available, and a college degree does not appear to offer social and economic mobility—why not take the easier courses?

The percentage of students graduating is lower in Delta schools than in other districts in the state. Many of the same considerations cited in the previous paragraph are responsible for this shortfall. However, teenage pregnancy also reduces the percentage of students graduating.<sup>10</sup> The absence of compulsory attendance laws has aggravated this issue in the past.

Empirical evidence is not available for the next two issues, although they are logically included here as factors influencing educational attainment in the Delta. Research on these two issues is theoretically possible, but not practical.

The impact of private schools on public school attainment in the Delta is a controversial issue. There are more private schools in the Delta (about 12.10 percent of total K-12 enrollment) when compared to the non-Delta (about 7.08 percent of total K-12 enrollment). Private schools rapidly expanded and grew as a consequence of federally ordered integration in public schools. The fact that there is a higher proportional private school enrollment in the Delta is probably related to the higher percentage of nonwhite enrollment in public schools.

While the racial issue is clearly the most prevalent reason for this increase in private school enrollment, other issues are sometimes involved. Many parents seek private schools for their children to avoid some traditionally weak public school districts. Other parents prefer to have more control over the content of what is taught than would be allowable in public schools. The teaching of evolution and sex education is an example.

Whatever the reasons, the relatively high private school enrollment in the Delta is certainly related to some of the present weaknesses in public school educational attainment. First, public schools obviously have a reduced enrollment, since about five percent more students are removed from Delta public schools than from non-Delta schools.<sup>11</sup> The arguments concerning size of school district become important here, as well. Second, since state and federal fundings are so frequently based on average daily attendance and/or total enrollment, the public schools in the Delta are funded at least five percent less by state and federal sources than they would be if there were no increases in private school enrollment above state averages. Third, public schools in the Delta will almost certainly continue to face a handicap in achievement and ability test scores, since five percent of the most educationally

---

<sup>10</sup>R. Story, "Human Capital: Youth-At-Risk," in *A Social and Economic Portrait of the Mississippi Delta*, this volume; Jones and Jones, "Variables Affecting Teenage Pregnancy."

<sup>11</sup>*Selected Data* (Jackson: Mississippi Center for Research and Development, 1986).

advantaged students have been removed from the public schools. The tuition at private schools is a burden that most families in the Delta cannot afford, leaving the financially more prosperous as the most likely participants in private schools. These economic advantages have always been associated with higher test scores, in the Delta and nationally.

Probably the most important effect of private schools, however, is that many influential members of the community do not feel an obligation to support public education. Their efforts and their financial support are already “spoken for” by the private schools where their children attend. This isolation from public education is aggravated by the hostility that some public school supporters may feel toward the parents of children in private schools. Every effort should be made to encourage these parents to support public and private schools. Their immediate concerns are understandably with their own children. However, all citizens of the Delta pay for a weak public education system.

A second issue difficult to assess empirically is that of low population density in the rural Delta. The Delta counties average about five people per square mile less than non-Delta counties in Mississippi.<sup>12</sup> It follows that to have schools of the same enrollment as those in the non-Delta, Delta districts will have to cover a larger geographic area. This places a somewhat greater burden on parents to provide transportation and means that a higher proportion of the districts’ budgets must be devoted to buses, gasoline, drivers, and so on. The recommendations made by the Educational Research Service, Inc., concerning a minimum district size of 2,000 must take this geographical factor into account.<sup>13</sup> Most towns in the Delta are not that large. Consolidation has many advantages, but there is a point of diminishing returns to be considered when low population density makes transportation a major factor. This is particularly true where a region has so many parents below the poverty level.

### **Higher Educational Opportunities**

High school graduation has finally been accomplished by the majority of today’s students, even in the Delta. Still, the drop-out rate is about 40 percent in the Delta compared to about 32 percent in non-Delta school districts in Mississippi. There has been progress here, if one compares the graduation rate of 1988 students with the percentage of persons over age 25 holding a high school diploma. Today’s 60 percent graduation rate in the Delta compares favorably with the over age 25 diploma percentage of 43.82. The 68 percent graduation rate in non-Delta counties also compares favorably with an over age 25 diploma percentage of 50.66. Still, this leaves an enormous number of persons without a basic educational credential, most of whom are doomed to low-paying jobs, or no jobs at all. The cycle of low educational attainment and low income continues.

However, before assuming that the 60 percent graduating in the Delta are necessarily better off, there are some additional sobering statistics to consider. Only about 26 percent of high school students in the Delta were completing a college core curriculum in 1988, according to the State Department of Education. These students are not really prepared for college, even though they have earned a diploma. The ACT scores are slightly higher for students finishing the College Core Curriculum (14.88 for college-bound curriculum compared to 13.11 for other graduates). When compared to a national average of about 19 on the ACT, it is clear that most students in the Delta are not well-prepared, even if they have completed the college core curriculum as part of their high school education.

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Educational Research Service, Inc., *Effective Schools*.

Table 6 (page 106) shows the lower opportunities in institutions of higher learning for those who are prepared. The table expresses proximity of opportunities in terms of colleges per county, allowing a comparison that is somewhat more readily interpreted than colleges per square mile. There are approximately the same number of public senior colleges per county when one compares the Delta with the non-Delta. However, at all other levels of higher education, the Delta is severely limited, even when compared to the rest of Mississippi. Graduate programs and private senior colleges are shown to be less than one-third as accessible in the Delta when compared to the rest of the state.<sup>14</sup>

Since opportunities for higher education are severely limited within the Delta, many of the best prepared (and financially capable) students leave this region to attend colleges and universities in other parts of the state and in other parts of the nation. Table 7 (page 106) shows the effect of this migration in terms of college degrees granted within the Delta and the non-Delta regions of Mississippi. The table shows the proportion of various levels of higher education produced in the Delta, compared to the proportion of people located in the Delta, as compared with the rest of the state. While community college degrees and certificates are slightly higher in the Delta, the production of bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees is considerably lower. No professional degrees (J.D., D.D.S., M.D., D.V.M., etc.) have ever been offered or awarded within the Delta. Along with the other educational deficits cited previously, this situation poses a constant "brain drain" that reaches into our economic life. We do not have the technologically trained work force needed by industry. We do not have the management and legal work force needed by business. And we do not have the health-care professionals needed by everyone.

Thousands of school children in the Delta have the ability to earn these degrees. Yet, few of the high school graduates can afford to leave the Delta for baccalaureate and advanced degrees. Those who can leave often do not come back to the Delta, and everyone in the Delta knows this. There should be no surprise that the Delta's poor often have low self-esteem and low motivation for academic attainment. If you are poor, why study? And if you can afford to leave for advanced study, why come back? If you did earn an M.D. and wanted to come back, just how many people could afford your professional services? The absence of doctoral programs in the Delta is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

To summarize these findings concerning educational opportunity in the Delta, six points are clear:

- 1) Public school students in the Delta arrive in kindergarten already behind other students in Mississippi, and very far behind the national averages.
- 2) The deficits for Delta children increase rather sharply by the fifth grade, leaving a relatively permanent educational handicap with low expectations for success in both students and teachers.
- 3) Although more students are finishing high school than traditionally, only a small proportion are completing a college preparatory core curriculum. This percentage has increased some in recent years, but Delta students have a long way to go to reach national averages.

---

<sup>14</sup>Institutions of Higher Learning, *Annual Report for Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning in 1988* (Jackson: Research Center, 1989).



- 4) College entrance scores fall seriously behind even the lower national averages, and these low scores have prompted such reports as *A Nation At Risk*. College preparatory students are only slightly better on the ACT than are students who have avoided that more rigorous curriculum.
- 5) Many of the best students from the Delta seek colleges outside of the region and state, placing a further drain on already limited personnel for modern technology.
- 6) The colleges that remain in the Delta must constantly struggle to maintain enrollments while not reducing standards. The number of degrees conferred is still lower than in Mississippi, and far lower than the nation.

This situation has produced severe handicaps with regard to the Delta's ability to attract desperately needed new businesses and industries.

### **Impact of Low Educational Attainment on the Delta Economy**

Economically, Mississippi and the Delta must be successful in attracting new sources of revenue. At present, the positives that can be discussed with prospective businesses include cheap (but poorly educated) labor and some tax incentives. On the negative side, there are many problems without mentioning educational attainment. The Delta has a very poor system of roads. It has the highest percentage of high school dropouts and teenage pregnancies in the nation. Industry has not been diversified in the Delta, leaving new businesses rather isolated from other businesses and cooperative ventures. Poverty is widespread. Some businesses searching for a new home apply what has been rather callously called a "thirty percent rule." That is, avoid any area where the nonwhite population is 30 percent or greater. Of course, the Delta percentage of nonwhite population is double that figure.

The impact of low educational attainment on new industry is perhaps the final "straw." If we could offer excellent schools for the children of employees or a well-educated work force, there would be more hope. In spite of present difficulties in education, it is likely that this is the area where most rapid and cost effective gains can be made. While the first half of this paper has been largely negative, we need to remember that the people of the Delta do not even approach the situation of many "Third World" nations regarding poverty, economy, or education. And the reader is surely aware of how rapidly Vietnamese refugees adapted to American society, often excelling in schools where they could not even speak the language a few years prior to their successes. Very little federal support was made available to these refugees from a tradition of poverty, poor schools, and a different language. The Delta can and must make similar educational gains.

### **Gains Have Been Made**

Following the Education Reform Act I (ERA-I) in 1982, Mississippi set into motion many programs designed to improve educational attainment in the state and in the Delta. Accountability was increased, a statewide curriculum was implemented, and statewide testing of educational objectives within that curriculum was initiated on an annual basis. Public school teachers protested their low wages, and the state responded with a substantial pay increase, despite a strained budget. The State Department of Education (SDE) developed new programs to support and stimulate reform, more often calling on universities, community and junior colleges, and industry to bolster these efforts. Finally, great hopes are tied to the implementation of required statewide kindergarten. A recent report in the prestigious *American Educational Research Journal* has reviewed pertinent literature and provided strong evidence for the importance of kindergarten experiences on both cognitive and social

development.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps more importantly for the Delta, the benefits these authors report are most dramatic for low income, minority children.

Table 8 (page 107) shows some of the gains mentioned previously. In this table, the Delta and the non-Delta schools are shown in terms of the absolute gains they have made, rather than in terms of increases in average percent correct. This method of presenting data undoubtedly gives some advantage to Delta schools. They were further behind to begin with, so they can also show larger improvement. However, when we proudly boast the entire state is improving, we are referring to gains. Table 8 shows that these gains have been considerably larger in Delta schools than in non-Delta schools. In sum, the Delta is providing more of the percentage gain by Mississippi schools than is provided by non-Delta schools.

With the exception of the 1988 FLE, these gains have not been dramatic. However, the *consistency* of gains has been dramatic. In virtually every type of testing, at virtually every grade, there has been an improvement over the previous year's statewide (and Deltawide) averages. The improvements in educational attainment are *not* paralleled by consistent improvements in economic conditions, health care, transportation, or personal income. Further, while the impact of the first two years of statewide kindergarten cannot yet be fully assessed, it is clear that even more improvement is likely. The ERA-I is working, particularly in the Delta.

We are at a critical time in the history of Mississippi education. The traditional deficits and traditional standing at the bottom of the 50 states have been shaken. We have reached the bottom of our trend and have made consistent improvement for four straight years. We must strongly support this new inertia, continuing our upward progress. The remainder of this chapter will review from various perspectives recommendations on how to maintain improvements and increase our performance.

### **What Do The Teachers Think Should Be Done?**

Too often policy makers overlook the specific recommendations made by those professionals who are undoubtedly most qualified to comment—the classroom teachers who observe limitations and strengths of our schools every day. In 1987, Jones completed an extensive survey of 896 public school teachers in 24 school districts in the Mississippi Delta. The research was sponsored by the Bureau of School Improvement (SDE) and dealt with education reform and mathematics.

Recommendations from the SDE, from teacher organizations, and from university faculty were incorporated into a three-page telephone survey. One administrator and one teacher from each of the 24 districts were interviewed by phone. A final, written survey was developed from these interviews and distributed to teachers. Their interest in educational improvement and diligence was deeply appreciated by researchers when over 95 percent of elementary teachers in the Delta returned the surveys through the mail.

Table 9 (pages 107-108) provides a brief demographic sketch of the teachers and their responses to 15 of the survey items. The responses were made on a five-point system, ranging from "Strongly Agree" (5) down to "Strongly Disagree" (1). The average score on each item was used to rank order teacher recommendations from the most strongly supported to the least strongly supported item.

The first four items all reflect strong support for the curricular and accountability aspects of ERA-I. The highest ranked item was that students be required to make up work on low basic skills test scores. Incidentally, this was also the item most strongly supported by

---

<sup>15</sup>D.R. Entwisle, K.L. Alexander, D. Cadigan, and A.M. Pallas, "Kindergarten Experience: Cognitive Effects or Socialization?" *American Educational Research Journal* 24 (1987:3), 337-64.

superintendents and administrators in our telephone survey. Regardless of the hardships on administrators, teachers, students, and parents, the Delta teachers have made it very clear that “social promotion” must not be tolerated and that minimum standards must be met. This attitude may well underlie the across-the-board improvements that have occurred in statewide testing over the past four years. Further, the attitude communicates an important message to the Delta student: You *can* do it, and you must do it, regardless of your home situation, poverty, or anything else. This is a tough position, but it is certainly the attitude that is most likely to produce continued improvement.

Items ranked second, third, and fourth are all specifically related to objectives approved for the statewide curriculum in all educational content areas. It should be noted that objectives are available for each grade, in general skill areas (such as reading, mathematics, and written communication), and in rather specific areas at the secondary level (such as geometry, algebra, and chemistry). The need for “teacher-ready” reteaching materials is a strong request for remedial materials specifically keyed to the Mississippi objectives. There is substantial need here, since all textbooks use their own schemes of educational objectives. Thus, the teacher must take the objectives approved for statewide use, identify appropriate sections of the texts, and develop exercises for practicing on those objectives. In most cases, each district has been doing this independently, since their textbooks may differ from those used in adjacent districts.

The Mississippi SDE has already responded to this request from teachers by providing an extensive set of mathematics reteaching materials for all elementary school objectives. Similarly, the SDE has provided support for development of teaching of mathematics. Finally, SDE support has been sought for the development of problem-solving materials, for testing materials and data on most frequently missed objectives, and for supporting the work of universities directly with school districts.<sup>16</sup> Staff development workshops have been offered to familiarize teachers with how to use these newly developed materials.

The point of these rather specific SDE responses has been to demonstrate a healthy interaction between school districts, the SDE, and the university system in the Delta. The following approach has been rather consistently followed:

- 1) The ERA-I has been translated into specific learning objectives for students.
- 2) Teacher needs in achieving these learning objectives are identified through a formal needs assessment process.
- 3) University faculty cooperate with experienced classroom teachers to develop a workable solution to these needs.
- 4) After field testing the materials, the SDE offers workshops around the state, disseminating the materials.

Most of this latter work has been supported by the Bureau for Instructional Services of the SDE. This type of cooperative response is one good means of continuing to implement the ERA-I. Further, by developing materials for statewide dissemination, the individual teacher

---

<sup>16</sup>B. Lynchard, *Teaching Modules for Elementary Mathematics* (Jackson, MS: Bureau of Instructional Services, State Department of Education, 1989); A. Hall's 1989 *The Reading-Math Connection* is a teaching pamphlet available through the Bureau of Instructional Services, State Department of Education, Jackson, MS; R. Brumfield, G. Hamon, and R. Jones, “A Feedback Model for Teacher Training and Achievement Test Improvement,” unpublished proposal to the State Department of Education, Jackson, MS, 1989; and Jones, *Mathematics Needs Assessment*.

is relieved of the burden of preparing so many specific textbook assignments and exercises on educational objectives.

### **Local, State, and Federal Recommendations for Improving Educational Attainment**

After years of stagnation and the assumption that educational problems in the Delta were insoluble, there has been movement toward remediation. At the local level, the Delta Council has taken the lead in promoting the study of educational and economic interactions. A review of the chapters in this volume by educators, researchers, and the business community will serve as a basis for recommendations and innovation. Further, educational recommendations will follow review of this material by the Delta Consortium For School Improvement—an action-oriented group of 24 Delta school superintendents, community college leaders, and faculty at two regional universities. These reviews are in process.

On a state level, Education Reform Act II has been proposed, based on the following goals from the Governor's Study Group:

- 1) All of Mississippi's communities will have schools, colleges, and universities in which the performance of students is regularly assessed and is improving.
- 2) All of Mississippi's children will be fully prepared for kindergarten.
- 3) Student achievement for elementary and secondary students must be competitive with students in other developed countries.
- 4) The school drop-out rate will be reduced by one-half.
- 5) Nine out of ten of Mississippi's adults will be functionally literate.
- 6) The rate of teenage parenthood will be reduced by one-half.
- 7) University research and teaching will be internationally competitive in selected areas and will be more accountable in terms of undergraduate learning in all areas.

The following recommendations have been made from the Governor's Office concerning "What will it take to get there?":

- 1) Innovation.
- 2) Greater control granted to schools that demonstrate they can achieve educational improvement.
- 3) Greater involvement by parents and the business community.
- 4) A funding system that provides resources for innovation and rewards success.
- 5) Provide teachers with the tools to improve learning and administrators with the skills to exert school leadership.
- 6) Move quickly and surely to initiate reforms.

Although these recommendations apply to Mississippi as a whole, they are probably even more valuable for the Delta.

A final note is in order concerning the newly formed Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission, based on U.S. Congressional mandate. Eight states in the lower Mississippi Valley are involved, all sharing similar problems with the Delta region of Mississippi. The first phase of these activities is devoted to fact-finding. A second phase is planned with goals of economic development for the region that shares the Mississippi basin with our state. While initial recommendations of that Commission are too lengthy to incorporate into the present chapter, the authors have the following reactions to those recommendations:

- 1) There are great similarities in the problems faced by the eight states.
- 2) There is a healthy emphasis on the interaction of education and economic factors.
- 3) The Delta in Mississippi remains behind the other states in educational and economic problems.
- 4) While the formation of the Commission was greatly needed and most welcome, Mississippi must not diminish its efforts toward educational reform.

Although the Commission will be emphasizing the similarities of the Delta states, it will remain our job to respond to the specifics that affect Mississippi and educational attainment in Mississippi.

We cannot help but be encouraged by the gains demonstrated in educational attainment in the Delta and the support coming from local, state, and federal institutions. Despite the many areas where educational attainment in the Delta is behind the state and the nation, the attitude here is positive and the progress is measurable.

**Table 1. Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) average percent correct by year Delta (N=36 Districts) vs. Non-Delta (N=116 Districts).**

	Reading			Mathematics			Written Communication		
	D	ND	P*	D	ND	P*	D	ND	P*
<u>3rd</u>									
<u>Grade</u>	78.51	82.71	5.1	75.30	79.31	5.0	77.95	79.63	2.1
1987	79.16	83.56	5.3	76.86	80.02	3.9	81.86	83.57	2.0
1988	80.81	84.29	4.1	79.05	81.40	2.9	84.22	84.16	0.0
1989									
<u>5th</u>									
<u>Grade</u>	67.01	74.58	10.1	66.54	70.45	5.6	66.66	72.44	8.0
1987	66.69	74.69	10.7	70.99	75.56	6.0	66.24	70.65	6.2
1988	70.25	76.35	8.0	76.23	79.26	3.8	69.89	73.07	4.4
1989									
<u>8th</u>									
<u>Grade</u>	59.02	65.67	10.1	64.82	68.76	5.7	71.50	75.18	4.9
1987	61.96	68.79	9.9	64.81	68.99	6.0	73.02	76.09	4.0
1988	65.88	70.97	7.2	68.44	71.06	3.7	74.49	76.49	2.6
1989									

\*Percent by which Delta School Districts trail Non-Delta School Districts.

- (1) In 27 of 27 comparisons, the Delta Schools trail the Non-Delta Schools in Mississippi.
- (2) In 32 of 36 possible year to year comparisons, both the Delta and the Non-Delta Districts showed gains.

**Table 2. Percentage of eleventh grade students failing the Functional Literacy Exam for 1987, 1988, and 1989.**

School Districts	1987	1988	1989
Delta	35.37	8.47	7.54
Non-Delta	28.01	7.16	7.26

**Table 3. Kindergarten Stanford Achievement Test scores.**

Subtest	Delta			Non-Delta		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
1986						
Reading	23	40.68	8.30	129	46.68	7.51
Mathematics	23	43.18	8.04	129	46.26	6.15
Environment*	22	44.59	9.81	129	49.19	7.44
1985						
Reading	16	47.63	5.18	89	48.74	6.38
Mathematics	17	50.59	9.73	89	54.99	9.24
Environment	16	40.19	9.43	87	45.07	7.90

\*Tests knowledge of natural science.

**Table 4. Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) scores for 1988.**

School districts	4th Grade			6th Grade		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Delta	37	44.43	5.16	37	45.04	5.25
Non-Delta	113	50.51	5.56	113	49.83	5.15

**Table 5. American College Test (ACT) results for 1988.**

Subtest	Delta	Non-Delta	Delta Proportion Below Non-Delta	National
English Usage	16.68	18.92	11.8%	About 19
Mathematics	12.69	15.79	19.6%	About 19
Social Science	12.69	15.85	19.9%	About 19
Natural Science	16.39	19.57	16.2%	About 19
Composite	14.88	17.76	16.2%	About 19

**Table 6. Opportunities for higher education.**

Type of Institution	Number of Institutions per County	
	Delta	Non-Delta
Public Community College Branches	0.42 (8/19 Counties)	0.52 (32/63 Counties)
Private Senior Colleges	0.05 (1/19 Counties)	0.21 (13/63 Counties)
Public Senior Colleges	0.11 (2/19 Counties)	0.09 (06/63 Counties)
Graduate Schools	0.05 (1/19 Counties)	0.17 (11/63 Counties)

**Table 7. Degrees and certificates awarded in 1988 compared to total population proportions: Delta compared to Non-Delta.**

	Delta Counties	
	Percentage of Degrees and Certificates	Percentage of State Population
<b>Community Colleges</b>		
Less than 1 year	28.43	21.04
1 to 2 years	20.99	21.04
Associate (2 to 2+ years)	20.12	21.04
<b>Public Universities</b>		
Bachelor's (4- year)	11.20	21.04
Master's (5-year)	6.93	21.04
Specialist's (6-year)	10.29	21.04
Doctorate (8-year)	0.25	21.04
<b>Professional Degrees</b>		
Law	0.00	21.04
Dentistry	0.00	21.04
Medicine	0.00	21.04
Veterinary Medicine	0.00	21.04



**Table 8. Gain scores in average percent correct (APC) for Delta and Non-Delta districts on Basic Skills Assessment Program (BASP).**

	1988 APC Gain		1989 APC Gain	
	Delta	Non-Delta	Delta	Non-Delta
3rd Grade (all areas)	+2.04	+1.83	+2.07	+0.91
5th Grade (all areas)	+1.24	+1.14	+4.15	+2.61
8th Grade (all areas)	+1.48	+1.42	+3.01	+1.55
Percent Students Passing FLE as Gain Scores	+26.90	+20.85	+0.93	(-.10)

**Table 9. Results of teacher survey concerning mathematics instruction in the Mississippi Delta.**

Teacher Variables	N	Mean	SD	Description	
AGE	734	40.11	9.01	Self-reported age of teacher.	
YRSTEACH	847	15.19	8.87	Number of years teaching.	
EMERCERT	859	.04	.20	Hold emergency certification.	
MATHTAKE	861	2.57	3.21	Extra math courses taken in college.	
Results of Survey Responses	N	Mean	Rank*	SD	Description
REQREMED	896	4.14	1	.94	Need required remediation for low BSAP.
RETEACH	896	4.08	2	.92	Need teacher-ready re-teaching materials.
OBJECTIV	896	3.83	3	.94	Need data on specific objectives missed.
TESTING	896	3.81	4	.97	Need teacher-ready testing materials.
TEXTEVAL	896	3.77	5	1.04	Need evaluation of math textbooks.
PROBLEM	896	3.63	6	.91	Need more emphasis on problemsolving.
STAFFDEV	896	3.61	7	.88	Integrate staff dev. and instruction.
MATHREAD	896	3.51	8	.95	Link teaching of reading with math.
UNIVERSI	896	3.51	9	.95	Desire help from universities on math.
NEWSLETT	896	3.50	10	1.03	Need mathematics newsletter.
ABSENCE	896	3.47	11	1.04	Workshop absences should be encouraged.

(continued)

**Table 9 (continued). Results of teacher survey concerning mathematics instruction in the Mississippi Delta.**

Results of Survey Responses	N	Mean	Rank*	SD	Description
RESEARCH	896	3.40	12	.96	Need research reporting network.
CONEDUC	896	3.36	13	.91	Need incentives for continuing education.
REGDATA	896	3.34	14	.95	Need regional data on math performance.
WORKMATH	896	3.10	15	.94	Need symposium on math in workplace.

\* Items ranked 1 through 4 received broad support from both elementary and secondary teachers. Items ranked 5 through 15 were supported more strongly by secondary mathematics teachers.

## **Chapter**

# **7**

### ***Capacity of the School Systems***

*by*

***Larry Hailey\****

Educational infrastructure refers to the basic economic essentials necessary for a school system to function. For school districts, the educational infrastructure includes such things as physical facilities, student-teacher ratios, tax money spent per pupil, educational requirements, and attainment of teachers. These variables and others will be examined in an effort to identify reasons for poor educational attainment in the Delta, as evidence by the fact that 12 of the 17 school districts on academic probation in Mississippi are located in the Delta area. A brief overview of the research on these four variables and their effects on achievement will be discussed to bring into focus their importance to education. In order to accommodate a variety of readers, an in-depth discussion of statistical analysis of the data will not be presented. Correlation coefficients for the variables will be provided for readers with a statistical background.

#### **Review of the Literature**

*Physical facilities* are a basic part of any social infrastructure and can hamper or enhance the achievement of students. Not much research is readily available on the effects that physical facilities have on learning, but teachers have long recognized the value of a cheerful and thought-provoking environment. Creekmore states that instructional control is challenged when children see and hear material not relevant to the lesson being taught.<sup>1</sup> Research has also proven repeatedly that the environment will reflect the teacher's ideas about how children learn. Wall organization of materials, classroom seating, and space all can enhance or hamper

---

<sup>1</sup> W.N. Creekmore, "Keeping Classroom Walls from Distracting Learners," in The Educational Digest, 44-46.

\*Chairman of the Division of Curriculum, Instruction, Leadership, and Research at Delta State University.

acquisition, maintenance, and generalization of material presented to students.<sup>2</sup> Schools with well-maintained facilities seem to create a special sense of pride and motivation in students. On the other hand, researchers have easily recognized that problems such as discipline, drop-out rate, and poor self-esteem may be affected by poor physical environment.

The purpose of a school building is to encourage and enhance the desired learning environment. An inefficiently used building, a building that is unpleasant, or a poorly maintained building defeats this purpose and inhibits the educational process. Researchers have also noted that other variables, such as illumination, colors, ventilation, heating, cooling, relative humidity, acoustics, and outside distractions, influence the learning process. Students cannot receive and process information well or easily when their physical environment is uncomfortable or distracting. If optimal learning is to take place in schools, the physical facility must be attractive and conducive to the learning process. Academic excellence is best achieved when the physical conditions for learning are also excellent.<sup>3</sup>

A second important issue to consider in the educational attainment of students in schools is *pupil-teacher ratio*. Arguments about class size and its relationship to the academic achievement of students have been heard and argued for several decades. The effect of class size on student performance is also a topic that can bring administrators and teachers into conflict. The realities of balancing costs are in conflict with the ideals of quality instruction. In most federally funded projects, smaller class sizes have been accepted because the higher cost did not affect the state or local districts financially. Therefore, local districts have been encouraged to keep lower class sizes to obtain gains in achievement. Class sizes of 8-12 students were promoted and have traditionally become a trend due to the success of many of the federal programs.

Teacher organizations have long believed that small classes are of major importance to pupil achievement and progress. Policy makers are frequently told that a reduction of a few students per class will lead to an increase in student achievement as well as improved working conditions for teachers.<sup>4</sup> It seems logical that a reduction in class size should influence the teaching/learning process in positive ways. The teacher would like to see smaller classes because the workload would be reduced, the classroom atmosphere would be more manageable, and the students would supposedly learn better. With these thoughts in mind, most educators have adopted the premise that smaller classes mean better teaching and consequently improved test scores. Although this statement is generally accepted, one must consider objective data in determining whether students in fact learn better in small classes.

During the last five decades, the controversial issue of class size has been subjected to serious and scientific studies in the United States and abroad. The results of these studies are not conclusive and the correlations between class size and achievement continues to be a focal point during the 1990's. G.V. Glass and L.S. Smith, authors of *School Class Size*, integrated data across approximately 100 comparisons from studies exercising good experimental control.<sup>5</sup> Analysis of this research (Figure 1) shows little gain in achievement when class size is reduced from 40 to 20 students. However, with further reduction there is appreciable gain.

---

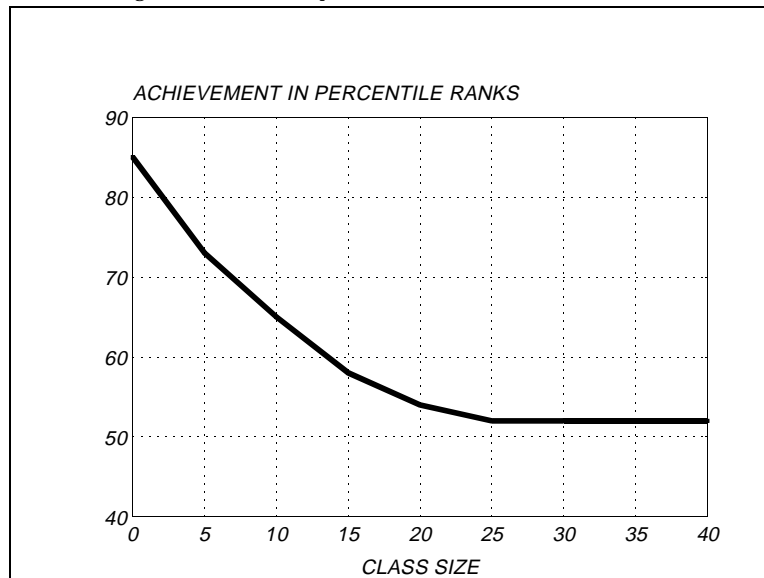
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth H. Hanson, *Public Education in American Society*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1956), 98.

<sup>4</sup> Tommy Tomlinson, "Do Students Learn More in Smaller Classes?" *Consumers' Research Magazine* 71 (September 1988): 11-15.

<sup>5</sup> G.V. Glass and L.S. Smith, *School Class Size*, in Tomlinson, *Consumers' Research Magazine* 71:13.

Figure 1: Relationship between achievement and class size



Source: Glass, G.V. and Smith, M.L. Meta-Analysis of the Search on the Relationship of Class Size and Achievement. Far West Laboratory of Educational Research and Development, San Francisco, CA, 1978.

With other variables being equal, 40 students will learn about 5 percent less than will 20. From Figure 1, one can also see that 15 students is the class size that first provides substantial improvement in student achievement. T.A. Chandler also believes that educational achievement is significant only when the class size is below 20 students. He adds, however, that this will not guarantee improvement in teaching and learning. The small class can instill in teachers the desire to increase personal instruction; but if the teachers continue to teach the same way, then there is no data to show students will continue to improve academically.<sup>6</sup>

A third important issue to consider is the *relationship of spending to achievement*. Educational reform and the increased amount of money it has generated for American schools have become major concerns of most Americans. Taxpayers have begun to ask if increased achievement has resulted from increased spending. In 1983, a National Commission on Excellence in Education proclaimed that the education foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a "rising tide of mediocrity" that threatens our very future as a nation and as a people.<sup>7</sup> This report suggests that our increased spending on education has resulted in decreased achievement.

On the other hand, there are those who feel if the money was spent for instruction, then achievement scores would improve. Educators also believe that equity funding would help improve achievement. Using this approach, districts with low tax bases would be given allocations in proportion to other districts within that state. As a result, increased spending would provide for greater opportunities for student achievement.

<sup>6</sup>T.A. Chandler, "Here's What to Try When You Can't Shrink Class Size Enough to Matter," American School Board Journal 175 (October 1988): 33.

<sup>7</sup> Milton Goldberg and James Harvey, "A National Commission on Excellence in Education," Phi Delta Kappan 65 (September 1983): 14-18.

Much research that has been conducted in this area has been contradictory, but most found no direct correlation between spending and achievement. When a correlation was found, the relationship was only minimal. In analyzing 45 studies, it was determined that 19 studies reported no relationship, 14 studies found a positive relationship, and 12 indicated a positive relationship under certain conditions.<sup>8</sup> Reports prior to 1970 studies consistently showed a relationship between monies spent and achievement. During the 1970's, an increase in compensatory funds to schools for assisting the disadvantaged students could account for the disappearance of the relationship.

In a thesis entitled "Educational Opportunity: A Study of the Relationship Between Public School Finance and Student Performance in Mississippi, 1970-1978," Anderson found that the popularly held conceptions of declining student performance and rising costs were determined to be incorrect in the State of Mississippi during the decade of the seventies.<sup>9</sup> A significant relationship between the school district's ability to support education and the amount of monies expended was recognized. This indicated that educational opportunity within the State of Mississippi during this time was dependent upon the wealth of the school district in which the student resided. Using a nationally recognized achievement test as his measurement, significant relationships between student performances and per-pupil expenditures for instruction and per-pupil current expense were found. However, no significant relationship was found between student performance and per-pupil expenditure for the ESEA Title I compensatory program. With regards to compensatory education, Anderson's findings were compatible with others of that time period.<sup>10</sup>

Socioeconomic status (SES) must be considered in determining the relationship between tax money spent and achievement. With the introduction of this variable, Bracey found that the results are much more conclusive. Substantial evidence was provided that there was not a significant relationship between tax money spent and achievement, but a significant difference was noted when correlated with the variable SES.<sup>11</sup> Other studies have found that SES overwhelms all other variables in its power to predict student achievement. Therefore, from this discussion one can conclude that higher spending is no assurance or guarantee for higher achievement.

A fourth issue to consider in the educational attainment of students is *Teacher Preparation*. The educational requirements and attainment of teachers are believed to have a positive impact on student achievement. Since the mid-1970's, public education in the United States has been bombarded with reform efforts intended to bring increased accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness to U.S. schools. Initially these reforms focused on students, but the most recent initiatives have focused on teachers. With the realization of the role teachers play in the educational process, there is a growing question as to what determines an effective teacher. Many educational authorities are trying to address this issue, but they are unable to pinpoint any single element that causes one to be an effective teacher. There are many variables, such as in-service training, experience, degree, interests, attitude, etc., that come into play. It is generally accepted that teachers should be certified in the area in which they will be teaching. In 13 studies reviewed by Evertson, Hawley, and Zlotnik, it was found that regularly certified teachers rank higher in effectiveness than teachers with less

---

<sup>8</sup> Stephen T. Childs and Charol Shakeshaft, "A Meta-Analysis of Research on the Relationship Between Educational Expenditure and Student Achievement," ERIC Document Reproduction Service (1987): no. ED. 283-284.

<sup>9</sup> Kelly D. Anderson, "Educational Opportunity: A Study of the Relationship Between Public School Finance and Student Performance in Mississippi," Dissertation Abstracts International 41 (November 1980): 1851A.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald Bracey, "SES Talks, Money Walks," Phi Delta Kappan 69 (January 1988): 376-377.

formal training. In that same study it was found that graduation from teacher preparation programs is positively associated with successful teaching.<sup>12</sup>

Another characteristic of effective teachers is a strong grasp of subject matter.<sup>13</sup> Teachers must be knowledgeable and must understand a subject in order to teach it effectively. This would seem to be an argument in favor of graduate school preparation for teachers. However, contrary to what most people believe, research has proven that the degree alone does not necessarily make an effective teacher or improve student achievement. The best teachers are not always the most educated, but rather are those who are intrinsically interested in and excited about what they are doing. Graduate degrees and more certification training neither measure nor assure effective classroom performance.<sup>14</sup>

In 1970, Eric Hanushek conducted a study on teacher quality and efficiency. He investigated teacher productivity as it related to experience, educational level, educational processes, the role of the teacher, and student output. Hanushek's findings showed that (1) teaching experience had a positive effect on achievement but not an overwhelming effect and (2) advanced degrees (master's degree and beyond) did not contribute to a proportionally higher amount of student achievement.<sup>15</sup> The study did show that the most recent educational experience of the teacher proved to be an important attribute affecting achievement. This recent educational experience either graduate or undergraduate level is important in the educational process. Thus, efforts to have teachers return for advanced study are justified in terms of its effects on education.

To ensure or maintain recent involvement in education, most states require some form of in-service training or staff development for teachers. Research has proven that in-service training has a direct effect on student achievement. Gage conducted nine studies dealing with in-service training at the seventh-grade level. Gage felt that the art of teaching is the existence of one or more relationships between things that teachers do and things that students learn; therefore, Gage's training involved changing teachers' methods or practices. After the training, teachers were observed, and in eight out of nine schools, in-service was fairly effective. This was not true with all teachers and not with all teaching practices, but it was effective enough to change teachers and improve student achievement, or attitudes, or behavior.<sup>16</sup> Good and Grouws studied the effects of in-service training in mathematics on student achievement. It was found that the teachers were not poor teachers but they had trouble knowing what concepts should be emphasized and how to apply these concepts to problem solving. After in-service sessions were conducted for the teachers, results showed significant changes in classroom practices, clear signs of improved mathematics presentations, and increased emphasis on problem solving. The net result was a substantial increase in student mathematics achievement on the Standard Achievement Test.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Carolyn M. Evertson, Willis D. Hanley, and Marilyn Zlotnick, "Making a Difference in Educational Quality Through Teacher Education," Journal of Teacher Education 34 (May-June 1985): 9-13.

<sup>13</sup> Debbie Demmon-Berger, "Effective Teaching: Observation from Research," ERIC Document Reproduction Service (1986): no. Ed. 274-087.

<sup>14</sup> Ray Faidley and Steven Musser, "Visions of School: Leaders Must Focus on Excellence, Dispel Popular Myths," NASSP Bulletin 73 (February 1989): 9-13.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Hanushek, "The Production of Education, Teacher Quality, and Efficiency," ERIC Document Reproduction Service (February 1970): no.ED. 037-396.

<sup>16</sup>N.L. Gage, "What Do We Know About Teaching Effectiveness?," Phi Delta Kappan 66 (October 1984): 87-93.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas L. Good and Douglas A. Grouws, "Increasing Teachers' Understanding of Mathematical Ideas Through Inservice Training," Phi Delta Kappan 68 (June 1987): 778-783.

Although the current research suggests that teachers make a difference in student achievement, performance, and behavior, researchers cannot confidently identify the degree of influence a teacher has on students. One can conclude that teacher preparation and in-service training are two of the most important tools that teachers carry into the classroom.

### **Analysis of Delta and non-Delta-area Schools**

The information presented up to this point has provided a basis for an in-depth discussion of Delta-area schools as compared to non-Delta schools. As noted earlier, there are many interwoven variables that effect schools in their tasks of providing lifelong educational experiences for our youth. Research clearly points out that the lack of physical facilities and personnel resources will have a negative impact in providing an effective school program. Since 70.59 percent (12 of 17) of the schools placed on academic probation in Mississippi during the 1988-89 school year are located in the Delta, these and other variables will be discussed in an effort to provide a basis for understanding underachievement.

The data presented are calculated using district averages as the unit of observation. A somewhat more precise index may be obtained by proportionalized averages based on enrollment. This is in the process of being completed. Data presented in Table 1 identify the 16 variables to be analyzed in determining the combination of educational infrastructure variables that impact educational attainment. Conclusions based on these descriptives will be drawn and a discussion of the correlation coefficients for the variables will follow. Coefficients vary from +1 to -1 and denote the degree of relationship between two or more observations. Values reflecting a significance at the .05 level are +.324 for Delta-area schools (N=36) and +.195 for non-Delta-area schools (N=116).

**Table 1. Summary data for Delta districts, non-Delta districts, and the state.**

	Delta (N=36)		non-Delta (N=116)		State (N=152)	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Enrollment	3007.83	2738.94	3406.54	3456.19	3312.11	3296.22
Free Lunch (%)	86.94	12.96	67.05	16.33	71.76	17.72
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	18.38	1.78	18.48	1.39	18.46	1.48
Advanced Degrees (%)	40.64	8.25	40.94	10.06	40.87	9.64
Experience (0-1 years)	6.56	4.04	8.91	4.36	8.35	4.39
Experience (2-9 years)	28.29	9.32	31.22	6.79	30.52	7.54
Experience (10-19 years)	39.04	9.38	40.13	6.28	39.88	7.12
Experience (20+ years)	22.35	9.44	19.58	6.78	20.24	7.56

(continued)



**Table 1 (continued). Summary data for Delta districts, non-Delta districts, and the state.**

	Delta (N=36)		non-Delta (N=116)		State (N=152)	
	Mean (M)	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Ad valorem per pupil	321.92	118.61	381.83	249.48	367.64	226.53
Millage	27.59	8.87	29.47	7.37	29.02	7.76
Expend. per pupil (\$)	1511.08	184.64	1473.87	158.89	1482.69	165.47
Percent, federal	21.95	4.86	15.76	4.72	17.22	5.43
Percent, state	58.09	4.92	59.58	6.18	59.23	5.92
Percent, local	19.95	6.52	24.66	7.78	23.55	7.74
Percent graduating, core	25.89	11.73	30.41	12.00	29.36	12.05
Percent graduating, total	58.92	17.26	68.14	12.37	65.96	14.18

Source: 1988 District Profile Sheets and 1988 Pupil Performance Data

**Conclusion 1:** Based on these data, Delta-area districts have a lower average enrollment.

When compared to non-Delta districts, the average enrollment for Delta-area districts is approximately 400 students less per school district. This indicates that there are many small school districts in the Delta. When analyzing correlates to enrollment variables, pupil-teacher ratio, ad valorem per pupil, district millage levy, and percentage of local funds spent on education were all positively correlated for Delta and non-Delta school districts. The high negative correlation of enrollment for Delta-area schools with free lunches (-.66) and federal support (-.56) verifies the existence of low socioeconomic conditions in the Delta. As pointed out earlier, socioeconomic status (SES) is a crucial variable to be considered in predicting student achievement or educational attainment. Many students from low socioeconomic environments are deficient in the basic skills needed to achieve well in schools. Therefore, the schools must provide the additional instruction needed for students in remediating these deficiencies.

Despite a low tax base, Delta-area schools expend more funds per pupil than do other schools in the state. When compared to non-Delta schools, the average expenditure for Delta schools is slightly more than 37 dollars per pupil. The higher expenditure per pupil in the Delta is attributed to the large amount of federal funds received for educating disadvantaged students.

**Table 2. Correlates to enrollment.**

Delta (N=36)		Non-Delta (N=116)	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Pupil/Teacher (+.45)	Free Lunch (-.66)	Pupil/Teacher (+.24)	Percent Federal (-.22)
Ad Valorem /Pupil (+.34)	Expend./Pupil (-.39)	Advanced Degrees (+.27)	Percent State (-.33)
Millage (+.42)	Percent Federal (-.56)	Ad Valorem/ Pupil (+.40)	
Percent Local (+.40)		Millage (+.24)	
		Percent Local (+.39)	
		Percent Core (+.26)	

**Conclusion 2:** Delta-area schools have a much higher percentage of students on free lunch.

Table 2 reflects that 86.94 percent of the students attending public schools in the Delta are receiving free lunches, as compared to 67.05 percent for schools located outside the Delta region. This difference is quite large (approximately 20 percent) and is an important factor to consider in assessing educational attainment. Reported correlations indicate a very broad scope of economic factors associated with free lunch. Again, the three variables of ad valorem

**Table 3. Correlates to free lunch.**

Delta (N=36)		Non-Delta (N=116)	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Experience 20+ (+.38)	Enrollment (-.66)	Experience 20+ (+.46)	Experience 2-9 (-.42)
Expen./Pupil (+.32)	Pupil/Teacher (-.33)	Percent Federal (+.78)	Millage (-.27)
Percent Federal (+.85)	Ad Valorem/ Pupil (-.30)		Percent Local (-.35)
	Millage (-.34)		Percent Core (-.47)
	Percent Local (-.47)		
	Percent Core (-.40)		

per pupil (-.30), millage levy (-.34), and percentage of local funds expended for education (-.47) are all negatively correlated with free lunches for Delta-area schools. These correlations, along with a positive correlation (+.85) for percentage of federal funds expended, confirm low socioeconomic conditions for the Delta and low local financial support for their schools.

Another important correlation reported is that free lunch was negatively correlated with the percentage of students graduating from high school in the core curriculum (explained under Conclusion 5) for both Delta (-.40) and non-Delta (-.47) districts. These negative correlations indicate that low-socioeconomic-level students are not taking advantage of higher educational opportunities afforded to them by federal support to the public schools.

**Conclusion 3:** Delta-area schools have lower ad valorem rates, lower millage rates, and lower local financial support.

In comparing data presented in Table 1, the ad valorem per pupil for Delta-area schools is approximately \$60 less than ad valorem per pupil for non-Delta schools. This statement alone provides a basis for equity funding. When considering a mean enrollment of 3,000 students per district, one can quickly realize the tremendous discrepancies that exist among schools. A lower average millage levy of approximately two mills for Delta-area schools is also noteworthy when assessing local support for schools. Low assessments and low millage rates are the two main factors that contribute to the lower local financial support for Delta-area schools. Budgets for schools located in the Delta show that 19.95 percent of the revenue is generated from local sources, as compared to 24.66 percent of non-Delta districts. The percentage of funds received from the state level in schools in the Delta is comparable to other schools throughout the state.

In looking at the federal share of local budgets, one will note that the Delta-area percentage (21.95) is high when compared to non-Delta schools (15.76). Again, this observation speaks to the poor economic conditions of the Delta. When studying the total picture of expenditure per pupil, Delta-area schools spend approximately \$37 per pupil more than non-Delta schools. This difference is due to the large amount of federal funds received by schools located in the Delta due to low economic and educational needs.

Correlations to the percentage of local funds show that ad valorem is highly correlated in both Delta (+.70) and non-Delta (+.85) school districts. As expected, negative correlations are reported between percent local support and percentage of students receiving free lunch, percentage of federal funds, and percentage of state funds. An interesting and noteworthy observation on these correlations is that school districts with higher percentages of local funds expended for educational purposes are districts that are stronger in many ways. For non-Delta schools, percentages of local support highly correlated with the percentage of students enrolled in core courses (+.57) and the percentage of teachers with master's degrees or above (advanced degrees +.43). These two variables play a significant role in the educational attainment of students in schools. The fact that these two variables are not as highly associated with the percentage of local funds in Delta-area schools is alarming and should provide added incentives to Delta-area citizens to promote economic development. As we all know, the local economy must improve to increase local financial support for the schools. Additional local financial support will increase parental and community involvement in schools and provide greater opportunities for a corresponding increase in the educational attainment of students.

**Table 4. Correlates to percentage of local funds expended.**

Delta (N=36)		Non-Delta (N=116)	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Enrollment (+.40)	Free Lunch (-.47)	Enrollment (+.39)	Free Lunch (*-.35)
Ad Valorem/ Pupil (+.70)	Percent Federal (-.66)	Advanced Degree (+.43)	Percent Federal (-.61)
Percent Core (+.30)	Percent State (-.67)	Ad Valorem/ Pupil (+.85)	Percent State (-.79)
		Millage (+.40)	
		Expend./Pupil (+.50)	
		Percent Core (+.57)	

**Conclusion 4:** Delta-area schools have slightly older teachers than do non-Delta schools.

One might question the significance of this variable, but an in-depth look raises a concern of which educators should be aware. Data presented in Table 1 demonstrate that Delta teachers are generally more experienced in terms of years of service. These data suggest that schools in the Delta are not attracting as many young teachers as are other schools in the state. The trend may be associated with a lagging economy and poor perception of schools in the Delta. Whatever the reason, if this trend continues, the Delta could face additional teacher shortages due to the fact of not being able to recruit applicants from other areas of the state. Therefore, every effort must be made to attract young teachers to the Delta by enhancing economic development and improving the quality and availability of educational programs.

**Conclusion 5:** Delta-area schools have a lower percentage of students completing the core curriculum.

The core curriculum is a prescribed list of courses that students must successfully complete if they plan to attend a four-year institution or university. The core curriculum consists of the following courses to be taken in grades 9-12:

Subject	Units
English	4 - All must require a substantial writing component.
Mathematics	3 - Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Units</b>
Sciences	3 - Choose from Biology, Advanced Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Advanced Physics. One of those chosen must be laboratory-based.
Social Sciences	2 1/2 - Must include United States History and American Government.
Required Elective	1 - Choose from a foreign language or mathematics (above Algebra II) or a science (chosen from the science courses shown above).

Table 1 shows that the percentage of students graduating from high school in the core curriculum is less (4.5 percentage points) for Delta-area schools than for non-Delta schools. Possible reasons for the lower percentage enrolled in the core curriculum in the Delta could be associated with low socioeconomic conditions, lack of student motivation, lack of academic preparation, and/or lack of encouragement from parents and school personnel.

When studying correlations, one can conclude that school districts with a higher percentage of students enrolled in the core curriculum have more local support and generally

**Table 5. Correlates to percent core.**

<b>Delta (N=36)</b>		<b>Non-Delta (N=116)</b>	
<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>
Advanced Degree (+.37)	Free Lunch (-.40)	Enrollment (+.26)	Free Lunch (-.47)
Millage (+.51)	Experience 20+ (-.48)	Advanced Degree (+.42)	Percent Federal (-.52)
Percent Local (+.30)	Experience 10-19 (-.38)	Ad Valorem/Pupil (+.44)	Percent State (-.32)
Experience 0-1 (+.43)		Millage (+.30)	
		Percent Local (+.57)	

better schools. Millage rates for Delta (+.51) and non-Delta (+.30) schools were both positively correlated with the percentage of students enrolled in the core curriculum. The percentage of local funds spent on education has a high correlation to percent core students for non-Delta schools (+.57) but no significant correlation for schools located in the Delta. Another interesting positive correlation with the percentage of students graduating from high school in the core curriculum is the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees. The Delta schools showed a correlation of +.37, and non-Delta schools reported a correlation of +.42. In other words, schools with a higher percentage of teachers with advanced degrees reported a corresponding higher percentage of students enrolled in the core curriculum. As stated earlier, research cannot demonstrate that a higher degree will automatically make a person a better teacher. On the other hand, research does show that somewhere during the process of obtaining a higher degree a person may become a better teacher and the achievement of students under their supervision will tend to improve. Whether this improvement in the teacher's ability to teach is due to content knowledge gained, improved teaching strategies, or

increased experiences is immaterial at this point. The fact that increased performance does occur is important, and school administrators must put a priority on seeking teachers with advanced degrees.

The negative correlations reported for the percentage of students on free lunch for Delta (-.40) and non-Delta (-.47) schools also reinforce the idea that low socioeconomic conditions and poverty play a vital role in the percentage of students graduating from high school in the core curriculum. When students cannot or do not take advantage of these educational opportunities, our school system is credited with failure and the economy will be further burdened with nonproductive citizens.

**Conclusion 6:** The graduation rate of students, core and noncore, is lower in Delta-area schools.

For the purpose of this discussion, graduation rate is defined as the number of graduating seniors compared to the number of ninth graders enrolled in that class four years prior to graduation. Table 1 reports a graduation rate of 58.92 percent for Delta schools. Drop-out rate is a common concern for all schools in the state, but it is quiet an alarming figure when one considers the fact that an additional 10 percent of the students are not graduating from Delta-area schools.

In analyzing correlations with graduation rate, one will note that no variables are correlated for non-Delta schools. For Delta schools, negative correlations are reported for percentage of federal funds (-.31), expenditure per pupil (-.53), and teachers with 20 or more

**Table 6. Correlates to graduation rate.**

Delta (N=36)		Non-Delta (N=116)	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Pupil/Teacher (+.37)	Experience 20+ (-.51)	None	None
	Expend./Pupil (-.53)		
	Percent Federal (-.31)		

years of experience (-.51). A positive correlation of +.37 for pupils per teacher in the Delta schools indicates that the large amount of federal funds received and expended for adding teachers has not had a significant impact on graduation rate. One possible explanation is that most of the federal funds in the past have been channeled to the elementary schools. Pupil-teacher ratios in these grades were reduced with little attention given to secondary education. As students moved through the system, classes became larger, and much of the individual attention received in the lower grades was lost. As a result, students became frustrated and sought alternatives to the traditional school environment. With the recent emphasis being placed on drop-out prevention and more federal funds being utilized on the secondary level, the graduation rate of students should improve.

**Conclusion 7:** Delta-area schools have about the same pupil-teacher ratio and percentage of teachers with advanced degrees as non-Delta districts.

In referring to Table 1, the pupil-teacher ratio and percentage of teachers with advanced degrees are approximately the same for Delta and non-Delta districts. Therefore, one could conclude that these two variables should not be the underlying factors for underachievement of Delta-area students. Research has shown that in class sizes of approximately 20 students or above, there is little, if any, differences in the achievement of students. One variable that is important in predicting educational attainment is the socioeconomic level of students. Since poverty and low socioeconomic conditions are more prevalent in the Delta, it would be safe to say that one method of improving educational attainment might be through a reduction of the pupil-teacher ratio. A more individualized or personalized educational program for these students may be the only solution in meeting the demands placed on schools by society. Delta-area schools should continue efforts to employ teachers with advanced degrees. The justification for encouraging teachers to return to school is discussed under Conclusion 5.

**Conclusion 8:** Many school facilities in the Delta are in need of renovation and/or repair.

Efforts by the public schools in the Delta are hampered by the lack of educational funds to provide and maintain the facilities needed for optimum learning environments. Many of the schools were built in the 1940's and 1950's and have not been properly maintained due to the ever-present problem of limited availability of maintenance funds. Many educational facilities are in dire need of renovation or expansion to meet the growing demands of a society with progressive plans for education. School buildings frequently are not air-conditioned, have windows that do not open, or have maintenance problems with heating and ventilation that lead to insufficient supplies of fresh air and an unpleasant environment for students and teachers. Yet, we expect them to perform as all other students.

With these thoughts in mind and the present emphasis placed on consolidation, educators and community leaders must carefully analyze available school structures in terms of utilization and future needs. Statistical data released by the State Education Finance Commission on Mississippi school districts raise some thought-provoking questions as to the availability of adequate classroom space on individual attendance center campuses. Statewide, approximately 70 percent of the school districts show a need for expansion at some of the attendance centers as compared to approximately 60 percent for Delta-area school districts. A better picture can be shown by breaking down the data by individual attendance centers as reflected in Table 7.

**Table 7. Comparison of attendance centers with deficit instructional areas.**

	Total attendance centers	Centers with deficit instructional areas	
		No.	Percent
State	980	316	32.2
Delta	228	68	29.8

Source: State Education Finance Commission Attendance Center Master Listing. State Department of Education, Jackson, Miss., Computer Printout, July 18, 1989.

The data in Table 7 use average daily attendance at individual schools to calculate the number of required instructional areas for that school. If the actual number of instructional areas in the attendance center is less than the calculated number of required instructional areas, a deficit is shown. As noted, 32.2 percent of the attendance centers in the State of Mississippi are in need of additional classroom space, as compared to 29.8 percent for schools located in the Delta. The slightly lower percentage of deficit instructional areas in the Delta can be attributed to declining enrollments in many of the schools. Schools located in rural areas may continue to face declining enrollments as residents relocate to more productive metropolitan areas. The overall effect for the Delta will be the migration of people to more progressive communities within the state or out-of-state. If the Delta area is to reverse this trend, the educational system must be productive in providing the base for economic growth and development. School facilities must be adequate to accommodate diverse student populations, and periodic maintenance schedules must also be implemented to insure comfortable, stimulating environments that are conducive to learning.

### **Higher Education in the Delta**

In looking at educational training beyond the high school level, the Delta area is fortunate to have two universities and four public community colleges that offer a variety of educational experiences and training to meet student and community needs. All of these institutions are instrumental in economic development and play a major role in providing services to Delta-area residents. Due to the lack of space, a brief overview of the two universities will be presented.

Delta State University, located in the heart of the Delta at Cleveland, Mississippi, was created as a Teachers College in the early 1920's. Since its establishment, the institution has grown into a university through a lifelong tradition of service and quality. Mississippi Valley State University is located at Itta Bena, Mississippi, and was formally opened in 1950 as Mississippi Vocational College. In 1964 the name of the college was changed to Mississippi Valley State College and since, as Delta State, has achieved university status. Philosophically, both institutions fulfill the mission of providing educational and cultural experiences to students, schools, and to the communities they serve.

The two universities offer a comprehensive program of financial aid to assist students in obtaining a college education. Assistance may be in the form of scholarships, student loans, campus employment programs, or federal and state aid programs. These financial packages, coupled with low tuition costs, provide educational opportunities for many individuals who normally would not be able to attend college due to financial reasons. It is noteworthy that Delta State University ranks as one of the nation's top 10 financial values in higher education, according to a listing in the September 1989 issue of *Money* magazine.

Both institutions offer a variety of bachelor degree programs for undergraduate students. On the graduate level, Delta State offers 12 degrees and an educational specialist's degree program that includes five major fields and several areas of emphasis at the secondary level. A graduate program leading to the doctorate of education degree in professional studies is also offered at Delta State. In addition to these programs, the universities are coordinating efforts in offering off-campus courses through their divisions of continuing education. When needs are identified, every effort is made by the universities to provide service and assistance.

Descriptive statistics for the two universities are reported in Table 8. From this data one can readily see that the vast majority of the students enrolled at both universities are from the 18 counties described as the Delta area. The percentage of students in residence halls indicates that many students live in the proximity of the universities and commute. Citizens in the Delta and surrounding communities have at their disposal quality educational services.



Through proper utilization, the diverse programs offered by these institutions are invaluable in providing avenues for improved educational attainment and economic development.

**Table 8. Descriptive statistics.**

	<b>MVSU</b>	<b>DSU</b>
Enrollment	1,761	3,631
Percent of Students in State	90.6	93.7
Nonresident	6.3%	9.4%
Percent of Students in Residence Halls	74	40
Percent of Students From Delta-Area Schools	71.3	80.5
*Total Budget FY 88-89	\$19,105,798	\$23,845,582

Source: Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, Statistical Report for First Term, 1988-89.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

First of all, there are some districts in the Delta meeting the tremendous challenge of educating their youth at or beyond acceptable levels of educational attainment. These districts are to be commended for their efforts and accomplishments. On the other hand, it is evident from the data presented in this chapter that many Delta-area schools are lagging behind in educational attainment when compared to other schools in the state. The lack of physical facilities and personnel resources in the Delta has a massive impact on poor academic performance. The lack of personnel is also linked to at-risk youth. For example, lack of available counselors may be related to drug problems, teenage pregnancy, and law enforcement issues.

Discussions in this chapter identified the percentage of students on free lunch as the single best predictor of low educational attainment. Low socioeconomic conditions and poverty play a vital role in the educational process, and it is imperative that these conditions be addressed in order to obtain desired educational results. Public confidence in our schools is a must in order to obtain greater local support, which has proven to be a significant variable for good schools. The only way to improve long-range economic performance in the Delta is to raise productivity and enhance the quality of life for its citizens. Public schools, universities, parents, and business communities must join efforts in providing meaningful educational opportunities for students. To accomplish this task, seven recommendations are suggested:

1. Provide equal educational opportunities for students by giving top priority to equity funding.
2. Improve schools aesthetically with high priority being given to air conditioning.

*Hailey*

3. Ensure the availability of adequate support personnel for schools. Specific needs include: personnel to identify deficiencies at an early age; counselors to provide needed guidance services; and assistant teachers or tutors in the upper grades to assist regular teachers in the remediation process.
4. Continue to gear staff development activities to improving teacher competency; example: strategies for teaching, learning.
5. Continue to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in classrooms, especially in classrooms with high numbers of underachieving students.
6. Increase local support by involving parents in the educational program through more active PTA's, adult education programs, tutoring, parenting.
7. Constantly seek broad community support through adopt-a-school programs, volunteer programs, and other activities that would create a sense of school ownership by the community.

## ***Chapter***

# **8**

### ***Human Capital: Characteristics of the Labor Force***

*by*

***Charles Campbell\****

***Kathie S. Gilbert***

***Paul W. Grimes***

#### **Introduction: The Delta In General**

The Mississippi Delta is a unique geographic region in terms of its history, culture, and demographic characteristics. As a whole, the Delta's economic characteristics differentiate it from either the rest of the State of Mississippi or the nation. Some of the area's most obvious differences are reflected in the characteristics of its labor force.

From an economic perspective, a region's labor force is central to its development and growth. A stable population is necessary to avoid periodic labor shortages and surpluses. The population should reflect a strong attachment to economic activity evidenced by high labor force participation rates. Furthermore, a strong economy requires a labor force with the appropriate education and training to match local business and industrial needs. If the demographics and culture of a region do not result in a strong labor force, economic development will be severely hampered.

Several characteristics relating to income, race, migration patterns, educational attainment, and population concentration tend to be held in common by the majority of Delta counties. The most striking is the substantial concentration of the very poor. In 1980, the percentage of households with incomes less than \$5,000 ranged from 26.8 to 38 percent, excluding DeSoto and Warren Counties where the respective rates were 12.3 and 17.5 percent. In all but one of the counties, labor earnings comprise more than 50 percent of personal income.

\*Charles Campbell and Paul Grimes are Associate Professors of Economics, and Kathie Gilbert is Professor of Economics and Political Science and Head of the Department of Finance and Economics, all at Mississippi State University.

A brief labor force profile for the 18 Mississippi Delta counties appears in Table 1 (page 135). Although the 18 counties possess various labor force characteristics and economic problems, some general labor market patterns for the Delta region can be identified.

First, most of the Delta counties have relatively small population bases. County population figures range from slightly more than 2,000 in Issaquena County to more than 65,000 in DeSoto County. These relatively small populations reflect the geography of the region, which is overwhelmingly rural. Though comprising roughly one-third of the state's geographical area, the counties represent only about one-fifth of Mississippi's population. In some of the smaller Delta counties, limited population presents a serious obstacle to economic development. The "critical mass" of workers necessary for many industries simply does not exist.

Table 1 also contains specific information concerning the size of the labor force found in each of the Delta counties. Technically, the labor force is the area's noninstitutionalized population over age 16 engaged in work for pay (employed) or actively looking for work (unemployed). The percentage of the population that belongs to the labor force is a measure of the population's attachment to economic activity. As seen in Table 1, all but one Delta county (DeSoto) reported labor force attachment rates below the national level in 1987. Further, all but two Delta counties (DeSoto and Warren) report rates below the Mississippi statewide level. Thus, the Delta population is not participating in labor market activities to the same degree as the state or national population. The extent to which demographic, cultural, and policy variables influence this observation is a question open to further study.

Breaking the labor force in each Delta county into the two components of employment and unemployment, the Delta region represented about 17 percent of total state employment in 1987. Unemployment and the corresponding unemployment rates (calculated as the percent of the labor force looking for work) for the Delta region are historically higher than statewide or national figures. In 1987, the Delta's unemployment rate was 12.57 percent, while Mississippi's was 10.2 percent, and the national rate was 7.0 percent. Within the Delta itself, many counties experienced unemployment rates significantly above the regional average. The highest rate occurred in Sharkey County, where more than 30 percent of the labor force was unemployed during 1987.

Low levels of labor force attachment and high unemployment rates result in relatively low levels of earnings. Earning from labor sources, a primary source of income in the Delta region, has a limited physical capital base. As a result, per capita income is also low in the Mississippi Delta. Per capita income figures for each of the counties appear in Table 1. For the entire region, 1987 per capita income reached only about 65 percent of the national average.

Tables 2 and 3 (pages 136-141) report selected labor force characteristics for the Delta counties, broken down by race and gender. At least two regional demographic characteristics have economic significance. First of all, in 13 of the 18 counties, the nonwhite population is larger than the white population. Secondly, in 17 of the 18 counties, the female population is larger than the male population. Therefore, large proportions of the Delta population are members of economic minority groups. This distribution of demographic groups is an important characteristic of the Delta region and must be considered by those interested in economic development.

Historically, the national labor force attachment rates for nonwhites and females have been below those observed for white male workers, while unemployment rates have been higher. This pattern is exaggerated in the Delta. Compared to state and national averages, the Delta region displays very low labor force attachment rates and very high unemployment rates for nonwhites and females. The labor market problem faced by economic minority groups in the Delta is the major contributing factor to the high levels of poverty found there and the need for relatively large state and national transfer payment expenditures in the region.

Many economic studies have shown that a population's attachment to the labor force increases as educational attainment rises. Further, the probability of unemployment significantly decreases as workers increase their years of education and training. The low level of educational attainment in the Delta population is the most important factor contributing to its low levels of labor force participation and high unemployment rates. Table 4 (pages 141-142) presents summary statistics in educational attainment that are low in both an absolute and a relative sense. The Delta population does not possess the same quality of human capital as that found in most other regions of the nation. In 1980, not a single Delta county matched the national average in percentage of population aged 25 years or over having a high school education, in median years of school completed for those aged 25 (although the medians were close in both DeSoto and Warren Counties), or in percentage of those over 25 years old having 4 or more years of college.

Median years of formal education is as much as 3 years below the national average in some parts of the Mississippi Delta (e.g., Tunica County). As the nation's economy evolves, the Delta's failure to invest in human capital will create a progressively greater barrier to economic development. It is imperative that those interested in solving the Delta's economic problems address this problem immediately.

From 1970 to 1980, net migration was negative in all but two of the Delta counties. Net nonwhite migration was negative in every county during this period. While a separate study of migration in the Delta has yet to be conducted, studies concerning migration and the general characteristics of those who migrate indicate that migrants tend to be fairly young and usually have higher levels of education than do nonmigrants. When they are not white-collar workers, migrants tend to have higher levels of skills and higher combinations of skills and experience than nonmigrants. Negative net migration within the Delta is most likely an additional human capital liability, resulting in a reduced level of educational attainment and a younger, less employable labor force.

Finally, it should be noted that the Delta counties are extremely rural, with 11 of the 18 counties including farming in their top three industries in terms of earnings. Population density tends to be quite low, ranging from 5 to 85 persons per square mile (excluding DeSoto County, which borders Tennessee and Memphis and has a density of 135 persons per square mile).

### **Subgroups of Delta Counties**

A careful county-by-county study of the labor force reveals that the 18 Delta counties are a heterogeneous group with few characteristics in common. Thus it is difficult to draw generalities about the entire region. Therefore, to facilitate this analysis, the counties are grouped into three general categories based on 1987 per capita income for each county. Each group includes counties that share general characteristics helpful to the analysis. Anomalies will be discussed as they are encountered. Hereafter, the three categories of Delta counties will be referred to as the "A," "B," and "C" groups (see Table 5, page 142).

Group A consists of counties in which 1987 per capita income is at least 95 percent of the Mississippi average that year. The Group B counties consist of those in which 1987 per capita income is between 85 and 94 percent of the Mississippi average, and Group C is composed of counties in which per capita income is less than 85 percent of the state average. To put these category definitions in perspective, it is important to remember that per capita income in the State of Mississippi remains low by national standards. In 1987, it was \$10,302, or roughly two-thirds of the total U.S. per capita income (\$15,484).

Overall labor force characteristics of these groups appear in Table 6 (pages 142-143). Group A counties tend to have higher median years of education with a range of 9.8 to 12.3, while Group B counties tend to have somewhat lower educational attainment, and Group C counties

generally have the lowest educational attainment. Labor force to population ratios are low in all of the counties but tend to be lowest in the C counties and highest in the A counties. Unemployment rates follow a similar pattern although there are certain anomalies, such as the unemployment rate of 30.2 percent in Sharkey County, which is in the B Group. Measured as a percentage of 1980 population, the strongest net out-migration (from 1970 to 1980) occurs in the C counties, and the only net in-migration in the region occurs in the A counties. Earnings as a percentage of income tends to be highest in Group A counties and lowest in Group C counties, while transfer payments as a percentage of personal income tend to be highest in Group C counties and lowest in Group A counties.

### **Group A Counties**

In many ways, the "A" category of counties is the most difficult subgroup to discuss because it is more diverse in character. There are really three types of counties within this single subgroup.

First, there are three counties that are adjacent to a metropolitan area: DeSoto, adjacent to Memphis, and Yazoo and Warren, both adjacent to Jackson. The metropolitan areas to which these counties relate are classical economic growth centers. The rapid expansion of these centers in recent years has created a spread effect that has generally supported growth into adjacent counties. Initially, in most cases, the spread appears in the form of new residential areas and accompanying retail sales. It then continues into both manufacturing and services industry growth. This spread effect may include adjacent counties, which then develop higher levels of per capita income than their characteristics would normally allow. Desirable growth characteristics may develop in such areas solely as a result of adjacency, rather than any internal development. Thus, a high level of growth and high per capita income in a county adjacent to a metropolitan area results from different processes than those found in a county which is nonadjacent but also developing.

Group A includes Humphreys County, an anomaly with much higher per capita income than its general characteristics seem to warrant. It has a small population (13,500), a very high proportion of earnings derived from the farm sector (49.6 percent in 1987), an extremely inequitable distribution of income (34.9 percent of households in 1980 had less than \$5,000 money income), relatively low levels of educational expenditures, and no institution or branch of an institution of higher education. Unemployment rates in 1987 for Humphreys County were 15.5 percent, while 35.1 percent of families lived below the poverty line. Despite all of this, Humphreys County has a per capita income of \$10,441 (or 101 percent of the state level), and the annual growth rate of per capita income from 1977 to 1987 was the highest for any of the Delta counties (10.1 percent). In fact, this growth rate was higher than either the state or national averages for the same period.

High growth rates in per capita income, such as those seen in Humphreys County, are not consistent with typical patterns for counties of this sort. Many of the Group A counties are anomalies of this type. It should be recognized that these counties must be truly different from any of the rest of the Delta counties.

The remainder of Group A consists of Leflore, Tate, and Washington Counties, which are analyzed together. Appropriate caveats are made where the "adjacent" counties or Humphreys County have major differences with the rest of the A category.

Group A counties tend to have fairly large populations. Excluding Humphreys and the "adjacent" counties, populations range from 21,800 to 70,400 with no discernable pattern. Population densities are fairly low, ranging from 14 to 85 persons per square mile (excluding DeSoto County). These counties, again excluding DeSoto County, all have significant nonwhite populations, ranging from about 38 percent in Warren and Tate Counties to 65.8 percent in Humphreys County. Four of the seven counties have populations that are more than 50

percent nonwhite. The A counties are the only county subgroup that includes counties (i.e., DeSoto and Warren) with positive net migration from 1970 to 1980. Four of the seven A counties had positive white net migration, but all of the A counties had negative nonwhite net migration.

Unemployment rates tend to be somewhat lower in Group A than in the other subgroups; but the range is broad with DeSoto County having a 1987 unemployment rate of 6.0 percent and Humphreys County having a rate of 15.5 percent. For the remaining counties, unemployment rates ranged from 9.5 to 13.7 percent. Labor force participation rates are only available for 1980, so a proxy percentage of the population in the labor force has been used in this analysis. This proxy will hereafter be referred to as the labor force-population ratio (LFPR). The LFPR tends to be highest in the A counties with rates ranging from 35.4 (in Humphreys County) to 53.2 (in DeSoto County) and generally falling into the low forties when DeSoto and Humphreys Counties are excluded.

Earnings as a percentage of total personal income tend to be highest in Group A counties, ranging from 62.2 percent to 81.1 percent. Farming is important (one of the top three industries in terms of earnings) in two of the A counties. In each of those two counties, Yazoo and Humphreys, farming is the most important contributor to earnings, providing 49.6 percent of earnings in Humphreys County and 21.6 percent of earnings in Yazoo County. No other A county has as little diversity in earnings as Humphreys County. The county with the next highest level of industry concentration is Warren, with 23.8 percent of earnings accounted for by federal civilian government employment. Except for Humphreys and Yazoo Counties, durable goods manufacturing accounts for more than 10 percent of earnings in Group A counties. In DeSoto County, durable goods manufacturing accounts for more than one-fifth (22.1 percent) of earnings. Excepting Warren, Yazoo, and Leflore Counties, nondurable goods manufacturing accounts for at least 14 percent of earnings in the A counties. Services are important in every A county and account for anywhere from 9.4 percent of earnings (in Humphreys County) to 21.2 percent of earnings in Leflore County. State and local government employment is important in only two of the A counties, accounting for 11.2 percent of earnings in Washington County and 15.7 percent of earnings in Leflore County.

In 1986, Group A employment had grown by 13.75 percent from 1969 levels (Table 7, pages 143-144). Employment was primarily concentrated in five sectors (i.e., proprietorships, manufacturing, trades, services, and government), which together constituted 86.24 percent of total employment in the A counties.

Proprietorships were fairly evenly split between farm and nonfarm in 1969, with a decline in farm proprietorships since 1969, and a corresponding growth in nonfarm proprietorships. By 1986, proprietorships were heavily concentrated in the nonfarm category.

Manufacturing employment in 1986 was fairly evenly split between durable goods and nondurable goods manufacturing, with about 1.5 percent more employment in durable goods. The primary concentrations in durable goods manufacturing were in lumber and wood, furniture and fixtures, electrical and nonelectrical machinery, transportation equipment, and fabricated metals. Nondurable goods manufacturing employment was primarily concentrated in food, textiles, apparel, chemicals, and printing and publishing. Manufacturing employment in Group A is more diverse in terms of the numbers of industries with significant employment, compared to Groups B and C.

Wholesale and retail trade together provided about 18 percent of total employment in the area, with retail trade dominating. Both trade sectors exhibited substantial growth since 1969, with wholesale trade actually growing at a faster rate than retail trade.

Services accounted for nearly 15 percent of total employment in 1986, with nearly half of these workers almost evenly split between private households and medical services and another 2.6 percent of total employment fairly evenly split between miscellaneous business

services and social services. The government sector accounted for nearly 17.5 percent of total employment in the A counties, with the bulk of employment occurring at the state and local levels.

Per capita general expenditures on education (in 1980) are generally within the range of such expenditures in most other Delta counties; but educational attainment in the A Group is noticeably higher than elsewhere in the region. Percent of 1980 population over age 25 with a high school education is at least 44.7 percent in every county except Humphreys, with an average rate of about 50 percent. In the same year, median year of schooling was about 12 in most of the counties, with only Humphreys County having less than 11. The percentage of those over 25 years of age with 4 or more years of college was generally in the range of 9 to 13 percent, with DeSoto at the low end (7.6 percent) and Warren County at the high end (15.7 percent). Four of the A counties were home to some institution or branch of an institution of higher learning.

There is a substantial concentration of very low income households in Group A, but it is somewhat less pronounced than in the other Delta counties. The percentage of households with less than \$5,000 incomes in 1980 tended to be between 21.5 percent and 28.3 percent, except for two "adjacent" counties (DeSoto with 12.3 and Warren with 17.5 percent) and Humphreys County with 34.9 percent.

### **Group B Counties**

Group B populations for 1987 ranged from 30,000 to 43,500, with the exception of Sharkey County with a population of 7,200. Population densities tend to be within the same range as those for Group A. Again, Sharkey County is the exception with a density of 17 persons per square mile in 1987. The remaining counties, Bolivar, Coahoma, Panola, and Sunflower, had population densities ranging from 43 to 62 persons per square mile. Each of the B counties has a predominantly nonwhite population, except for Panola with a 49.1 percent nonwhite population. The remaining counties have nonwhite percentages ranging from 62.4 to 65.7 percent. Net migration (1970-1980) for each Group B county was fairly high and negative for both the white and nonwhite populations. Total net migration ranged from -2,125 to -7,473 in the B counties, indicating a very large relative drain on the work force in this group.

Unemployment rates in 1987 were as high as 30.2 percent in Sharkey County to about 12 to 15 percent in the remaining B counties. Labor force to population ratios are somewhat lower in Group B than in Group A, with rates ranging from 34.4 to 40.0 percent. Earnings as a percentage of personal income tend to be slightly lower in the B than in the A counties, ranging from 57.4 to 68.5 percent with a "norm" of about 62 percent.

Farming makes an important contribution to earnings in three of these five counties, comprising 18.6 percent of earnings in Coahoma County, 28.2 percent in Sharkey County, and 20.7 percent in Sunflower County. Service industries are important in all counties, contributing from 13 to 19 percent of earnings in all but Sunflower County in 1987. State and local government employment is also important, contributing from 12.5 to 21.7 percent of earnings. Government employment was the number one "industry" in both Bolivar and Sunflower Counties in 1987. Manufacturing is important in three of the five counties, with durable goods manufacturing dominant in Bolivar and Panola Counties, while Sunflower County benefits from nondurable goods manufacturing. Manufacturing is not currently an important contributor to earnings in either Coahoma or Sharkey Counties.

In 1986, aggregate employment for Group B counties declined by 6.13 percent from 1969 levels (see Table 8, pages 145-146). Employment patterns in the B counties are similar to those in the A counties. The same five sectors (proprietorships, manufacturing, trades, service, and government) that accounted for 86.24 percent of total employment in Group A accounted for 73.63 percent of total employment in Group B. However, despite the overall similarities



between the two groups, there are significant differences in the growth rates. Between 1969 and 1986, the only major sectors that grew in the B counties were manufacturing and wholesale trade. All other major employment sectors declined during this period.

Proprietorships made up 15.64 percent of total employment, with nonfarm proprietorships dominating the sector and growing over the 1969 to 1986 period, while farm proprietorships declined.

In manufacturing, 1986 employment was concentrated in nondurable goods, with 11.12 percent of total employment compared to just 7 percent in durable goods employment. The primary concentrations in nondurable goods manufacturing were in textiles, apparel, chemicals, rubber, and plastics. With the exception of textiles, all of these categories registered growth during the 1969 to 1986 period. Durable goods manufacturing employment was primarily concentrated in fabricated metals and nonelectrical machinery, both of which grew over the 1969 to 1986 period. Several of the other durable goods categories registered dramatic growth in terms of percentages, but the actual numbers of employees in each of them are rather small.

Wholesale and retail trade together provided nearly 16 percent of total employment in Group B, with retail trade dominating. Both trade sectors have exhibited substantial growth since 1969, with especially fast growth in wholesale trade.

Services accounted for 14.5 percent of total employment in 1986, with over 5 percent of total employment occurring in private households. Medical services constituted another 2.8 percent of total employment, and social services accounted for 2.09 percent of total employment.

The government sector accounted for over 21 percent of total employment in the B counties with the bulk of employment occurring in state and local government.

Per capita general expenditures on education (in 1980) tend to be similar to that of Group A counties, but educational attainment is generally lower. The percentage of those 25 years old or older with at least a high school education ranged from 40.9 to 45.8 percent in 1980. In the same year, median years of schooling for Group B ranged from 10.3 to 11 years, and the percent of those 25 years or older who had 4 or more years of college ranged from 7.7 percent in Panola County to 14.1 percent in Bolivar County. Three of the five counties have some institution or branch of an institution of higher learning.

Poverty in the B counties is somewhat more concentrated than in the A counties, with the percent of households having less than \$5,000 in money income in 1980 ranging from 26.8 percent to 30.9 percent, with a norm of about 29 percent. On the other hand, Sharkey County has the distinction of having the second highest regional concentration of households with more than \$50,000 in money income. While 28.6 percent of Sharkey households had incomes of less than \$5,000 in 1980, 3.6 percent of households had incomes greater than \$50,000. The regional norm for high income households is about 2.5 percent.

### **Group C Counties**

Group C includes Carroll, Holmes, Quitman, Tunica, Tallahatchie, and Issaquena Counties. These counties have the lowest per capita income in the Delta. They also tend to have the lowest populations. In 1987, population figures for the C counties ranged from 2,200 to 22,400. Population densities also tend to be lower, ranging from 5 to 30 persons per square mile. Net migration from 1970 to 1980 was negative in all C counties, and the rates of out-migration were large relative to the small population base. The counties with the smallest negative net migration (Carroll -59; Issaquena -373) each had positive white net migration. The remaining counties had negative net migration for both whites and nonwhites, with total net migration ranging from 2,242 in Holmes County to 5,065 in Quitman County.

Unemployment rates tend to be highest in the C counties. The lowest unemployment rates in this group are in Carroll (11.4 percent) and Tallhatchie (13.7 percent). Rates in the remaining counties range from 18.2 to 19.2 percent. Group C labor force to population ratios range from 29.8 to 35.5, with a norm of about 30.

Farms are the major source of earnings in all C counties, and earnings tend to be much more concentrated than in Groups A or B. In 1987, farm earnings ranged from 20.6 percent (Holmes County) to 64.2 percent (Issaquena County) of total personal income. State and local government employment is a major source of earnings in four of the six counties, with percentage of earnings ranging from 12.8 to 16.5. Services are a major source of earnings in three of the counties, and durable goods manufacturing is important in two of the counties. Nondurable goods manufacturing, agricultural services/forestry/fishing, and transportation/communications/public utilities are each important in one county. Group C counties have the lowest rates of earnings to total personal income in 1987 from 19.3 to 56.2 percent (excluding Carroll County with 66.9 percent and Issaquena with 70.3 percent). In 1980, two-thirds of the C counties reported transfer payments as the major source of personal income. By 1987, transfer payments were lower than earnings in all of the C counties, ranging from 18.2 percent of personal income in Issaquena County to 30 percent of personal income in Quitman County.

As in the B counties, 1986 employment for Group C declined from 1969 levels (see Table 9, pages 146-148). However, the decline is much more dramatic in the C counties, a drop of nearly 27 percent (as opposed to 6.13 percent in the B counties).

Group C employment follows the same sector concentration pattern as both the A and B counties (proprietorships, manufacturing, trade, services, and government). These five sectors accounted for about 80 percent of total employment (similar to the 86.24 percent for Group A and 73.63 percent for Group B). Of the five major sectors, only manufacturing and trade exhibited growth during the 1979 to 1986 period.

Proprietorships made up over 24 percent of total employment, with a nearly even split between farm and nonfarm proprietorships. Overall, proprietorships declined by one-third from 1969 to 1986; the result of a nearly 55-percent decline in farm proprietorships only partially compensated by an 18-percent increase in nonfarm proprietorships.

In manufacturing, 1986 employment was fairly evenly split between nondurable goods employment (5.56 percent of total employment) and durable goods employment (6.91 percent of total employment). The primary concentrations in nondurable goods manufacturing are in textiles and apparel, but both of those categories are declining. Durable goods manufacturing employment is concentrated in the lumber and wood category, which makes up over half of 1986 durable goods employment. The lumber and wood category has grown by over 422 percent (579 employees) over the 1969 to 1986 period and is the only durable goods category constituting more than 1 percent of 1986 total employment. However, electrical machinery, nonelectrical machinery, and motor vehicles and equipment all registered significant percentage gains over the 1969 to 1986 period.

Wholesale and retail trade, combined, provide over 11 percent of total employment in Group C, with retail trade dominating but declining. Wholesale trade grew by 271 percent during the 1969 to 1986 period but only accounts for 3.14 percent of 1986 total employment.

Services account for over 12.5 percent of 1986 total employment, with nearly 6 percent occurring in private households. Medical services account for 1.19 percent and social services for 2.05 percent of total employment.

The government sector accounts for over 19 percent of total employment in Group C, with the bulk of employment in state and local government. All government categories declined from 1969 to 1986, with a total drop of 14.29 percent in government employment.

Per capita general expenditures on education (in 1980) are similar to those of Groups A and B; but educational attainment is generally lower than in the other two Delta subgroups. In

1980, the percent of those over 25 having a high school education ranged from 30.8 to 40.3, with a norm of about 37. Median years of schooling for the same year ranged from 8.6 to 10.4 years, and percent of those 25 years and older with 4 or more years of college ranged from 5.7 to a maximum of 10.3 (in Holmes County), with the next highest percentage being only 8.7 percent. With the exception of Holmes, none of the counties host an institution or branch of an institution of higher learning, although three of the six have secondary vocational centers.

The worst concentration of poverty tends to be found in the C counties, with the percentage of households with less than \$5,000 money income in 1980 ranging from 27.3 percent in Issaquena County to 38 percent in Tunica County. However, of all the Delta counties, Issaquena County does boast the highest percentage of households with more than \$50,000 in 1980.

### **Conclusions**

The major thread that appears to explain the differences in the three subgroups of counties tends to be a combination of four related characteristics: net migration relative to population, educational attainment, the degree of reliance on agriculture for earnings, and per capita income. Those counties with the highest per capita incomes tend to be those with the highest educational attainment, the lowest negative net migration relative to population size, and those where manufacturing and services tend to be the most important sources of earnings and where earnings are not concentrated heavily in any single sector. The poorest counties tend, with some exceptions, to be those where earnings from farms make up dominant portions of earned income and manufacturing and services contribute much smaller portions to total earnings. The poorest counties also tend to have the lowest levels of educational attainment and the lowest labor force participation rates. That is, in the poorest counties there appears to be a stronger pattern of limited employment opportunities leading to out-migration, which lowers the level of educational attainment in the work force and further limits the location of employment opportunities in that area. Evidence of this can be seen in the dramatic decline of employment in the Group C counties where only the wholesale trade and manufacturing sectors exhibited growth during the 1969 to 1986 period. There is also evidence that a significant amount of employment is in very low wage sectors. For example, in both the B and C county groups, over 5 percent of total employment is concentrated in private households. There is evidence of employment potential with several of the minor manufacturing categories exhibiting significant growth in percentage terms.

Further study would be necessary to recommend appropriate detailed and specific policies for growth in each of the Delta counties; but there are certain obvious considerations that should be kept in mind. Local pride or vested interest may cause communities to be reluctant to admit that their areas lack development potential or to see their populations decline. Another cause of concern is that out-migration is highly selective of highly skilled and educated workers. Obviously, out-migration cannot solve the problems of a distressed area by draining off the unemployed. Those who are most employable are those most able to migrate. Those who are least employable are those most likely to be left behind. Improved migration policies in distressed areas could, however, help areas where development potential is limited or unwanted and areas where there is development potential. Such policies include human resource development (including education, training, and retraining) and improved job information and placement services (especially those directed at the least employable and least mobile).

There are two advantages to such a set of policies. In areas that have little development potential, such policies help people move to jobs. In areas where there is development potential, such policies help jobs move to people. There is a major danger in a misguided set of such policies, in that communities tend to favor training programs for the kinds of jobs that

currently exist in their areas rather than training for the kinds of jobs that are nationally in demand; and communities are reluctant to spend for programs that develop skills in people who ultimately move away from the community. But by improving the skills and mobility of the labor force (particularly that part of the labor force unemployed or employed at very low wages), any community can be strengthened. In those communities that cannot or do not want major economic development, such workers who have been educated and trained or retrained and then provided quality placement services and job information will leave the community. This means less public welfare and less demand for public services from those who cannot contribute toward the provision of such services. In communities where development potential and a desire to develop exist, such policies enhance their development. Training programs, high levels of educational attainment, and a reputation for such programs will lure employers more surely than will temporary tax reductions or industrial revenue bonds.

An overall Delta development program might well begin by establishing which counties have significant development potential and a desire to develop, and which counties have little potential or little desire for development. For example, a county with relatively high per capita income that is primarily dependent upon agriculture may desire to continue its agricultural focus as opposed to commercial and industrial development, and this is a legitimate goal. In other counties, there may not be a sufficient base for such development, resulting in greater out-migration rates. In any case, human resource development and improved job information and placement services would work toward any community's realistic goals.

Once adequate education and training are provided, if the goal is county growth and economic development, then to retain an educated work force there must also be an effort to recruit more employers, particularly in higher wage industries. If such an effort is not successful, the area will, no doubt, see still further out-migration. For some counties this may be a desirable outcome. It is a signal that the area lacks development potential, but if appropriate policies have been used, the result will be less unemployment and higher per capita incomes. The community will have educated and placed in jobs elsewhere those who would otherwise be unemployed in the county. If development efforts are successful, the county may become an easily accessible destination for skilled migrants from the more distressed counties in the Delta, improving its stock of skilled labor and contributing to still further development.

**Table 1. Basic labor force profile of Delta Counties.**

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
County	1987 Pop.	1987 Labor force	1987 Labor force percent- age of pop.	1980 LFPR*	Net migra- tion 1970-80	Employ- ment	No. Un- employ- ed	Unem- plov- ment rate	Per capita income (\$)
Bolivar	43.5	15.39	35.4	51.9	-8.995	13.47	1.92	12.5	8.92
Carroll	9.8	2.99	30.5	49.9	-.059	2.65	0.34	11.4	8.08
Coahoma	34.8	11.97	34.4	51.0	-7.473	10.16	1.81	15.1	9.54
DeSoto	65.3	34.74	53.2	63.1	12.700	32.64	.21	6.0	12.21
Holmes	22.4	7.01	31.3	43.0	-2.242	5.70	1.31	18.7	7.72
Humphreys	13.5	4.78	35.4	46.9	-2.054	4.04	0.74	15.5	10.44
Issaquena	2.2	0.78	35.5	49.1	-.373	0.63	0.15	19.2	8.44
Leflore	39.1	16.03	41.0	52.9	-4.860	13.83	2.20	13.7	10.26
Panola	30.0	11.66	38.9	53.6	-2.125	10.18	1.48	12.7	8.72
Quitman	11.1	3.41	30.7	49.9	-5.065	2.79	0.62	18.2	8.59
Sharkey	7.2	2.88	40.0	47.0	-2.284	2.01	0.87	30.2	9.73
Sunflower	36.3	14.42	39.7	49.0	-6.445	12.65	1.77	12.3	9.18
Tallahatchie	16.1	5.42	33.7	48.0	-3.875	4.68	0.74	13.7	8.54
Tate	21.8	9.28	42.6	55.1	-.300	8.40	0.88	9.5	10.76
Tunica	9.0	2.68	29.8	45.8	-3.582	2.19	0.49	18.3	8.65
Warren	50.7	23.32	46.0	60.1	2.300	20.36	2.96	12.7	12.26
Washington	70.4	28.96	41.1	56.6	-7.390	24.69	4.27	14.7	9.94
Yazoo	26.7	9.76	36.6	51.3	-1.972	8.58	1.18	12.1	9.82
Delta total	509.9	205.48	40.3	53.7	--	179.65	25.83	12.57	9.54
State total	2,646.2	1,151	43.5	59.0	85.0	1,034.0	117.0	10.2	10.30
U.S. total	241,078	117,834	48.9	63.8	--	109,597	8,237	7.0	14.64

\*Labor Force Participation Rate

Source: Mississippi Statistical Abstract (1988), Tables 2.4 and 5.16; U.S. Statistical Abstract (1988) Tables 20, 610, and 682; and 1980 U.S. Census.

Note: All figures expressed in thousands except columns 4, 5, and 9, which are percentages. Data are for 1987, except for U.S. totals, which are 1986 and Labor Force Participation Rates (LFPR), which are 1980.

**Table 2. Labor force profile of Delta counties by race.**

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
County	Population	Labor force	Labor force as percentage of population	Employment	Unemploy.	Unemploy. rate
<b>Bolivar</b>						
White	16.38	7.20	44.00	6.91	0.29	4.0
Nonwhite	27.83	8.19	29.40	6.56	1.63	19.9
<b>Carroll</b>						
White	5.15	1.83	35.50	1.70	0.13	7.1
Nonwhite	4.27	1.16	27.20	0.95	0.21	18.1
<b>Coahoma</b>						
White	12.51	5.50	44.00	5.26	0.24	4.4
Nonwhite	22.70	6.47	28.50	4.90	1.57	24.3
<b>DeSoto</b>						
White	51.89	31.31	60.30	28.79	1.52	5.0
Nonwhite	11.54	4.43	38.40	3.85	0.58	13.1
<b>Holmes</b>						
White	6.67	2.60	39.00	2.44	0.16	6.2
Nonwhite	16.53	4.41	26.70	3.26	1.15	26.1
<b>Humphreys</b>						
White	4.74	2.13	44.90	2.07	0.06	2.8
Nonwhite	9.10	2.65	29.10	1.97	0.68	25.7
<b>Issaquena</b>						
White	0.95	0.43	45.30	0.38	0.05	11.6
Nonwhite	1.19	0.35	29.40	0.25	0.10	28.6
<b>Leflore</b>						
White	16.81	7.99	47.50	7.61	0.38	4.8
Nonwhite	24.98	8.04	32.20	6.22	1.82	22.6

(continued)

**Table 2 (continued). Labor force profile of Delta counties by race.**

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
County	Population	Labor force	Labor force as percentage of population	Employment	Unemploy.	Unemploy. rate
<b>Panola</b>						
White	15.21	6.63	43.60	6.11	0.52	7.8
Nonwhite	14.68	5.03	34.30	4.07	0.96	19.1
<b>Quitman</b>						
White	4.78	1.76	36.80	1.59	0.17	9.7
Nonwhite	6.15	1.65	26.80	1.20	0.45	27.3
<b>Sharkey</b>						
White	2.67	1.10	41.20	0.97	0.13	11.8
Nonwhite						
<b>Sunflower</b>						
White	14.14	6.84	48.40	6.56	0.28	4.1
Nonwhite	23.51	7.58	32.20	6.09	1.49	19.7
<b>Tallahatchie</b>						
White	6.78	2.69	39.70	2.45	0.24	8.9
Nonwhite	9.24	2.73	29.50	2.23	0.50	18.3
<b>Tate</b>						
White	13.30	6.20	46.60	5.79	0.41	6.6
Nonwhite	8.48	3.08	36.30	2.61	0.47	15.3
<b>Tunica</b>						
White	2.42	0.96	39.70	0.92	0.04	4.2
Nonwhite	6.59	1.72	26.10	1.27	0.45	26.2
<b>Warren</b>						
White	31.82	15.43	48.50	14.15	1.28	8.3
Nonwhite	19.74	7.89	40.00	6.21	1.68	21.3
<b>Washington</b>						
White	31.00	15.10	48.70	13.88	1.22	8.1
Nonwhite	40.19	13.86	34.50	10.81	3.05	22.0

(continued)

**Table 2 (continued). Labor force profile of Delta counties by race.**

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
County	Population	Labor force	Labor force as percentage of population	Employment	Unemploy.	Unemploy. rate
<b>Yazoo</b>						
White	12.98	5.57	42.90	5.32	0.25	4.5
Nonwhite	13.85	4.19	30.30	3.26	0.93	22.2
<b>Delta Total</b>						
White	250.20	121.27	48.50	112.90	7.37	6.1
Nonwhite	265.69	85.21	32.10	66.75	18.46	21.7
<b>State Total</b>						
White	1708.77	798.44	46.70	743.45	54.99	6.9
Nonwhite	937.45	352.56	37.60	290.55	62.01	17.6
<b>U.S. total</b>						
White	203,985	101,801	49.90	95,660	6,140	6.0
Black	29,224	12,654	43.30	10,814	1,840	14.5

Source: Mississippi Statistical Abstract (1988), Tables 2.4 and 5.16.

Note: All figures expressed in thousands, except columns 4 and 7, which are percentages. Data are for 1987.

**Table 3. Labor force profile of Delta counties, by gender.**

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
County	Population	Labor Force	Labor Force as percent of Population	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
<b>Bolivar</b>						
Male	20.73	8.28	39.9	7.34	0.94	11.4
Female	23.48	7.11	30.3	6.13	0.98	13.8
<b>Carroll</b>						
Male	4.53	1.75	38.6	1.59	0.16	9.1
Female	4.89	1.24	25.4	1.06	0.18	14.5

(continued)



**Table 3 (continued). Labor force profile of Delta counties, by gender.**

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
County	Population	Labor Force	Labor Force as percent of Population	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
<b>Coahoma</b>						
Male	16.48	6.70	40.7	5.85	0.85	12.7
Female	18.73	5.27	28.1	4.31	0.96	18.2
<b>DeSoto</b>						
Male	31.33	20.98	67.0	19.91	1.07	5.1
Female	32.10	13.76	42.9	12.76	1.03	7.5
<b>Holmes</b>						
Male	10.95	3.75	34.2	3.09	0.66	17.6
Female	12.35	3.26	26.4	2.61	0.65	19.9
<b>Humphreys</b>						
Male	6.55	2.63	40.2	2.27	0.36	13.7
Female	7.29	2.15	29.5	1.77	0.38	17.7
<b>Issaquena</b>						
Male	1.04	0.50	48.1	0.40	0.10	20.0
Female	1.10	0.28	25.5	0.23	0.05	17.9
<b>Leflore</b>						
Male	19.43	8.43	43.4	7.55	0.88	10.4
Female	22.36	7.60	34.0	6.28	1.32	17.4
<b>Panola</b>						
Male	14.44	6.76	46.8	6.00	0.76	11.2
Female	15.45	4.90	31.7	4.18	0.72	14.7
<b>Quitman</b>						
Male	5.25	1.96	37.33	1.63	0.33	16.8
Female	5.68	1.45	25.53	1.16	0.29	10.0
<b>Sharkey</b>						
Male	3.72	1.71	46.0	1.17	0.54	31.6
Female	4.07	1.17	28.7	0.84	0.33	28.2

(continued)

**Table 3 (continued). Labor force profile of Delta counties, by gender.**

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
County	Population	Labor Force	Labor Force as percent of Population	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
Sunflower						
Male	18.83	8.00	42.5	7.12	0.88	11.0
Female	18.82	6.42	34.1	5.53	0.89	13.9
Tallahatchie						
Male	7.61	3.15	41.4	2.79	0.36	11.4
Female	8.41	2.27	27.0	1.89	0.38	16.7
Tate						
Male	10.54	5.33	50.6	4.91	0.42	7.9
Female	11.24	3.95	35.1	3.49	0.46	11.6
Tunica						
Male	4.3	1.68	39.1	1.41	0.27	16.1
Female	4.71	1.00	21.2	0.78	0.22	22.0
Warren						
Male	24.54	13.32	54.3	11.85	1.47	11.0
Female	27.02	10.00	37.0	8.51	1.49	14.9
Washington						
Male	33.46	15.80	47.2	1.004	1.80	11.4
Female	37.73	13.16	34.9	10.69	2.47	18.8
Yazoo						
Male	12.72	5.56	43.7	5.11	0.45	8.1
Female	14.11	4.20	29.8	3.47	0.73	17.4
Delta total						
Male	246.45	116.29	47.2	103.99	12.30	10.6
Female	269.54	89.19	33.1	75.69	13.53	15.2
State total						
Male	1275.71	648.84	50.9	588.35	60.49	9.3
Female	1370.51	502.16	36.6	445.65	56.51	11.3

(continued)

**Table 3 (continued). Labor force profile of Delta counties, by gender.**

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
County	Population	Labor Force	Labor Force as percent of Population	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
U.S. Total						
Male	117,360	65,422	55.7	60,891	4,530	6.9
Female	123,718	52,413	42.4	48,706	3,707	7.1

Sources: Mississippi Statistical Abstract (1988) Tables 2.4 and 5.16

Note: All figures expressed in thousands except columns 4 and 7, which are percentages. Data for counties are for 1987. Data for U.S. totals are for 1986.

**Table 4. Human capital: percentage of adults with formal educational attainment.**

County	Median Years	8 or Fewer Years	Some High School 9-11 Years	High School 12 Years	Some College	College	Grad School
Bolivar	11.00	32.09	15.94	19.94	11.73	7.54	6.58
Carroll	10.40	32.91	19.63	24.92	8.11	4.64	2.66
Coahoma	10.70	34.48	15.46	19.47	12.23	7.57	4.52
DeSoto	12.20	17.46	20.21	37.54	12.84	4.84	2.79
Holmes	10.20	34.04	17.36	19.44	9.89	6.55	3.73
Humphreys	9.80	38.08	15.74	18.34	11.26	6.31	2.80
Issaquena	10.10	36.51	17.69	25.36	6.79	4.04	1.70
Leflore	11.10	30.37	18.89	20.51	11.03	7.64	5.52
Panola	10.60	30.55	21.24	23.49	9.74	5.21	2.50
Quitman	9.70	37.26	18.15	19.01	9.31	6.15	2.05
Sharkey	10.60	32.45	17.69	19.85	9.05	9.59	3.75
Sunflower	10.30	34.04	16.62	18.45	11.35	6.99	4.27
Tallahatchie	10.00	34.28	19.81	20.29	8.02	5.62	2.93
Tate	12.00	25.00	20.01	27.05	13.47	5.23	4.00
Tunica	8.60	44.14	15.19	15.43	8.88	4.32	2.20
Warren	12.30	19.32	16.38	29.06	14.76	9.17	6.54
Washington	12.00	27.04	17.46	25.06	12.38	7.30	5.23

(continued)

**Table 4 (continued). Human capital: percentage of adults with formal educational attainment.**

County	Median Years	8 or Fewer Years	Some High School 9-11 Years	High School 12 Years	Some College	College	Grad School
Yazoo	11.40	28.38	18.02	23.41	11.57	6.82	4.67
Delta total	11.20	28.68	17.84	24.14	11.70	6.82	4.46
State total	N/A	26.61	18.27	28.65	13.52	12.94	
U.S. total	12.00	18.35	15.30	34.41	15.67	16.26	

Source: U.S. Census General Economic and Social Characteristics (1980) Note: Data are for 1980.

**Table 5. Mississippi Delta county subgroups, based upon 1987 per capita income.**

Group A	1987 Per Capita Income	Group B	1987 Per Capita Income	Group C	1987 Per Capita Income
DeSoto	12,206	Bolivar	8,917	Carroll	8,084
Humphreys	10,441	Coahoma	9,536	Holmes	7,718
Leflore	10,262	Panola	8,720	Issaquena	8,443
Tate	10,762	Sharkey	9,728	Quitman	8,591
Warren	12,263	Sunflower	9,175	Tallhatchie	8,537
Washington	9,944			Tunica	8,651
Yazoo	9,823				

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) BEARFACTS (1989).

**Table 6. Ranges of key economic variables, by county groups.**

Group	Median years education in 1980	Labor force as percent of pop. in 1987	Unemploy. rate in 1987	1970-80 net migration as percent of 1980 pop.	Per capita income in 1987	Earnings as percent of income in 1987
<b>A Counties</b>						
Low	9.8	35.4	6.0	-14.7	\$ 9,823	62.2
High	12.3	53.2	15.5	23.6	\$12,263	81.1
<b>B Counties</b>						
Low	10.3	34.4	12.3	-28.7	\$ 8,720	57.4
High	11.0	40.0	30.2	-7.5	\$ 9,728	68.5

(continued)

**Table 6 (continued). Ranges of key economic variables, by county groups.**

Group	Median years education in 1980	Labor force as percent of pop. in 1987	Unemploy. rate in 1987	1970-80 net migration as percent of 1980 pop.	Per capita income in 1987	Earnings as percent of income in 1987
C Counties						
Low	8.6	29.8	11.4	-40.1	\$ 7,718	49.3
High	10.4	35.5	18.7	-0.6	\$ 8,651	70.3

**Table 7. Employment patterns in "A" Counties, for 1969 and 1986.**

Category	1969	1986	Percent of 1986 total	Percent change 1969-86
Total Employment	101,239	115,164	100.00	13.75
Total Wage and Salary Employment	86,283	96,428	83.73	11.76
Number of Proprietors	14,956	18,736	16.27	25.27
Farm Proprietors	7,209	3,840	3.33	-46.73
Nonfarm Proprietors	7,747	14,896	12.93	92.28
Private	59,369	72,698	63.13	22.45
Mining	526	375	0.33	-28.71
Construction	3,683	3,155	2.74	-14.34
Manufacturing	17,709	22,461	19.50	26.83
Nondurable Goods	5,491	10,288	8.93	87.36
Food and Kindred Products	1,362	2,467	2.14	81.13
Textile Mill Products	1,314	943	0.82	-28.23
Apparel and Other Textile Products	731	2,304	2.00	215.18
Paper and Allied Products	450	703	0.61	56.22
Printing and Publishing	323	1,297	1.13	301.55
Chemicals and Allied Products	833	1,384	1.20	66.15
Petroleum and Coal Products	123	139	0.12	13.01
Rubber and Miscellaneous Plastic Products	355	1,051	0.91	196.06

(continued)

**Table 7 (continued). Employment patterns in "A" Counties, for 1969 and 1986.**

Category	1969	1986	Percent of 1986 total	Percent change 1969-86
Durable Goods	12,218	12,173	10.57	-0.37
Lumber and Wood Products	2,703	1,833	1.59	-32.19
Furniture and Fixture	1,334	1,847	1.60	38.46
Primary Metal Industries	201	519	0.45	158.21
Fabricated Metal Products	1,850	1,332	1.16	-28.00
Machinery, Except Electrical	1,752	1,572	1.37	-10.27
Electric and Electronic Equipment	1,764	1,212	1.05	-31.29
Transportation Equipment Except Motor Vehicles.	880	1,386	1.20	57.50
Motor Vehicles and Equipment	42	935	0.81	2,126.19
Stone, Clay, and Glass Products	356	602	0.52	69.10
Instruments and Related Products	0	87	0.08	---
Miscellaneous Manufacturing Industry	1,324	848	0.74	-35.95
Transportation and Public Utilities	4,072	4,716	4.10	15.82
Wholesale Trade	2,294	5,008	4.35	118.31
Retail Trade	10,464	15,732	13.66	50.34
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	1,921	2,931	2.55	52.58
Services	18,131	17,268	14.99	-4.76
Government and Government Enterprises	18,732	20,133	17.48	7.48
Federal, Civilian	3,818	4,782	4.15	25.25
Federal, Military	2,619	1,905	1.65	-27.26
State and Local	12,295	13,446	11.68	9.36

Source: Bureau of Economics Analyses (unpublished data) 1989.

**Table 8. Employment patterns in "B" Counties, for 1969 and 1986.**

Category	1969	1986	Percent of 1986 total	Percent change 1969-86
Total Employment	61,057	57,312	100.00	-6.13
Total Wage and Salary Employment	49,944	48,349	84.36	-3.19
Number of Proprietors	11,113	8,963	15.64	-19.35
Farm Proprietors	6,678	2,454	4.28	-63.25
Nonfarm Proprietors	4,435	6,509	11.36	46.76
Private	29,693	32,266	56.30	8.67
Agricultural Services, Forestry, Fisheries, and Other	343	949	1.66	176.68
Mining	82	42	0.07	-48.78
Construction	1,067	969	1.69	-9.18
Manufacturing	8,226	10,379	18.11	26.17
Nondurable Goods	5,540	6,373	11.12	15.04
Food and Kindred Products	849	2,117	3.69	149.35
Textile Mill Products	1,535	907	1.58	-40.91
Apparel and Other Textile Products	851	896	1.56	5.29
Paper and Allied Products	71	48	0.08	-32.39
Printing and Publishing	111	211	0.37	90.09
Chemicals and Allied Products	1,124	1,154	2.01	2.67
Rubber and Miscellaneous Plastics Products	728	1,040	1.81	42.86
Leather and Leather Products	270	0	0.00	-100.00
Durable Goods	2,686	4,006	6.99	49.14
Lumber and Wood Products	247	292	0.51	18.22
Furniture and Fixtures	416	375	0.65	-9.86
Primary Metal Industries	57	421	0.73	638.60

(continued)

**Table 8 (continued). Employment patterns in "B" Counties, for 1969 and 1986.**

Category	1969	1986	Percent of 1986 total	Percent change 1969-86
Fabricated Metal Products	791	971	1.69	22.76
Machinery, Except Electrical	641	1,093	1.91	70.51
Electric and Electronic Equipment	48	186	0.32	287.50
Transport. Equip. Except Motor Vehicles	6	37	0.06	516.67
Motor Vehicles and Equipment	53	302	0.53	469.81
Stone, Clay, and Glass Products	337	236	0.41	-29.97
Miscellaneous Manufacturing Industry	90	93	0.16	3.33
Transportation and Public Utilities	1,427	1,254	2.19	-12.12
Wholesale Trade	1,488	2,663	4.65	78.97
Retail Trade	5,127	6,333	11.05	23.52
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	772	1,364	2.38	76.68
Services	11,161	8,313	14.50	-25.52
Government and Government Enterprises	10,447	12,220	21.32	16.97
Federal, Civilian	584	490	0.85	-16.10
Federal Military	1,668	985	1.72	-40.95
State and Local	8,195	10,745	18.75	31.12

Source: Bureau of Economic Analyses (unpublished data), 1989.

**Table 9. Employment patterns in "C" Counties, for 1969 and 1986.**

Category	1969	1986	Percent of 1986 total	Percent change 1969-86
Total Employment	27,611	20,199	100.00	-26.84
Total Wage and Salary Employment	20,248	15,316	75.83	-24.36

(continued)



**Table 9 (continued). Employment patterns in "C" Counties, for 1969 and 1986.**

Category	1969	1986	Percent of 1986 total	Percent change 1969-86
Number of Proprietors	7,363	4,883	24.17	-33.68
Farm Proprietors	5,232	2,364	11.70	-54.82
Nonfarm Proprietors	2,131	2,519	12.47	18.21
Private	9,948	8,937	43.75	-11.17
Agricultural Services, Forestry, Fisheries, and Other	218	499	2.47	128.90
Mining	49	69	0.34	40.82
Construction	159	216	1.07	35.85
Manufacturing	2,212	2,518	12.47	13.83
Nondurable Goods	1,661	1,123	5.56	-32.39
Food and Kindred Products	263	168	0.83	-36.12
Textile Mill Products	289	260	1.29	-10.03
Apparel and Other Textile Products	934	558	2.76	-40.26
Paper and Allied Products	47	52	0.26	10.64
Printing and Publishing	24	14	0.07	-41.67
Chemicals and Allied Products	34	39	0.19	14.71
Rubber and Miscellaneous Plastics Products	69	32	0.16	-53.62
Durable Goods	551	1,395	6.91	153.18
Lumber and Wood Products	137	716	3.54	422.63
Furniture and Fixtures	24	0	0.00	-100.00
Primary Metal Industries	0	0	0.00	--
Fabricated Metal Products	54	79	0.39	46.30

(continued)

**Table 9 (continued). Employment patterns in "C" Counties, for 1969 and 1986.**

Category	1969	1986	Percent of 1986 total	Percent change 1969-86
Machinery, Except Electrical	0	159	0.79	--
Electric and Electronic Equipment	36	193	0.96	436.11
Transport Equipment Except Motor Vehicles	60	0	0.00	-100.00
Motor Vehicles and Equipment	0	195	0.97	--
Stone, Clay, and Glass Products	12	13	0.06	8.33
Miscellaneous Manufacturing Industries	228	40	0.20	-82.46
Transportation and Public Utilities	465	270	1.34	-41.94
Wholesale Trade	171	634	3.14	270.76
Retail Trade	1,804	1,696	8.40	-5.99
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	235	391	1.94	66.38
Services	4,635	2,544	12.59	-45.11
Government and Government Enterprises	4,555	3,904	19.33	-14.29
Federal, Civilian	335	302	1.50	-9.85
Federal, Military	846	459	2.27	-45.74
State and Local	3,374	3,143	15.56	-6.85

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analyses (unpublished data), 1989.

# 9

## ***Public Health Care Funding in the Mississippi Delta***

*by*  
***Eunice R. McCulloch\****  
***Martin Wiseman***

Health care in Mississippi reflects a mosaic of differing services, funding sources, and levels of care. It is a network of interrelated programs, administrative units, and demographic and economic factors that cannot be easily disassembled for analysis. In general, in all counties in the state, a substantial number of public health care services are available. There is also considerable flexibility in the funding system, which makes it possible to divert money to and from programs and areas that may have a deficit or a relative surplus, thus making it possible to use available funds in the most efficient way.

However, considerable differences exist among counties and regions in the quantity and availability of health practitioners and services. The differences are particularly acute between sparsely populated rural areas and the urban centers. This situation persists in spite of state and community efforts to bring more physicians and facilities to the areas that do not have adequate health care services. Many parts of the Delta can be categorized as having insufficient numbers of health practitioners and facilities in both the public and private health care sectors. In many places, the shortage of health care practitioners may actually have a greater effect on services than the costs of those services.

Health care is funded by local and state appropriations, federal block grants, Medicare/Medicaid programs, third party collections and fees, and funds from industry and private individuals. Money may also enter the system from philanthropic foundations for special projects, such as the Robert Wood Johnson grant for neonatal services in several counties; but the full extent of such activities is not known by these authors. Major aspects of federal, state, and local fundings and how services are administered and distributed will be described. The funding formulas used for allocation of state and local revenues are of particular interest.

\*Eunice McCulloch is a Research Sociologist with the Social Science Research Center, and Martin Wiseman is Assistant Professor of Political Science, Mississippi State University.

## **Federal Funding**

In Mississippi, health care funding from federal programs tends to outweigh other sources of revenue. In 1989, for the State Department of Health, federal monies accounted for 48.5 percent of that agency's expenditures, state funds paid 19.0 percent, and local funds, 9.4 percent. Fees and refunds stood at 22.9 percent.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the services administered by the State Department of Health, some federal funds go directly to the communities, hospitals, nursing homes, etc. An example of community programs is the Community Health Center funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Two major kinds of federal programs act as basic funding sources, the programmatic block grants that target particular services and populations and the Social Security programs, and Medicare/Medicaid assistance, which pays for a range of services for those who qualify on the basis of age, physical condition, and/or financial need.

The federal health related programs of most significance in Mississippi are: the WIC program (Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children) funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA); the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) block grants; MCH (Maternal and Child Health) and PHHS (Preventative Health and Health Services); the HHS grants for Community Health Centers; other special grants to communities and hospitals; and the Medicaid program. The WIC, MCH, and PHHS are administered by the State Department of Health through its nine district offices. The Medicaid program has the status of an independent state agency and cooperates with health providers in funding services. Community health centers are private, nonprofit corporations governed by community residents. The majority of these centers are joined together as the Mississippi Primary Health Care Association. The major programs and Medicaid-funded services are described in more detail.

## **The WIC Program**

The federally funded (USDA) Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides food supplements and nutrition counseling to pregnant and nursing women, and infants and children up to age five. Recipients must be low income and nutritionally at risk. The goal of the program is to reduce health problems associated with poor nutrition during pregnancy, infancy, and early childhood and to reduce the infant mortality rate.

In Mississippi, the WIC program is administered by the State Department of Health. Eleven other states provide state funds to supplement the program, but Mississippi does not.<sup>2</sup> However, the program in Mississippi is considered a model one in that the state is able to reach a higher proportion of WIC eligibles than do most other states because of its efficient purchasing and distribution system. All WIC foods are purchased in bulk and distributed from state warehouses. Costs for WIC food are, therefore, lower than for other states and funds can be stretched to serve more participants. In early 1990, approximately half of the states were facing the reduction of WIC services because of costs; but the Mississippi program was not faced with these problems. Participation in the program is high in Mississippi at an estimated 63 percent of those eligible. This is higher than the national average of 45 percent. Health Department figures indicated an estimated monthly participation of 95,060 (includes women, children, and infants) in 1989.

---

<sup>1</sup>Mississippi State Department of Health *Annual Report 1989*.

<sup>2</sup>Center on Budget and Priority Issues, *Holes in the Safety Nets, Poverty Programs and Policies in the States: National Overview* (Washington, DC. 1988).

In the Delta, computations for 1988 data show that the 18 counties (22 percent of counties in the state) accounted for 27 percent of the total participation in the state. This is an average of 1,973 persons per county. Non-Delta counties averaged 1,492 participants per county; this was in spite of six counties having more than 3,000 participants with two of these (urban areas) having over 6,000. It is clear that the WIC program is a significant component of the health-care-related system in the Delta.

### **HHS Block Grants**

The two block grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and the Preventative Health and Health Services (PHHS) programs. Through these grants, some \$10 million are provided annually to the state to deal with particular health problems. The MCH grant is the larger with funds of around \$8.5 million for health care services.

Administered by the State Department of Health, MCH provides funds for maternity services, adolescent health services, and medical and surgical assistance to families of children with special health care needs, such as those with hemophilia, cystic fibrosis, and sickle cell anemia.

In 1988, approximately 18,000 women in Mississippi received maternity services, and over 115,000 children received health services statewide. The 18 Delta counties accounted for 25 percent of the total participation for maternity services and 31.6 percent of the state's participation for children's services under this program.

The PHHS grant is used for activities that stress prevention and control of diseases. Targeted are diseases such as tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases, the virus that causes AIDS, and others that can be prevented through vaccination. These funds are also used in a hypertension program, community fluoridation, health promotion activities related to tobacco, alcohol, and drug use, and rape prevention and crisis intervention projects. Because of the somewhat flexible and discretionary nature of the use of these funds, county breakdowns of participation by fund or activity are not readily obtainable.

### **Community Health Care Centers**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funds, together with fees collected, also support 34 community health centers in the state. These are private nonprofit community-governed corporations designed to provide health services to medically underserved populations in urban and rural areas.

The centers offer comprehensive health services, including medical, dental, radiology, pharmacy, nutrition, health education, social services, and transportation. Centers are located in each of six Delta counties: Bolivar, Coahoma, Humphreys, Tunica, Warren, and Yazoo. For 10 of the remaining 18 Delta counties, a center is located in an adjacent county; Issaquena and Carroll populations do not have access within a county's distance.

### **Medicare and Medicaid**

Medicare and Medicaid are funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through its Health Care Financing Administration. Most persons are familiar with the Medicare program in a general way and only a brief overview is offered here.

The Medicare program covers hospital, physician, and other medical services for persons aged 65 and over, disabled persons entitled to Social Security cash benefits for 24 consecutive months, and most persons with end-stage renal disease. Two distinct parts, Hospital Insurance (Part A) and Supplemental Medical Insurance (Part B), are complementary with Part B requiring a monthly premium. Part A covers 90 days of inpatient hospital care in a benefit period that begins with hospitalization and ends when the beneficiary has not been an

inpatient in a hospital or skilled nursing facility for 60 continuous days. The Part B program provides payment for physicians and related services and supplies ordered by the physician. It also covers outpatient hospital services, rural health clinic visits, and home health visits.

### **Medicaid**

Participation in the Medicaid program is more directly reflective of the levels of public health care needs and services. This program is of vital importance to health care in Mississippi, particularly in the Delta counties, providing financial assistance for essential health care services to a great many Delta residents.

Under Medicaid federal regulations, each state has considerable discretion in determining who is eligible for program benefits. This is because of eligibility discretion concerning the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs, since persons eligible for these are automatically eligible for Medicaid. However, because each state exercises discretion concerning AFDC and SSI eligibility, Medicaid benefits vary substantially among states. Federal law also provides a number of eligibility options, and Mississippi has extended coverage to several of these. The groups in Mississippi eligible for coverage are:<sup>3</sup>

1. *Recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).*<sup>4</sup>
2. *Children up to age 6 years, in families with income not over 133 percent of the federal poverty level (monthly income of \$934 for a family of 2).*
3. *Children up to age 18 years, and pregnant women in intact families who meet AFDC criteria.*
4. *Pregnant women and infants with incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level (monthly income of \$1,957 for a family of 4).*
5. *Pregnant women who would be eligible for AFDC if their children were born.*
6. *Aged, blind, or disabled persons who live at home and qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI).*
7. *Aged, blind, or disabled persons in need of institutional care who have been in an institution for 30 or more consecutive days and whose income does not exceed \$1,104 per month.*
8. *Aged, blind, or disabled persons with total resources less than \$2,000 for an individual and \$3,000 for a couple whose incomes are at or below 90 percent of the poverty level (\$632 per month) with phase-in up to 100 percent of the poverty level by January 1, 1992. Aged, blind, or disabled persons with total resources between \$2,000 to \$4,000 for an individual and between \$4,000 to \$6,000 for a couple whose incomes are at or below 90 percent of the poverty level with phase-in up to 100 percent of the poverty level by January 1, 1992. The individuals in this group are referred to as *Qualified Medicare Beneficiaries* and do not receive full Medicaid benefits. Medicaid pays only for co-insurance, deductibles, and premiums for Medicare.*
9. *Certain disabled children under age 18, who are living at home but who would be eligible for Medicaid if they were in an institution.*
10. *Children under state and county custody in foster homes or with adoptive parents.*
11. *Disabled workers eligible to enroll in Medicare, whose incomes do not exceed 200 percent of the federal poverty level, eligible as *Qualified Medicaid Beneficiaries*.*

---

<sup>3</sup>As of July 1, 1990. Mississippi Legislature, House Bill 1467, signed April 4, 1990.

<sup>4</sup>As of October 1, 1990, the AFDC-unemployed parent program was added.

Federal law mandates certain basic health services under the Medicaid program. In addition, there are 32 services that are optional and are selected at the discretion of each state. The services provided in Mississippi are:<sup>5</sup>

1. *Inpatient hospital care for 30 days (infants up to age 1 year are allowed 365 days in certain hospitals).*
2. *Outpatient hospital care for six emergency room visits.*
3. *Nursing facility care.*
4. *Intermediate care facility services for mentally retarded.*
5. *Up to five prescriptions for drugs per month for noninstitutionalized recipients.*
6. *Home and/or community-based services.*
7. *Early periodic screening, diagnosis, and treatment services for children up to 21 years (children's preventative health program).<sup>6</sup>*
8. *Physician services, 12 visits per year; unlimited for pregnancy-related visits.*
9. *Laboratory services.*
10. *Essential transportation, including emergency ambulance services.*
11. *Adult dental services essential to acute medical or surgical conditions and emergency extractions.*
12. *Home health; 50 visits per year.*
13. *Certain durable, medical equipment and supplies.*
14. *Eyeglasses, one pair, if needed due to surgery.*
15. *Family planning services.*
16. *Rural health clinic services.*
17. *Nurse-midwifery services.*
18. *Christian Science sanatoria.*
19. *Nurse-anesthetist services.*
20. *Clinic services.*
21. *Mental health services in an approved mental health/retardation center.*
22. *Inpatient hospital services and nursing facility services for persons 65 years of age or older in an institution for mental disease.*
23. *Nurse practitioner services.*
24. *Perinatal risk management services.<sup>7</sup>*
25. *Ambulatory services in health centers, local health department clinics.*
26. *Inpatient psychiatric services.*
27. *Managed-care services (pilot program in two sites).*
28. *Birth center services.*
29. *Hospice care (pilot program, one site).*

Medicaid expenditures in fiscal year 1989 in Mississippi totaled \$477,341,680. The state's share of these expenditures varied by program, but the overall match was 20.2 percent to the federal share of 79.8 percent.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>As of July 1, 1990.

<sup>6</sup>As of July 1, 1990, all necessary treatments for mental and physical conditions identified through this program are required by federal Medicaid law. Additional services, such as organ transplants and payment for specialty medical equipment and supplies, are included.

<sup>7</sup>As of October 1, 1990.

<sup>8</sup>Mississippi Division of Medicaid *Annual Report*, 1989.

County participation is, of course, proportional to the number of financially needy and the number of health practitioners who participate in the Medicaid program. Percentages of county populations eligible for Medicaid are generally considerably higher in the Delta core counties than in the state as a whole, less so in the Delta fringe counties. (Core counties are those that lie entirely within the flood plain of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley, and fringe counties are those that only partially lie within the flood plain.) Both groups of counties, although quite similar in many respects, exhibit different social, political, and economic characteristics. (See Chapter 15, "The Agricultural Base," for a detailed discussion of these characteristics.) Table 1 (page 159) shows the numbers and percentages of Medicaid eligibles for all the Delta counties for fiscal year 1989.<sup>9</sup> In the core counties, the average was 32.9 percent; for the fringe counties, 21.5 percent; and for non-Delta counties, 17.3 percent. The average for the core counties, almost twice as high as for non-Delta counties, reflects the greater poverty and need for medical assistance. Fringe counties vary from the second lowest in the state for DeSoto (7.0 percent)<sup>10</sup> to those, such as Holmes, Panola, and Yazoo, with high percentages of eligibles. The highest percentage of eligibles, 41.8 percent, is found in the core county of Tunica.

Table 1 also shows the amount of expenditures, by county of residence, for recipients. Of the total amount spent for health services, 22.7 percent was spent on health care for residents of the 18 Delta counties (22 percent of all the counties). If this is separated into core and fringe counties, the eligible participation of the 11 core counties (13.4 percent) received services that accounted for 15.3 percent of the Medicaid funds for 1989. On the other hand, in the seven fringe counties (8.5 percent of the counties) funds spent were at 7.4 percent of the total.

These expenditures per county do not tell the complete story. Counties with multiple facilities, such as hospitals, health centers, nursing homes, and retardation and mental health centers, will receive proportionately more Medicaid funds. This also applies to the number of doctors and other practitioners who participate in the Medicaid program. Although amounts shown are for recipients by county of resident, ready access to providers is an important factor in seeking treatment. Thus, it cannot be assumed that all those persons eligible for services will receive medical services even though they may need them.

### **Overview of State and Local Funding**

State and local funding presents a picture best described as a "patchwork quilt" of revenues, targeted as accurately as possible at the areas of the state with the greatest number and variety of problems. The State of Mississippi is broken down into nine health districts ranging in size from 6 counties in District IX to 11 counties in District II. These districts are the primary mechanisms for allocating state appropriated funds.

Local funds consist of appropriations from county governing bodies, voluntary appropriations from cities, personal health fees, and sanitation fees. Flexibility is built into the funding system in that revenues not expended by the districts are considered as "earned revenues" and may be carried over from one year to the next. The allocation formula is updated based on projections of earned revenues. This combination of state appropriated funds, local appropriated funds, and revenues generated from user fees appears to be beneficial to those districts whose counties would otherwise lack leveraging in the basic funding formula.

This section will examine, in some detail, the state appropriation process and the formulas for making allocations to the districts. In addition, it will include an analysis of locally generated revenues. This, combined with the previous discussion of federal funding, will allow

---

<sup>9</sup>These numbers will be higher for 1990, since broader coverage was enacted by the State Legislature.

<sup>10</sup>Only Rankin County had a lower percent of eligibles at 6.6 percent.



for some speculation concerning the adequacy of health care funding for the counties in the Mississippi Delta.

### **State Appropriations**

The Legislature of Mississippi appropriates funds to the State Department of Health through its normal budgetary process. The Legislature may choose to target or “earmark” a portion of the annual budgetary allocation for specific problems statewide. Thus, the allocation of state-appropriated funds becomes a multistaged process. Before allocation for normal operations can take place, legislative funds “earmarked” by the legislature for special purposes must be subtracted from the total state appropriation. The remainder is available for allocation on two levels, the state office and the district level. Thus, the initial formula for allocation of the state appropriation would be as follows:

***Total State Appropriations - Legislative Earmarks = Total Allocable***

These funds are then divided between the district level and the central office level by employing percentages based on past history. Currently, these percentages are 48.7 percent for the district level and 51.3 percent for the state level or central office. A large proportion of central office funds is also used to purchase goods and services for local areas. Thus, the total district allocation would be made according to the following formula:

***Total Allocable - Central Office (51.3 percent) = District Allocation (48.7 percent)***

The district allocation is comprised of the aggregate of funds to be further allocated to the respective districts. Before this allocation can take place, however, the value of each district’s core staff (based on salaries and fringe benefits) must be established. A district core staff consists of the District Health Office, Administrator, District Sanitarian, District Supervising Nurse, District Office Systems Supervisor, and Secretary. The allotment for district core staffs statewide comprises approximately 25 percent of the total district allocation. The formula for this may be stated as follows:

***District Allocation - Core Staff Allotment = Balance To Be Allocated***

It is at this point that regional factors begin to play a role in the allocation process. Of the nine districts in the state, three (Districts I, III, and V) contain counties in the core or fringe Delta. In District I, eight of the nine counties may be labeled either core Delta or fringe Delta. In District III, seven of the nine counties are either core or fringe Delta and in District V, four of ten counties are either core or fringe Delta. This is significant because the allocation formula, at this stage, accesses data related to population, income levels, and volume of public health service usage. As is discussed in other chapters of this report, there are significant differences in the demographics of the Delta when compared to the rest of the state. This fact makes a difference in the “leveraging” capabilities of the districts containing Delta counties. This may best be illustrated by reviewing the allocation formula for the district allocable balance. This formula may be stated as follows:

***Percent of the Total State Population in Each District + Percentage of Families with Income Less Than Poverty Level in Each District, Divided by 2 + Percentage of the Total Patient Registration by District, Divided by 2.***

An examination of Table 2 (page 160) illustrates the impact of this funding formula on the district allocations. Of the three districts containing Delta counties, only District V has a significantly higher population than other districts in the state. This picture changes

somewhat when the Percentage of Families Below the Poverty Level is examined. The three Delta-related districts exhibit the highest percentages in this category, with Districts III and V at 16.83 percent and 17.49 percent, respectively, almost doubling the other districts. The category titled Percentage of Total Patient Registrations by District refers to the number of persons availing themselves of public health services. Here again, the three Delta-related districts exhibit considerably higher figures than do the other districts in the state. The final variable appearing in Table 2 contains the dollar amount of the state allocation. District I shows a state allocation only slightly higher than might be expected given the large number of Delta counties in that district. However, the counties contained in this district are some of the least populated in the Delta region. The allocations for Districts III and V clearly illustrate the impact of the funding formula. In these districts, all three variables (Percentage of Population, Percentage of Families Below the Poverty Level, and Percentage of Total Patient Registrations) combine to leverage the highest district allotments from the state allocation.

The data presented in Table 2 provide fairly clear evidence that an effort is made from the state level to target funds toward those areas with the greatest potential needs. These state funds are combined with the funds of various federal programs that reach the district level and that are allocated in much the same way. Once allocation to the districts takes place, district administration designates the level of funding for each county office within that district. This county portion of state and federal monies is then supplemented by local appropriations and locally generated revenues. The next segment of this chapter will discuss these funds from local sources.

### **Revenues from Local Sources**

Local revenues consist of funds from the appropriations from counties, appropriations from cities, personal health fees, and sanitation fees. Income from interest on funds is not included in projections for fund allocations. Because of the intergovernmental mix of revenues, analysis of local funding will center on the consideration of local effort in generating this increment of funding.

Table 3 (pages 160-161) contains several variables related to local government revenues. Very little funding comes from cities. There is no requirement for cities to allocate monies to county health departments. Any appropriation from cities is purely voluntary. The data for revenues from city sources reveal very limited participation by cities in the county health programs. In some of the core Delta counties, there are no contributions from any city within those counties. Only in Leflore County do city contributions exceed the non-Delta county average. The four noncontributors are Humphreys, Quitman, Tallahatchie, and Tunica—some of the most depressed counties in the region. For the seven fringe Delta counties, there were no contributions at all from municipalities within those counties. While the amounts of municipal contributions are low for all counties, regardless of where they are located, the non-Delta counties exhibit a level of municipal contributions that is between four and five times greater than that of the core Delta counties. Municipal government will be discussed later as a potential source of increased county health department support.

The major source of local revenues to the respective county health departments is county government. The level of county funds allocated to the county health departments is also the most predictable, in that these contributions are not voluntary and they are not directly dependent on level of services delivered as are the fee categories. In examining the county category, Table 3 shows that the appropriations for county health departments in core Delta counties are comparable with and in many cases actually exceed the other categories of counties in the table. With an average appropriation of \$99,790, the core counties greatly exceed the fringe counties at \$71,545, the non-Delta counties at an average of \$78,850, and the all-county average of \$81,036. This is an initial indicator of the significant level of effort

expended by those counties in the core Delta. The same is not necessarily true for counties in the fringe Delta.

Physicians' fees, while their amounts are fixed, are actually assessed based on the ability of the recipient to pay. It is in this category that socioeconomic factors become quite obvious in the process of local revenue generation. The counties of the core Delta, although having a large Medicaid population, exhibit significantly lower physician-fee-generating capacity. Core Delta counties average \$9,794 per year in these fees, as compared to \$18,037 for the non-Delta counties. The figure for fringe Delta counties stands at \$12,805. These figures clearly indicate the lack of ability to pay on the part of Delta residents. Indicators earlier in the chapter, pertaining to level of demand, reveal a higher level for these counties than in the remainder of the state. In short, services are being rendered at a higher level with fees being generated at lower levels.

The category of sanitation fees is directly related to the number of new homes, the number of food businesses, and to the level and quality of sanitary facilities possessed by residents. The core Delta counties exhibit an average of \$2,329 per year in sanitation fees. This compares to an average of \$6,042 per year for non-Delta counties. Ironically, sanitation fees for fringe counties are the highest in the state at \$7,592.

In examining the total per-county-revenue-generation effort, it would perhaps be best to consider "total local" revenues and "per capita" revenues together. The average total local revenues for core counties is \$110,017. This is almost identical to the figure for non-Delta counties. The average for fringe Delta counties is significantly lower at \$93,372. When per capita revenues are considered, the averages for core Delta and non-Delta counties are identical. Four core counties, Bolivar, Leflore, Quitman, and Tunica, either equal or surpass the \$4 per capita core Delta and non-Delta averages. The per capita revenues for the fringe counties average only \$2.40. None of the fringe counties reach the averages of the two previously discussed categories. One county, Tate, has the lowest per capita level of local government revenues in the state.

An additional, interesting pair of measures is available. These assist in determining if the Delta is performing at an acceptable level as compared to the remainder of the state. These variables are county-assessed value, labeled "Tax Value" in Table 3, and the millage equivalent, labeled "Millage" in the table. The millage equivalent is a figure representing the ratio of Total Local Revenues to Assessed Value. Calculating this ratio yields a figure in terms of dollars per thousand or "mills." Thus, the data in this variable represents "dollars generated locally for public health purposes per thousand dollars of assessed value." Assessed value is significantly lower in the core and fringe Delta counties as compared to the non-Delta counties.<sup>11</sup> The millage equivalent for public health purposes for core counties is 1.3 or the highest for any of the studied regions. The fringe counties exhibit the lowest millage equivalent in the state for local revenues for public health at .8 mills, which is .1 of a mill lower than in the non-Delta counties. These data are important for what they reveal about the revenue-generation effort. It would appear that the core Delta counties are performing at a satisfactory level given the lower aggregate levels of property values in that section. The same cannot be said of the fringe counties, since the millage equivalent represents the lowest revenues-to-value ratio.

### **Summary of Funding for County Health Departments**

The previous discussion has focused on the intergovernmental sources of revenues for public health services. The problem of funding is exceeded only by the magnitude of the health

---

<sup>11</sup>See Chapter 13, "Local Government Capacity," this volume.

problems in the Mississippi Delta. It is apparent that the State Department of Health faces a formidable task in targeting federal and state monies to those districts and subsequently to counties that need it most. While the funding apparatus from this level is not perfect, it is obvious that an effort is being made to address the myriad of health problems that exist in the Delta as well as in the rest of the state. There is, however, more that could be done on the local level. The fact that very few municipalities make a significant contribution to county health department revenues, and that many contribute nothing at all, indicates that this would be a good source of additional funds. Legislation may be necessary to mandate municipal funding for county health departments based on an equitable formula. This would be a "stop-gap" formula at best. Rapidly increasing costs and increasing demands for more health care will require higher levels of funding and greater organizational and administrative efficiencies. The best way to meet these demands may be a greater emphasis on new and innovative health care delivery systems.

In general, funding from other levels is beyond the reach of local efforts, except for political activity. Little may be expected from the state level, because of the heavy and growing obligation placed on the State Legislature to fund the state match for federal Medicaid funds. It must be hoped that any effort at improving the Delta from the federal level will include significant levels of funding for some of the most disheartening health problems existing there. Infant mortality and family planning are two of the most obvious areas for targeting, but there are many more.

**Table 1. Number of persons eligible for Medicaid, FY 1989.**

County	Population	Number of Medicaid Eligibles	Percentage of Population	Expenditures for Recipients by County of Residence
Core Counties				
Bolivar	42,400	14,918	35.2	\$12,974,148
Coahoma	34,000	12,221	35.9	12,642,212
Humphreys	13,400	4,011	29.9	3,051,457
Issaquena	2,200	594	27.0	276,104
Leflore	38,200	10,966	28.7	11,110,896
Quitman	10,900	3,947	36.2	3,831,708
Sharkey	7,200	2,853	39.6	2,377,783
Sunflower	35,700	9,992	28.0	7,120,503
Tallahatchie	16,800	5,286	31.5	3,938,387
Tunica	8,900	3,716	41.8	2,193,933
Washington	69,700	19,274	27.7	13,442,314
Fringe Counties				
Carroll	9,700	1,666	17.2	1,269,988
DeSoto	70,100	4,936	7.0	3,782,878
Holmes	22,600	9,310	41.2	6,202,897
Panola	30,500	6,878	22.6	6,859,345
Tate	22,100	3,641	16.5	3,499,917
Warren	49,800	8,567	17.2	7,521,025
Yazoo	26,100	7,555	28.9	6,196,297
<b>AVERAGE (Core Counties)</b>	<b>25,400</b>	<b>7,980</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>6,632,677</b>
<b>AVERAGE (Fringe Counties)</b>	<b>32,986</b>	<b>6,079</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>5,047,478</b>
<b>AVERAGE (Non-Delta)</b>	<b>32,959</b>	<b>5,043</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>5,766,404</b>
<b>AVERAGE (All Counties)</b>	<b>31,948</b>	<b>5,525</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>5,821,240</b>

Source: Mississippi Division of Medicaid Annual Report 1989.

**Table 2. Percentage of 1988 population, by district; percentage of families with income below poverty level, by district; and percentage of total patient registration, by district.**

	Percent 1988 Population	Percent Families With Income Below Poverty	Percent of Total Patient Registration by District	State Allocation
District I	8.44	10.86	9.72	\$ 913,378
District II	11.23	9.15	9.80	910,619
District III	10.89	16.83	15.26	1,188,852
District IV	9.37	9.65	10.45	954,536
District V	20.38	17.49	15.34	1,353,686
District VI	8.88	9.14	9.28	847,179
District VII	6.88	7.88	9.02	805,079
District VIII	9.76	9.21	10.00	917,773
District IX	14.24	9.78	11.13	1,070,707

Source: State Department of Health, "Funds Allocation Formula for FY 89," (unpublished report) 1989.

**Table 3. Locally generated public health funds, FY 1989.**

County	City	County	Physi- cian Fees	Sanita- tion Fees	Total Local	Per Capita	Tax Value	Millage Equivalent
Core Counties								
Bolivar	\$1,200	\$188,055	\$13,331	\$4,095	\$206,681	\$4.40	\$127,856,310	1.5
Coahoma	2,625	133,623	8,048	2,970	147,266	3.90	95,512,057	1.4
Humphreys	0	5,000	8,424	1,480	59,904	3.70	39,088,609	1.3
Issaquena	480	34,000	0	105	105	3.70	42,707,707	.8
Leflore	5,822	176,880	10,971	3,410	197,083	4.70	121,708,367	1.5
Quitman	0	59,500	4,386	890	64,776	5.40	32,605,673	1.8
Sharkey	480	34,000	5,529	815	40,824	3.70	42,707,707	.8
Sunflower	2,400	138,140	16,170	1,970	158,880	3.90	95,307,204	1.5
Tallahatchie	0	63,495	10,325	1,610	75,430	3.90	45,992,316	1.4
Tunica	0	36,000	3,191	405	39,676	4.00	2,959,557	1.3
Washington	333	184,000	27,364	7,875	219,572	2.60	230,033,095	.8

(continued)

**Table 3 (continued). Locally generated public health funds, FY 1989.**

County	City	County	Physi- cian Fees	Sanitation Fees	Total Local	Per Capita	Tax Value	Millage Equivalent
Fringe Counties								
Carroll	\$0	\$ 33,000	\$ 2,668	\$ 1,215	\$ 36,882	\$ 3.40	\$ 28,624,018	1.2
DeSoto	0	155,000	17,371	25,730	198,101	2.40	220,796,098	.7
Holmes	0	55,000	7,716	2,095	64,811	2.40	53,622,735	1.0
Panola	0	74,512	11,549	4,395	90,456	2.50	87,427,118	.9
Tate	0	27,674	8,814	6,105	52,593	1.70	560,075,930	.7
Warren	0	99,917	23,875	10,960	134,752	2.00	225,372,403	.4
Yazoo	0	55,718	17,647	2,645	76,010	2.10	9,100,839	.6
<b>AVERAGE (Core Counties)</b>	<b>1,213</b>	<b>99,790</b>	<b>9,795</b>	<b>2,329</b>	<b>110,018</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>79,679,873</b>	<b>1.3</b>
<b>AVERAGE (Fringe Counties)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>71,546</b>	<b>12,806</b>	<b>7,592</b>	<b>93,372</b>	<b>2.40</b>	<b>97,288,449</b>	<b>.8</b>
<b>AVERAGE (Non-Delta Counties)</b>	<b>5,663</b>	<b>78,851</b>	<b>18,037</b>	<b>6,042</b>	<b>108,637</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>113,193,018</b>	<b>.9</b>
<b>AVERAGE (All Counties)</b>	<b>4,583</b>	<b>81,036</b>	<b>16,485</b>	<b>5,676</b>	<b>107,519</b>	<b>3.90</b>	<b>107,339,645</b>	<b>.9</b>

Prepared by Monitor MISSISSIPPI Laboratory, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University, 1990.

## *Chapter*

# 10

### *At-Risk Youth*

*by*  
*W. Ross Story\**

#### **Introduction**

In 1956, the Delta Council put forth a special effort to improve the Delta's economy by establishing a full-time Industrial and Community Development Department. This department was organized to improve the quality of life for Delta residents.

In 1987, the Delta Council compiled an economic progress report that indicated economic conditions had improved in several different areas. Several bright spots point out the underlying strengths of the Delta economy. Total employment increased by 3,610 jobs in 1986, an increase of almost 2 percent. This increase was twice as great as job growth in 1985 and exceeded the 1986 statewide growth rate of 1.4 percent.

In keeping with national trends, manufacturing employment grew at a slower rate than the rest of the economy, only 0.7 percent in 1986; but total wages in manufacturing increased by over \$27 million, an increase of 4.4 percent. Other economic indicators, such as retail sales (up 3.1 percent) and sales tax collections (up 11.8 percent), suggest the nonagricultural part of the Delta economy had a moderately good year in 1986.

Within manufacturing in 1986, the strongest performances were in the areas of food processing, textiles, lumber, and nonelectrical machinery. Continued weakness was experienced in the apparel industry, which has suffered from substantial competition from imports. However, the impact of the weakness in the apparel industry is somewhat lessened, because wages in the apparel industry are usually below those in other areas of manufacturing. Other industries that suffered employment losses, primarily reflecting national trends, were paper, chemicals, and petroleum.

From 1960 to 1970, the Delta's population decreased from approximately 550,491 to approximately 498,010. According to the 1980 census, the Delta's population increased to 530,427. However, there was not a significant increase in population from 1980 to 1986. It has been predicted that the population of the Delta will continue to decrease. Obviously, if the population continues to decrease, the economic health of the area will probably not improve; therefore, community leaders should put forth a special effort to attract good-paying jobs to

\*Dean of the Division of Continuing Education and Professor of Counselor Education, Delta State University.



the Delta. To be successful in encouraging industries to move to this area, there is a need to have a skilled labor force. Even though the Education Reform Act of 1982 has resulted in significant improvements in the quality of public education, more needs to be done to make sure that these improvements continue. We should not rest until every boy and girl is assured a good basic education.

The Delta has a large percentage of at-risk children in its public schools, largely because of the high concentration of economically, socially, and culturally disadvantaged families. To increase the chances of providing a good basic education to this group of boys and girls, there is a need to develop strategies for reducing the school drop-out rate, teenage pregnancies, youth crime, and teenage drug abuse.

An article in the Jackson (MS) Clarion-Ledger printed in 1989 revealed the following array of statistics that highlight educational problems statewide:

- o Forty-five percent of Mississippi's adults haven't finished high school;
- o Twenty-five percent of the state's adult population can't read or write;
- o Scores of Mississippi high school students continue to rank last in the country on the standardized American College Test; and
- o The state's drop-out rate is one of the 5 highest in the country, estimated at 37 percent.

The term *at-risk youth* is used to describe young people who are in danger of dropping out of school and out of the labor market due to a variety of social, economic, and educational problems. Obviously, these are youth who are also very much at-risk of leading lives marred by crime and violence. It is also accurate to say that our nation is at-risk if we do not address the problem.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, educators have focused renewed interest on procedures for identifying students at-risk (students who are likely to leave school before receiving a high school diploma). The importance of accurate identification at an early age is founded on the assumption that early identification and intervention can significantly reduce drop-out rates, currently estimated at 25 percent nationally.<sup>2</sup>

The most obvious characteristic of at-risk students is academic underachievement. But solid evidence suggests using other characteristics as well to identify these children. Two salient factors appear to be family background and socioemotional functioning. Underachievement has been consistently associated with single-parent or broken-family environment. Underachievers and students at-risk can be characterized as apathetic or withdrawn, or conversely, as overtly disruptive.

In a study designed to examine characteristics of at-risk students, classroom teachers were given the opportunity to subjectively identify students at-risk. After a pool of at-risk students was identified by teachers, standardized data were collected using standard instruments to validate teachers' intuitive impressions. The results of this study indicated that teachers evaluated the at-risk students significantly more negatively than the actual dropouts had been evaluated on four variables: average class achievement, social competence, anxiety, and academic difficulty.<sup>3</sup>

The current drive for academic excellence is reaching an impasse. The convenient excuse—that we cannot instill rigor in our schools because it would push out minorities and

---

<sup>1</sup>W.H. Kolberg, "Employment, the Private Sector, and At-Risk Youth," *Annual of the American Academy of Political Science* 494 (1987): 94-97.

<sup>2</sup>D. Kagan, "How Do Teachers Define Students At-Risk?" *Clearing House* 61 (1988): 320.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 320-324.

the poor—has produced a system without rigor, and increasingly without minorities and the poor as well.<sup>4</sup>

To achieve both excellence and equity in our schools, we must change the way many schools are organized and operated. The passage of the Education Reform Act by the Mississippi Legislature in 1982 has resulted in positive changes in our educational system. But the drive for excellence and the reforms enacted in its name are not enough (see Tables 1 and 2, pages 173-174).

### **Teenage Pregnancy**

Teenage pregnancy is escalating at an alarming rate. In Mississippi, a special effort should be made to reduce the number of teen pregnancies, or we will be faced with a problem of such magnitude that one wonders how to solve this problem. A community is drained financially as a result of high teenage pregnancy rates.

Teen pregnancy and teen mothers are not new. Today one young woman in five becomes a teen mother. Among young women who turned 20 between 1945 and 1949, one in four had given birth. The consequences associated with teen pregnancy are different now. Most of these young families grew up in poverty.<sup>5</sup>

They grow up poor because at the time teens have babies, they have not acquired job skills, work experience, or landed their first "adult" job at "adult" wages. This experience "deficit" affects them the rest of their lives. In the Mississippi Delta, many of these inexperienced teens perpetuate the cycle of poverty. As a result of becoming a teen parent, they earn half the lifetime earnings of a woman who waits until age 20 to have her first child.

In addition to facing economic hardships, teenage mothers are more likely than older mothers to have birth complications and are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care. Low-birth-weight babies and premature births, which can lead to problems such as childhood illnesses, neurological defects, and mental retardation, are common to teenage mothers.

In about 45 percent of the cases, pregnant teenagers have abortions. Although the teenage pregnancy rate is increasing, the birth rate has declined. In fact, about 30 percent of all abortions in this country are performed on teenagers. Although many people see abortion as preferable to teen parenthood, it carries a host of emotional consequences, aside from any moral issues. Teenagers often don't seek abortions until late in the pregnancy, increasing the risk of complications and emotional distress.

In addition to the dire individual consequences of teenage pregnancy is the economic burden on society as a whole. According to the Center for Population Options in Washington, DC, teenage childbearing cost the United States \$16.65 billion in 1985. As the cost of living has escalated since 1985, it is logical to conclude that the cost of teenage childbearing has increased accordingly.

Teenage mothers from affluent, educated homes, or who were doing well before pregnancy, can bounce back quickly. But the majority lose ground. Today's teen couples who find themselves with a child at 17 fall 4 to 6 years behind their peers financially as the labor market's educational demands rise.

More than 40 percent of teenage girls who drop out of school cite pregnancy as the reason. Once they drop out, they become easy to ignore because they are at home taking care of their babies.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Rafael Valdivieso, "A Culture of Concern for At-Risk Students," *Educational Digest* 52 (1987): 29.

<sup>5</sup>M.W. Edelman, "Adolescent Pregnancy: Everybody's Problem," *Journal of Reading* 59 (1986): 158-160.

<sup>6</sup>L. Jolison, "Not Easy at All," *USA Weekend* 6 (1989): 7-10.

Young teenagers are not always capable of internalizing contraceptive information. Some young people don't have the psychological strength to recognize the consequences of their actions. Teenagers tend to be impulsive and have trouble deferring gratification and making long-range plans.<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes, deep down, teenagers want to become pregnant. They feel isolated and the prospect of a baby offers the possibility of someone to love. Pregnancy also brings attention to a girl who may feel neglected. The ploy of entrapping a boyfriend may motivate some teenagers to want to become pregnant. Others may see pregnancy as a way to assert their independence from their parents or to become their mothers' equals. Some may want to keep up with their pregnant girlfriends. However, most teenage girls who see someone else's cute, cuddly baby are in for a rude awakening when their own baby cries through the night and interferes with their social life.

Lower-income teenagers are more likely to become pregnant because of attitudes within the family. A tolerant family attitude toward early sexual activity and pregnancy is associated with high rates of teenage pregnancy. But if a teenage girl has a good relationship with her mother and if her mother is opposed to teenage pregnancy, it is less likely.<sup>8</sup>

With disadvantage creating disadvantage, it is no wonder that teen pregnancy is widely viewed as the very hub of the U.S. poverty cycle. The so-called feminization of poverty starts with teenagers having babies. Among the underclass in America's urban ghettos, the trends are especially disturbing. Nearly half of black females in the United States are pregnant by age 20. The pregnancy rate among those aged 15 to 19 is almost twice that among whites (see Table 3, page 175).

### Youth Crime

The United States has many features that make it unique among nations. Sadly, one of these is a uniquely high crime rate. Real reduction in our crime rate requires policies that address the social pathology that gives birth to excessively high levels of crime and violent behavior. Many factors contribute to this pathology, and its cure requires a coordinated attack from a variety of angles.<sup>9</sup> An increase in unemployment leads to an increase in crime. The sense of frustration and despair that joblessness can provoke finds expression in a variety of ways: theft, substance and alcohol abuse, and spouse and child abuse. Programs that fight unemployment fight crime as well. However, crime rates remain high in the United States whether unemployment rises or falls. A disproportionate amount of crime is committed by youth who have been labeled as at-risk. Any substantial reduction in our nation's crime rate requires that we address effectively the problems of at-risk youth.

The combined efforts of public and private leaders, government, community organizations, and families will be crucial in addressing the issues facing our nation's young people. Unemployment problems among young people cannot be solved in isolation, and success in moving at-risk youth into the economic mainstream can have a ripple effect of its own in reducing crime, drug use, and other undesirable forms of behavior.

According to FBI statistics, nationwide 1,311 kids under 18 were arrested for murder last year. That's a slight drop over the last 8 years and still represents less than 10 percent of total homicide arrests; most of those arrested were youths of ages 16 and 17. Nonetheless, each case presents an agonizing problem: What is to be done with an adolescent killer? Twenty-six states

---

<sup>7</sup>D.R. Gergen, "Childhood Lost," *U.S. News and World Report* 99 (1985): 78.

<sup>8</sup>E. Stark, "Young, Innocent, and Pregnant: Teenagers Get Pregnant for a Variety of Reasons," *Psychology Today* 20 (1986): 28-35.

<sup>9</sup>Kolberg, "Employment, the Private Sector, and At-Risk Youth."

now permit underage executions and death rows hold 37 teen killers. But many of the condemned will never face an executioner, and for most young killers, the legal system prescribes punishments far short of death. A Justice Department study commission has recommended that youths under 14 (who kill) be held for at least 7 years in a juvenile facility and that those over 15 be treated just as adult killers.<sup>10</sup>

The problem of juvenile delinquency has been compounded by "children's rights" legislation and juvenile court systems, and actions by educators and law enforcement agencies have proven to be only temporarily effective. Every effort should be made to build upon the actions of those who influence today's youth by alleviating those inconsistencies that defeat the intended purpose of curbing delinquency.

Delta-area law enforcement officers are reporting incidents of gang-related crimes. With the migration of American families from the large cities to small cities and towns, small communities and schools are seeing an increase in the activities and presence of youth gangs. With poverty, unemployment, lack of positive role models, and a constant erosion of the family as an institution, juvenile gangs will increase.

A gang is an organized group, with a recognized leader, whose activities are either criminal or, at the very least, threatening to the community. Unity, identity, loyalty, and reward are normally qualities that are admired. But when associated with gangs, they become distorted. They are traits each gang shares in order to survive.

Gangs display their identity and unity in obvious ways, such as the use of rings, colors, jargon, and signals. Members remain together in quiet times as well as in times of conflict. In response to this twisted loyalty, the "reward" is being accepted and recognized as a gang member.

One of the main sources of income for most gangs is narcotics. Members of all ages are utilized by the gang in the illegal sales of narcotics and other unlawful activities.

The hard-core gang member is a loser. Lacking recognition in the family, school, athletics, or employment, the members seek the acceptance, support, and protection of the losers and cowards.

Gang violence, a scourge of ghetto life in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York for decades, erupts with numbing regularity in American's biggest cities. More and more gang-related violence is appearing in cities like Jackson, Mississippi. In fact, Charles Triplett, 16, was shot in the back and died in Jackson, a city not too far removed from the Mississippi Delta. Law enforcement officers have reported gang-related violence in Bolivar County. To date, there has not been an occurrence of gang-related violence that resulted in death in the Delta. There seems to be an emergence across the American South of organized teenage gangs inspired by models in the north and west.

Since Charles Triplett was killed in Jackson, gang violence has ebbed. However, many people believe the calm may prove short-lived. To combat the gangs, officials in Southern cities have established task forces, set up hot lines, and offered counseling programs. But violence is still on the rise.

## **Drugs**

Drug use among teenagers is increasing. The data below clearly confirms this increase in teenage drug use:<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>"Children Who Kill: Should They Be Treated and Punished As Adults?" *The Clarion-Ledger* 1986, 8A.

<sup>11</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, No. 1 (April 1986).

Approximately 6.2 million young people ages 12-17 have used marijuana at some time during their lives; 2.7 million have used marijuana in the last month; 4.8 million have used marijuana in the past year.

Nearly two-thirds (61 percent) of all American high school seniors use an illicit drug at least once before they finish high school; 40 percent have used drugs in addition to marijuana.

Cocaine has been tried by at least 17 percent of seniors in the Class of 1985—the highest rate observed so far in the National High School Senior Survey.

Despite widespread concern regarding the effects of teenage drug use, there has been little effort to establish specifically what long-term consequences arise from such use and whether these adverse outcomes may be mitigated by supportive social networks. Data were obtained from a group consisting of 654 teenagers during early and late adolescence.<sup>12</sup> These data were used to evaluate resultant problems reported by the same group of youngsters when they were young adults. General or polydrug use increased the prevalence of drug and alcohol, health, and family problems. The unique or independent effects of cigarettes and hard drug use had a wide range of negative effects on health, psychosomatic symptoms, emotional distress, and interpersonal relationships. Alcohol use, which was not reflected in general drug use, had no specific negative effects, but it is associated with loneliness in romantic relationships, self-derogation, and family problems.

Drug use among adolescents and young adults has become widespread during the past 25 years. In a national survey of high school seniors, 92 percent reported using alcohol sometime in their lives; whereas, 54 percent reported marijuana use, and 40 percent reported using some other illicit drug.<sup>13</sup> Although it is not surprising that teenagers experiment with various drugs, problems can arise if this experimental use becomes regular use or abuse. In this same survey, 37 percent reported at least one instance of heavy drinking (five or more drinks) during the past 2-week period, 268 reported at least monthly marijuana use, and 58 reported daily marijuana use. For many teenagers, drug use is more than experimental or occasional or simply the result of curiosity. For many adolescents, ingestion of various drugs is a component of their life-styles.

The average American who does not have a drug habit will pay between \$850 and \$1,000 next year to treat drug and alcohol abuse problems.<sup>14</sup> Much of this money will be collected through taxes and spent by police or state agencies. Insurance companies and health care providers will collect another portion. Some of the cost will be indirect. For example, to pay for lost productivity some businesses will increase the cost of goods and services. Drug users themselves will spend a great deal more—both drugs and treatment are expensive. In contrast, only about \$175 will be spent on each child to *prevent* drug use in the first place.

Before you can prevent drug abuse you must first understand why young people use drugs. Over the past few decades, investigators have pinpointed an interval during which the

---

<sup>12</sup>M.D. Newcomb and P.M. Bentler, "An 8-Year Study of Multiple Influences on Drug Use Consequences," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53 (1987): 1094-1106.

<sup>13</sup>M.D. Newcomb and P.M. Bentler, "Impact of Adolescent Drug Use and Social Support on Problems of Young Adults: A Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 97 (1988): 84-96.

<sup>14</sup>B. Kumpster, "Bring Home the Drug-Test Dilemma: Can Parents do the Policing?," *Newsweek* 108 (1987): 66.

problem typically emerges.<sup>15</sup> Among preadolescents, use of these "gateway" substances is rare. Only about 10 percent of fifth graders drink alcohol during any given month; fewer than 5 percent will have smoked or used tobacco, and about 2 percent will have used marijuana. However, as young people progress through adolescence, more and more of them experiment with and begin regular use of these and other substances. The occurrence of first use and experimental use is most frequently during the years around puberty; this is the dangerous interval. By high school, most young people who use drugs have established habits; the period of recruitment is over.<sup>16</sup>

Among the various factors that might cause drug use, the single best predictor of who will experiment with substances is their use by a young person's close friends. Researchers have adopted the peer pressure hypothesis as the primary force behind experimentation with substances.<sup>17</sup>

This sociological development is sustained by several psychological developments that affect young people. First, people at this stage of growth perceive much of the world incorrectly, including the prevalence and the acceptability of drug use. For example, when adolescents were asked to estimate how many people their age use any given substances, they often think that the proportion is two to four time greater than it actually is.<sup>18</sup>

Young people who use drugs minimize the likelihood that any harmful effects will occur to them personally. This idea of perceived personal immunity suggested that only relevant undeniable effects, such as breathlessness and bad breath, are important to a young person's decision about substance use.<sup>19</sup> Young people are likely to deny the very information that program developers think of first—that is, the severe and frightening consequences of drug use.

A growing body of research indicates certain prevention techniques can be successful in reducing substance use. However, the degree to which new research findings have translated into practice is unclear. During the past three decades, schools have attempted several approaches to ameliorate this social problem. Health teachers, counselors, and other school staff undertaking this responsibility during the 1960's largely provided information about alcohol and other drugs and used scare tactics to deter students from substance use. The strategies of the 1970's focused more on teaching students personal skills, such as problem solving, decision making, and developing positive health self-concepts.<sup>20</sup> Despite well-intended efforts, levels of alcohol and other drug use among young people have shown no substantial reduction over time.

Prevention and intervention efforts appear to be the preferred approaches used by schools to combat chemical abuse. By concentrating on prevention and early intervention, serious problems can be avoided. "Operation Snowball" is a drug prevention model that emerged in response to drug abuse problems in school and society.<sup>21</sup>

Each school started with a grass-roots movement of replacing destructive chemical involvement of students with positive attitudes toward themselves and life in general. The vision was to create a positive peer culture that grows as more and more students derive satisfaction and success from healthy relationships and understanding. The snowball grows

---

<sup>15</sup>B.T. Johnson, "Substance Abuse Prevention Research," *Journal of School Health* 56 (1984): 369-375.

<sup>16</sup>W.B. Hansen, "Effective School Based Approaches to Drug Abuse Prevention," *Educational Leadership* 45 (1988): 9-14.

<sup>17</sup>S.A. Hansen and E.A. Malotte, "Is Your Child Taking Drugs?" *Readers Digest* 128 (1986): 55-60.

<sup>18</sup>E. Sherman, "America's Crusade: What is Behind the Latest War on Drugs?," *Time* 128 (1986): 60-68.

<sup>19</sup>Hansen and Malotte, "Is Your Child Taking Drugs?"

<sup>20</sup>P. Johnston, "Hearings Pinpoint Problems in War on Drunk Driving," *Nation's Cities Weekly* 11 (1986): 8.

<sup>21</sup>D. Donald, "A Cross Curriculum Substance Abuse Unit," *Journal of Reading* 31 (1989): 563-569.

larger and larger as positive peer pressure and relationships counter the prevalent drug culture messages of getting high to escape the pressures of reality.

The Snowball experience is a process, not a rigid and structured program. Each community customizes the major program themes according to local conditions. Today, there are more than 70 active Snowball chapters and some 700,000 students who have participated in Snowball experiences.

The components of the prevention model, which guide the three-day Snowball agenda, include the following:

1. *Information:* Provision of factual information about alcohol/drugs and their effects, examples of abuse, and reasons or causes of abuse. The goal of information is to provide basic factual data upon which individuals make responsible rational decisions about their own alcohol/drug use.
2. *Education:* Affective experiences designed to develop coping and decision-making skills. Values clarification, communication skill building, decision-making exercises, goal setting and personal motivation, and purpose.

The success of this and all other prevention programs depends upon the unique balance of the four approaches, none of which should be used exclusively, but each individualized in terms of needs and resources. Table 4 (page 176) shows the average number of youth drug offenses for Delta and non-Delta counties for 1986 and 1987.

### **School Dropouts**

In 1987, a growing number of grant makers directed funds toward the problem of early school leaving, while public interest groups launched major drop-out-prevention initiatives. Local school boards began to address the problem of the growing numbers of dropouts in their communities. At every level, governments convened meetings and conferences, appointed committees, and commissioned studies. Well-meaning citizens reached a consensus—excessively high drop-out rates threaten the nation's productivity and represent a tragic waste of young lives.<sup>22</sup>

The actual drop-out rate is probably higher than the drop-out rates that are reported in research reports, because school districts use different methods of calculating annual drop-out rates. It sometimes seems that no two school districts count dropouts in the same way. School administrators say that they follow local or state procedures to calculate the annual number of dropouts. But, in fact, their statistics are not always accurate; and their methods of calculating the drop-out rate vary from year to year and from school to school. In part, this is because, in many localities, no central authority at either the state or the city level rigorously scrutinizes the drop-out count. Tables 5 (pages 177-178) shows recent drop-out rates for Delta school districts.

Drop-out rates in nearly all large U.S. cities are tabulated annually, rather than according to how many starting freshmen actually receive diplomas four years later. Thus, if 15 percent of a high school freshman class drops out in a given year, the official drop-out rate is put at 15 percent. Yet, four years later when the students gather in the school auditorium to receive their diplomas, only half of the original class may still be in school.

Some researchers contend that where drop-out rates are concerned, per pupil expenditure was less important than a school's organization, the quality of its teaching and administration,

---

<sup>22</sup>Hahn, "A Nation in Crisis: The Dropout Dilemma," *NEA Today* 6 (1985): 61-65.

and its innovations in curriculum. A nationwide examination of retention rates demonstrated that teachers' salaries and per pupil expenditures were not related to drop-out rates, while student/teacher ratios did correlate with the incidence of dropping out. Drop-out rates among schools with the most favorable ratios were less than two-thirds as high as those among schools with the worst ratios.<sup>23</sup>

Improving the student/teacher ratio will require employing additional teachers, and that takes money. Preventing students from dropping out may also involve retraining and increasing the number of counselors, implementing a comprehensive health and family planning program, providing infant care facilities for teenage mothers, developing a cooperative work/education project, offering remedial instruction, and establishing connections between the schools and social service agencies in the community. All of this takes money.

Each year about 700,000 high school students drop out. Another 300,000 are constant truants. In some of our cities, the drop-out rate is 50 percent. One out of every four ninth graders will not graduate from high school. For minorities and the poor, the rates are significantly higher. In Japan, in contrast, virtually every high school student graduates and illiteracy has been reduced to the vanishing point.<sup>24</sup>

School dropouts are most frequently children of parents who are in our lowest socioeconomic underclass or from ethnic or racial groups. These children enter school already disadvantaged and tend to remain underserved by our schools' educational practices. If their academic deficits are not appropriately addressed by our schools, student retention problems occur, which, in turn, set up the drop-out syndrome. By the third grade, approximately 70 percent of eventual dropouts can be identified.<sup>25</sup>

Much has been written about school dropouts: why they drop out, what happens to them, and the impact on society. Finding out why students drop out, however, has tended to be difficult, since personal, family, social, and institutional factors interact with each other, leaving no clear culprit to target. Often dropouts are victims of influences they do not control and this makes their own efforts to improve more difficult. The families of these children typically live in poverty or close to it, usually obtain their incomes from low-skill jobs or government sources, and are increasingly headed by single parents. Many of the parents were dropouts themselves. These and other home factors influence the child's ability to profit from school.

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in confronting the retention issue, because the increasing number of dropouts pose a substantial threat to society. The American public school drop-out rate is reported to be 25 percent, and as high as 40 percent in urban areas. The U.S. Department of Education cited a drop-out rate of 20.1 percent in urban areas.<sup>26</sup> Blacks are dropping out of school at the rate of one out of four, Hispanics at the rate of one out of three, and whites at the rate of one out of seven. Dropping out of school has ceased to be a minority issue—it is becoming a white, middle-class problem as well.<sup>27</sup>

The increased number of students from white, middle-class backgrounds who are dropping out of school is one reason the drop-out issue is receiving greater national attention.

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Kolberg, "Employment, the Private Sector, and At-Risk Youth."

<sup>25</sup>L.M. DeRidder, "School Dropout Prevention Begins in the Elementary Years," *Education* 108 (1988): 88-93.

<sup>26</sup>C.D. Caliste, "Drug Use and Illness Among Eighth Grade Students in Rural Schools," *Public Health Reports* 103 (1984): 394-396.

<sup>27</sup>R.L. Calabrese, "The Structure of Schooling and Minority Dropout Rates," *Clearing House* 61 (1988): 325-329.



Unfortunately, however, solutions developed in this context may fail to take into account minority needs and culture.<sup>28</sup>

Typically, "dropouts" have been defined as students who have not completed high school. They are characterized as "pushouts," disaffiliated "stopouts," and those who are socialized to drop out. These descriptions exclude students who attend school but do not actively participate.

Recent evidence that the American economy is failing to compete in foreign markets has prompted scrutiny of our system of public education in the United States. Many of the suggested changes would result in more rigorous courses of study and higher standards of achievement for students in the nation's schools.<sup>29</sup> The Mississippi Legislature passed bills that resulted in increasing academic standards in public schools. To date, there has not been a formal study to determine the effect increasing academic standards has had on the school drop-out rate.

A review of the principal reasons why youngsters drop out of school provides a rough blueprint that emphasizes the need to allocate additional resources more effectively.<sup>30</sup> Students reported many reasons for dropping out: poor grades, dislike for school, alienation from peers, marriage or pregnancy, and employment. The "good" son or daughter may leave school to help parents and siblings through financial crises.

But the most common reason for leaving school is poor academic performance. Forty-two percent of the dropouts from high school and beyond reported grades of mostly D's in school. Male dropouts cited school and employment factors more often than did females, who cited marriage more often. However, some 13 percent of males and only 8 percent of females cited "had to support family" as their reasons for dropping out.

## Summary

It has been predicted that the population of the Delta will continue to decrease. Obviously, if this is so, the economic health of the area will probably not improve. Therefore, community leaders should put forth a special effort to attract good-paying jobs to the Delta. To be successful in encouraging industries to move to this area, there is a need to increase the skilled labor force and reduce the number of "at-risk" teenagers.

The term "at-risk youth" is used to describe young people who are in danger of dropping out of school and out of the labor market due to a variety of social, economic, and educational problems. Obviously, these are youth who are also very much at-risk of leading lives marred by crime and violence.

The most obvious characteristic of at-risk students is academic underachievement. Two other salient factors appear to be family background and socioemotional functioning. Underachievement has been consistently associated with single-parent or broken-family structure and with a nonsupportive family environment. Underachievers and students at-risk can be characterized as overtly disruptive.

Teenagers who become pregnant continue to remain poor because they have not acquired job skills, work experience, or landed their first "adult" job at "adult" wages. This experience "deficit" affects them the rest of their lives. In the Mississippi Delta, many of these inexperienced teens perpetuate the cycle of poverty. As a result of becoming a teen parent, they earn half the lifetime earnings of a woman who waits until age 20 to have her first child.

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>J. Barber, "School Dropouts: Patterns and Policies," *NASSP Bulletin* 71 (1987): 142-144.

<sup>30</sup>A. Hahn, "Reaching Out to America's Dropouts: What to Do?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 68 (1987): 256-259.

As a group, children born to teenage mothers tend to have lower IQ's than those born to women older than 20. Studies have also shown that children of teenage parents are at an increased risk of child abuse; teenage parents are often completely unprepared or too immature to care for a baby.

The combined efforts of public and private leaders, government, community organizations, and families will be crucial in addressing the issues facing our nation's young people. They cannot be solved in isolation. Success in moving at-risk youth into the economic mainstream can have a ripple effect in reducing crime, drug use, and other undesirable forms of behavior.

Efforts to reduce or control juvenile delinquency and crime should focus more on the sociological factors associated with such behavior. Today's depressed economic conditions and social pressures that youth face probably result in an increase in the overall crime rate and juvenile violence.

Drug use among adolescents and young adults has become widespread during the past 25 years. Teenagers experiment with various drugs; therefore, problems can arise if this experimental use becomes regular use or abuse. For many adolescents, ingestion of various drugs is a component of their life-styles.

The actual drop-out rate is probably higher than the drop-out rates that are reported in research reports, because school districts use different methods of calculating annual drop-out rates. It sometimes seems that no two school districts count dropouts in the same way.

School dropouts are most frequently children of parents who are in our lowest socioeconomic underclass or from ethnic or racial minority groups. These children enter school already disadvantaged and tend to remain underserved by our school's educational program. If their academic deficits are not appropriately addressed by our schools, student retention problems occur which in turn sets up the drop-out syndrome. By the third grade, approximately 70 percent of the eventual dropouts can be identified.

Youngsters in households that receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), in households in which a single parent juggles many roles, and in households in which the family has little income must often scramble to attain the emotional and material support they need to continue their studies. Although some of these youths succeed, far too many fail.

The following recommendations are representative of policies that could alleviate many of the youth-related problems in the Mississippi Delta, as well as for the rest of the State.

### **Recommendations**

1. Teach children about sex and sexuality from an early age by including sex education in the school's curriculum.
2. Add character education to the curriculum by focusing on personal, family, and citizenship concerns.
3. Improve secondary and postsecondary vocational-technical education programs to make sure that the Delta has a skilled labor force.
4. Involve youth in constructive community activities, such as community youth groups, to help them utilize their idle time.
5. Develop strategies for providing meaningful work experiences for youth.

6. Employ additional counselors in the schools to help students understand the harmful effects of the inappropriate use of drugs.
7. Create an educational environment that facilitates successful educational experiences by low socioeconomic youth.

**Table 1. Federal Government expenditures or obligation for the Delta counties, FY 84 (in millions of dollars).**

County	Expenditures
Bolivar	93.8
Carroll	16.9
Coahoma	77.4
DeSoto	60.1
Grenada	42.0
Holmes	57.8
Humphreys	30.5
Issaquena	3.5
Leflore	83.1
Panola	54.1
Quitman	26.3
Sharkey	16.4
Sunflower	65.1
Tallahatchie	47.8
Tate	35.0
Tunica	22.1
Warren	194.0
Washington	139.2
Yazoo	56.9

Average Government Expenditures for the Delta Counties (59.05).

Average Government Expenditures - Statewide (129.55).

Source: Handbook of Selected Data, Mississippi Research and Development Center, 1986.

**Table 2. Percentage of families below poverty level, Delta counties, FY 84.**

County	Percent
Bolivar	31.7
Carroll	25.0
Coahoma	30.5
DeSoto	12.0
Grenada	18.5
Holmes	39.0
Humphreys	35.0
Issaquena	27.1
Leflore	27.0
Panola	27.5
Quitman	30.8
Sharkey	35.7
Sunflower	30.0
Tallahatchie	34.3
Tate	20.7
Tunica	44.7
Warren	13.8
Washington	26.2
Yazoo	27.5

Average Percentage of Families Below Poverty Level--Delta Counties (28.36).

Average Percentage of Families Below Poverty Level--Statewide (27.58).

Source: Handbook of Selected Data, Mississippi Research and Development Center, 1986.

**Table 3. Pregnancy rates for teens, by county and race, 1983-1987\*.**

Delta Counties	1983		1984		1985		1986		1987	
	White Rate	Non-white Rate	White Rate	Non-white Rate	White Rate	Non-white Rate	White Rate	Non-white Rate	White Rate	Non-white Rate
Bolivar	48.69	82.77	49.63	94.38	28.56	57.14	36.52	80.94	48.45	94.48
Carroll	18.37	37.61	18.39	39.82	23.62	55.61	21.00	39.82	33.41	66.87
Coahoma	42.13	100.39	34.70	95.67	40.89	93.95	26.02	84.94	42.09	88.34
DeSoto	29.67	56.02	33.25	68.46	37.25	48.76	37.88	45.64	39.88	49.78
Grenada	36.84	69.49	38.95	79.26	45.26	85.78	36.84	60.80	37.82	84.28
Holmes	40.58	79.82	43.48	87.23	63.77	74.69	34.78	74.12	37.68	88.01
Humphreys	52.92	97.10	50.14	96.10	41.78	85.09	33.43	79.08	51.36	78.76
Issaquena	20.41	98.36	30.16	122.95	10.20	65.57	10.20	32.79	31.25	33.33
Leflore	56.82	88.08	48.30	73.94	57.77	88.48	40.72	73.54	34.01	71.49
Panola	35.58	86.52	47.12	73.78	43.27	78.47	44.23	71.09	56.97	77.67
Quitman	54.40	89.52	49.22	70.30	54.40	83.21	36.27	80.34	49.45	99.56
Sharkey	56.70	98.99	25.77	109.06	36.08	104.03	41.24	88.93	15.38	85.37
Sunflower	37.51	88.87	26.96	100.54	26.96	107.27	22.27	89.32	25.73	86.47
Tallahatchie	25.54	103.34	37.43	107.40	21.61	89.16	23.58	92.20	36.59	93.92
Tate	36.07	69.14	38.25	51.22	55.74	71.70	40.44	39.69	57.37	51.95
Tunica	19.42	107.34	24.27	89.67	53.40	76.09	29.13	89.67	25.33	78.15
Warren	33.79	80.69	30.26	75.14	27.11	63.04	20.43	61.52	29.34	62.13
Washington	35.89	71.32	38.58	84.06	48.45	83.17	34.10	75.79	30.28	74.33
Yazoo	41.25	89.13	41.25	80.35	44.59	97.26	37.90	78.33	23.49	70.22

\*Pregnancy Rate = Live Births + Fetal Deaths + Induced Terminations per 1,00 female population ages 10-19.

**1983-87 Average White Pregnancy Rate (Delta) 36.94**

**1983-87 Average White Pregnancy Rate (Statewide) 33.91**

**1983-87 Average Nonwhite Pregnancy Rate (Delta) 78.68**

**1983-87 Average Nonwhite Pregnancy Rate (Statewide) 63.39**

**Note:** Table shows that there is a significant difference between the nonwhite average pregnancy rate (78.68) for the Delta counties and the statewide nonwhite average pregnancy rate (63.39) from 1983-87. However, there is no significant difference between the white average pregnancy rate (36.94) for the Delta counties and the statewide white average pregnancy rate (33.91) from 1983-87.

**Source:** Vital Statistics, Mississippi State Department of Health, 1987.

**Table 4. Youth drug offenses, Delta counties (1986 and 1987).**

Delta Counties	1986	1987
Bolivar	2	1
Carroll	0	0
Coahoma	7	3
DeSoto	30	29
Grenada	1	3
Holmes	0	2
Humphreys	7	3
Issaquena	1	0
Leflore	0	1
Panola	4	0
Quitman	2	1
Sharkey	0	0
Sunflower	0	1
Tallahatchie	0	1
Tate	4	1
Tunica	0	0
Warren	0	8
Washington	5	8
Yazoo	0	4

Average Number of Youth Drug Offenses for the Delta Counties in 1986 (3.31)

Average Number of Youth Drug Offenses for the Non-Delta Counties in 1986 (1.06)

Average Number of Youth Drug Offenses for the Delta Counties in 1987 (3.58)

Average Number of Youth Drug Offenses for the Non-Delta Counties in 1987 (1.13)

Source: Youth Court Report, Mississippi Department of Youth Services, 1987.

**Table 5. School dropouts in Delta school districts, 1986-87 and 1987-88.**

District	1986-87 (No.)	1987-88 (No.)
Bolivar District 1	66	88
Bolivar District 2	4	2
Bolivar District 3	21	28
Cleveland	160	123
Bolivar District 5	8	30
Mound Bayou	19	11
Carroll	22	40
Coahoma County	82	68
Coahoma AHS	48	73
Clarksdale	91	81
DeSoto	250	207
Grenada	152	146
Holmes	70	52
Durant	10	18
Humphreys	86	99
Leflore	102	89
Greenwood	142	131
North Panola	71	65
South Panola	48	73
Quitman	84	80
Anguilla School District	14	11
Sharkey/Issaquena	45	35
Sunflower	46	45
Drew Municipal	44	41
Indianola	122	137
East Tallahatchie	76	59
West Tallahatchie	68	60
Tate	106	76

(continued)

**Table 5 (continued). School dropouts in Delta school districts, 1986-87 and 1987-88.**

District	1986-87 (No.)	1987-88 (No.)
Senatobia	15	15
Tunica	65	60
Warren	137	164
Vicksburg	112	88
Hollandale	16	27
Leland	21	8
Western Line	96	58
Greenville	334	345
Yazoo	29	45
Holly Bluff	9	14
Yazoo City Separate District	88	78
Delta Average	76.38	75.74
Mississippi Average	64.98	65.31

Source: School Reports, Mississippi State Department of Education, 1986-87.



## *Chapter*

# **11**

## *Leadership in the Mississippi Delta*

*by*

*Vaughn L. Grisham, Jr.\**

Community crises are all too common in the nonmetropolitan South. Following economic growth in the 1960's and 1970's, the decade of the eighties brought economic and population declines to many rural communities. The continuing decline of agriculture as a job producer, the employment downturn in labor intensive manufacturing, and reduced federal spending produced a three-pronged spear that punctured the prosperity balloon of the previous decades. In those communities that withstood the assault and actually prospered, the key factor was usually viable leadership.

Local leadership will be a critical part of economic survival for communities throughout the South. This chapter examines the leadership in the Mississippi Delta, both in the private and public sectors. Data were collected from over 100 detailed interviews with leaders throughout the Delta, from local newspapers, and a variety of secondary resources. Interviewees were assured their anonymities. It was their generous sharing of observations that made this report possible.

The concern is not to judge the leadership but to report as accurately as possible the observations made by the researcher. There have been successes and failures of leadership. Both are reported. Perhaps some readers will feel that the light cast is too harsh, while other important issues have been left in the shadows. A more detailed study is planned and will examine an even wider range of leadership activities to supplement this initial report.

Leadership itself has become a buzz word. Unfortunately, the understanding of the term has been rather superficial. All too often the leader is depicted as a lone hero who is able to save a group. There is frequently a longing by many communities to be rescued by a

\*Director of the George McLean Institute for Community Development and Professor of Sociology at the University of Mississippi.

charismatic figure who can right the wrongs. Unfortunately, leaders are seen as individuals set apart and operating in a rarefied atmosphere.

Effective leaders should indeed be able to help elevate their constituents to the highest cultural level. That is the essence of a transformational leader, to help the group rise to its highest potential. As John Gardner notes, the focus of leadership is on the accomplishment of group purpose. This involves participation of a wide range of individual talents within the community. A successful community, like a thriving and innovative corporation, needs responsible leaders at many levels, not merely at the top echelon. There should be capable leaders in businesses, schools, public offices, churches, neighborhoods, newspapers, and in all community services. Otherwise, even the strongest top leader will be restricted.

An understanding of the dispersment of leadership is essential to clarify some of the major strengths and flaws in the leadership structure of the Delta. The concept is quickly recognized and appreciated by anyone who has sought to make extensive changes within a community. Few if any leaders are able to operate in a democratic society with a high degree of autonomy. The position of leader does not come equipped with a wand for performing wholesale miracles. These changes come about through the combined efforts of a variety of participants, not all of whom are always pulling in the same direction at any one time.

The term most often applied to this distribution of responsibilities is *team leadership*. While there has been a renewal of attention given to team leadership, the idea is ancient. The power of team leadership has been effectively described in the corporate world in Rosabeth Moss Kanter's book, *The Change Masters*. In this fine piece of research, Kanter notes that the most innovative corporations in the nation have been able to more fully utilize the human resources that reside within the organization itself. Such corporations gain maximum participation at as many levels as possible and are careful to structure the communication loop to allow a two-way flow of information. Workers' inputs are valued and rewarded in proportion to their contributions to the whole.

Detailed research by Professor Harold Kaufman has demonstrated the power of extensive team work in communities. Leaders are guided by the values of their constituents in helping to set goals. The leader does not seek to impose his values on the community. The assumption is made that a community will have within itself cultural values of a high order; otherwise it will die. One of the primary activities of the leader is to be a social architect who creates unity within the community. This unity and cohesion are structured around a communication system that allows the free exchange of ideas. In this way, the leader's potential power is enhanced as he or she receives input from constituents. By sharing this expanded power with the community, the leader has also enriched the community itself.

Examples of this type of team leadership can be seen in the Delta Council, which is a predominately white organization, and the Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), which is predominately black. The Delta Council was created by Delta farmers to address a number of common problems. (Note that the values and interests originated with the constituents.) By pooling their combined efforts and resources, these farmers, in time, formed a vehicle by which their collective voices were magnified through lobbying efforts, research programs, and other activities. Through their continuing team effort, the power of the organization has grown. The organization in turn is a valuable conduit of information to the farming community.

MACE was initiated in 1966 by a group of black women who recognized that some of the civil rights gains of the 1960's had opened avenues for full political participation, but the skills necessary to use these political rights were still lacking. By pooling their efforts, these women initially constructed a means to educate blacks about participation in the democratic process. This process began with the values of the participants, and the organization subsequently fed by those values became the instrument to allow greater participation in the

community. The leaders of the organization continually meet the needs of its constituents and by this means increase both their own and the organization's potential.

Certainly within any organization at any one time there will be some leaders more dominant and effective than others. Some will have greater vision than others. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these organizations depends on competence by leaders at multiple levels. The effectiveness of these well-established systems is determined by the extent of efforts throughout the programs, not merely by the vision or charisma of those at the top.

This misconception of the leader as being only at the top is frequently compounded by a confusion of the terms "power" and "leadership." Leaders, of course, always have power if they are to be effective, but there are numerous power figures who are devoid of leadership. One only needs to be reminded that all members of the police have power, as does a bank loan officer, or even a headwaiter. Moreover, it is common for people of power to operate behind the scenes and exercise control over leaders.

Leadership involves at least four dimensions. Leaders are invariably individuals who have *vision*. They envision the course of action, or the need for unity, or see more clearly the best that the group can be. Such persons must be able to *communicate* that vision. They share that vision in a way that helps the group understand how it can best achieve its goals. Thirdly, leaders are able to *mobilize* both human and natural resources to move toward the desired ends. Basic to all leaders is to have the *trust* of their constituents. The element of trust cannot be overemphasized. Put simply, no one willingly follows someone he or she does not trust.<sup>1</sup>

Given these broad parameters, a logical starting point to analyze leadership in the Delta is to ask two questions. What makes it easier to be a leader in the Delta? What makes it more difficult to be a Delta leader?

Beginning with the question of what makes it easier to be a leader, one is struck initially by a unification of the entire region around agriculture. Since its earliest settlement, even the towns of the area have survived as rural trade centers and have existed primarily to serve and service agriculture. In only a few regions in the nation has the economy been so completely tied to agriculture. Moreover by fact and ideal, many of the more prosperous families have been guided by a sense of *noblesse oblige*. The reality of this ideal has been challenged by some historical scholars and by a number of people interviewed. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that this ideal of responsible behavior to the community continues to exist and is a guiding principle for some Delta citizens. Moreover, the region has been blessed with the most basic agricultural resources—rich and abundant land and plentiful rainfall. Few agricultural areas in the world can match it in basic resources.

Nevertheless, the Delta is a region of ironies. It is readily apparent that there are many factors that bind the area together, but it is also a divided region. The most apparent of these divisions is racial. The Delta's 60 percent black population often feels itself outside any mainstream efforts to raise the quality of life. There is little trust between the white and black communities. (This issue will be elaborated in a subsequent discussion of the Greenville Foundation.) Because shared values are the bedrock on which leaders build, frequently the common values, of which there are many, have not been fully recognized and brought into play.

Only in recent times has a middle class begun to emerge and it is largely confined to whites in the relatively few large towns. A black middle class has only the narrowest base at the beginning of the 1990's. By contrast, the Delta has the largest number of poor, especially the very poor, in Mississippi. Most of these poor have low or no literacy skills. They are

---

<sup>1</sup>For a more complete discussion of the role of trust in leadership see: Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

frequently unable to help themselves in a more sophisticated age that demands education. They could play only a minimal role in any system of dispersed leadership. Unable to help themselves, they certainly cannot address the community's needs. Moreover, such a high concentration of poverty erodes humans, physically and emotionally. This is a burden to an economy already made anemic by the agricultural crisis.

It is not simply that the poor find themselves unable to participate in any revamped economy; they frequently find themselves totally outside any avenues of remediation or self-development. Most of the poor do not understand the political system and its processes. They do not understand the potential or the limitations of elected officials. For some there is an expectation from the political system that is impossible or unlikely to be fulfilled.

The vast number of very small towns, often built originally around a plantation system, is a barrier to cooperative efforts that might otherwise facilitate some blending of human resources. These small communities often lack the basic financial resources to provide necessary human services to address the problems of poverty.

With no usable past on which to build, the poor have only a limited record of achievement and little confidence. Indeed there is scant evidence that this confidence has ever existed. This is one of the most fundamental impediments to any leadership development within such a large underclass.

Even the past has a way of making leadership more difficult. William Faulkner once observed that in the South the past is not only not forgotten, it is not even past. This has poignant significance for the Delta. Because change for much of the Delta's history, as with the history of the entire State and South, did not come as rapidly as it did in other parts of the nation; the past has tended to linger.

There are multiple consequences, but for the sake of this argument only two will be cited. Many of the existing organizations, institutions, and even some customs are intertwined with vestiges threatening to blacks. Whites, on the other hand, see the institutions or customs as normal routines of daily life. When such institutions come into play, almost immediately distance is extended between the two races, blocking communication. One might counter this observation with the argument that a culture cannot change its past. Indeed it cannot. Nevertheless, the words of Dorris Betts might be considered. "Whatever the South failed at yesterday can be turned to success tomorrow; what it lost can be restored; what it dreamed can be made real for all its people."

The Delta also shares the burden of the Southern image from the Civil Rights Era. Its racial problems may well be played out in the national media with bitter reminders of those traumatic times. Such situations make quieter, more reflective negotiations more difficult or impossible when conducted under the lights of cameras. Routine situations can become inflamed. Tempers may quickly escalate in anticipation of the recurrence of bitter experiences. Reflective leaders are pushed aside in favor of those with more dramatic styles.

### **The Leadership Structure**

When Deltans are interviewed about the leaders and the leadership structure, the most knowledgeable will suggest that there are three large groups of leaders in the Delta. Almost all those interviewed described the old line planters or large farmers as the traditional leaders. Their prominence, they suggest, once overshadowed all Delta leaders. Now, it is noted, they are losing power and leadership. The next most powerful are the industrialists and town professionals, some of whom are viewed as outsiders but who are now the emerging leaders. The third group is usually lumped together as black leaders.

The planter retains the image of being the most likely to be in control. There are perhaps few leaders in the nation as closely linked and as well organized as the Delta planter-leaders. They are a part of a long tradition of being a unified group. They are held

together by their common economic interest in farming and farm-related activities. Since their products are sold in national and international markets, the planters have also organized themselves in their marketing efforts. Because the Delta has had to continuously plan and fight against the threat of flood, many of these contemporary families have ancestors who were aligned through the various levee boards that sought to protect the region from flooding rivers. Their very survival and the survival of the entire region have depended on their cooperative efforts against water that would reclaim the land.

The Delta Council has existed for more than a half century as a vehicle for the farmers in their combined agricultural efforts. The names of the Council's officers are readily identified as being among the region's most prestigious families. Frequent interviewees suggested that the list of Delta Council officers is a starting point for the Delta leadership. The Delta Council remains the single most powerful organization in the region.

These key Delta farmers are also interconnected through a variety of other economic ties. They commonly serve on the board of directors of the region's banks. While many of those interviewed suggested that the influence of big farmers is waning, the majority of many of the bank boards are still composed of planters, indicating that their community influence is still significant.

Moreover, the planters are linked to one another on a variety of boards of agriculture-related activities, including membership on oil mills, ginning co-ops, or a variety of other quasi-agricultural activities. These bonds are reinforced through membership in the Farm Bureau.

Many planters contribute to both major political parties on state and local levels, but a high percentage are now committed to the Republican Party on national issues. The GOP is often another link holding them together.

Lastly, there are the social ties that bind. Planters speak often of dinner visits with fellow farmers throughout the region. Aside from dinner parties there are other social galas, including annual debutante balls and other festive occasions.

While there are vast numbers of linking threads in this leadership fabric, it would be simplistic to see all planters as cut from the same cloth. Planters are often viewed as the linch-pin in retaining conservative traditions, including the boundary maintenance between the races. While some have sought to continue policies of racial segregation, there are also planters who felt that being a farmer allowed them the latitude to take a more progressive stand in supporting civil rights activities. As noted, they do not sell their products in a local market so they are unlikely to suffer any direct economic loss for such action. Furthermore, as a customer, even those who disapprove of their racial views are still glad to get their business.

Nevertheless, the role of planters in maintaining traditional racial division was cited in almost every interview, by both whites and blacks. This perceived position was also considered to be a major stumbling block in the industrial and economic development of the area. Part of the argument states that by withholding support for public education, planters had contributed to the weakening of the public schools and, thus, to the weakening of education in general. A number of interviewees suggested that some planters had consistently lobbied against state support for kindergartens and public education. The perception also is that planters have frequently not been good team players in the overall economic development of the region. They cite the money invested in economic development in the Delta as compared with the money invested in some of the eastern counties of Mississippi.

Farmers, often aware of these perceptions, defend themselves, in part, by arguing that the weakened public schools are a function of too many small rural schools with undermanned staffs and undersupportive parents. They suggest that economic growth is prohibited by an

unskilled work force. Further, many noted that the sheer magnitude of the poverty is too great to be addressed on a local level.

Some of these farmers feel that the greatest impact of farm-supported leadership in the coming decade will come with environmental issues. Here, too, there is division within the ranks. Most agree that state-directed water management programs are needed. However, other major environmental issues, such as drainage programs, are already on the horizon and may well rival issues of education and jobs as a central concern in the 1990's.

A second group of leaders are the industrialists and town professionals. As noted earlier, this group is smaller in the Delta than in other parts of the state. Their numbers are enlarged if one incorporates the planters who are involved in the processing of agricultural products. For the purpose of this analysis, the agricultural leaders were treated as a separate group.

While professionals cannot properly be considered industrialists, a majority of the professionals tended to identify themselves with what they see as an emerging part of the economy, built around manufacturing and the service sector. Consistently, industrialists and professionals have a parallel, if not identical, vision for the future of the Delta. Both see education and job creation as the two major challenges in the coming decade. Almost none of these individuals view themselves as ideologues. They describe themselves as pragmatists who are capable of working with the existing reality. They were consistently the most optimistic about the future of the Delta. Nevertheless, few tended to minimize the difficulties facing the Delta in its economic transformation.

The initial step in this transition, most agreed, is to get the white population involved in the public schools. The white flight that diminished the participation of middle-class whites in the public school system is seen as a major contributor to a perceived decline in the public schools. One industrial leader proudly displayed a petition with over 1,800 names supporting a public school education reform bill. He noted that over three-fourths of the signatures were white citizens. This was the largest effort to gain support for public schools. For most of the Delta, there was little organized focus on gaining more white involvement in these schools. Few of these leaders expected any major turnaround of white involvement in the schools during the upcoming decade, but do see a gradual winning over of whites to the public schools.

While all agreed on education as the foundation for an enriched community, the sharpest disagreement was the assessment of the quality of the work force. Most manufacturers feel that the initial work skills are low, but that there is a strong work ethic and that workers are very productive after the proper training, either through community colleges or in-house. They felt that a greater problem was the *perception* of outside investors that the work force was ineffectual. Many professionals and merchants frequently complained that the literacy skills were too low to be trained for their work. Consequently, a fairly common situation was to find high unemployment in the same community in which unfilled jobs were going begging for skilled claimants.

Some industrialists from outside the South noted that it was more difficult to gain access to a leadership position in the Delta as both an outsider and nonfarmer. Others, however, found that as a major employer they had unusually strong leverage power to enter the community problem-solving arena. Based on several case studies conducted as a part of this research, it appears that industrialists do have opportunities to act as community leaders. Perhaps more will avail themselves of that opportunity in the future.

Perhaps the largest group of emerging leaders are black leaders. It is as inaccurate to link all black leaders together as it is to lump white leaders. Black leaders are usually as likely to disagree among themselves as are white leaders. Moreover, not all black leaders will be considered leaders by all blacks. At this point, most blacks are held together by their consciousness of their minority status. In time there will be a greater blending of black and white leaders, and that is the subject of subsequent discussion in this chapter.

Traditionally, black professionals and semiprofessionals have been limited to jobs not performed by white rivals. This included morticians, barbers and beauty parlor operators, ministers, teachers, and a few, often very few, black merchants in the black sections of towns. If one makes a head count, morticians are most often the wealthiest members of the black communities, and this has been used as a power base by some emerging leaders. Ministers and teachers remain influential members of the black community. As most black respondents noted, the church is the only consistently viable institution in the black community. The church gained even stronger leverage when it served as the center of the Civil Rights Movement. White leaders have traditionally seen black ministers as the bridge or conduit for communication between the white and black communities. The church continues to be the single most powerful mobilizing force. Few if any elected officials could by-pass the church and win large black support. There are, however, black leaders now emerging who have only limited contact and sanction from the church. This trend will likely continue.

Some of the middle-aged and older leaders gained their initial exposure during the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties. A large number of these leaders have gone through a metamorphosis of style. They acknowledge that confrontation and public demonstrations were essential to gain access to the opportunities of a political democracy. Today, however, they strive to work within the system. One such prominent leader said very matter-of-factly, "The theme of the sixties had to be confrontation; the theme of the nineties must be unity. Unless we learn to work together, we perish together."

One of the lasting legacies of the Civil Rights Era and the War on Poverty is the leadership of those who began their careers as workers in Head Start programs. During the late sixties, one of the few jobs available to black college graduates was work in Head Start. The Delta retained many black college graduates who otherwise might have left for want of a job.

Black leaders, unlike their white counterparts, have had to be social architects from the beginning. Lacking organizations outside the church, one of the first activities of emerging black leaders in the post-Civil Rights Era was to create organizations that could sustain the gains made during the movement. Perhaps the most successful effort in the Delta has been the Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), cited earlier. This program initially helped to educate blacks who had previously not participated in the democratic process. Having been outside the participatory structure, blacks had to understand the electoral process and the responsibilities of various elected officials. They had to learn the functions of a myriad of public service agencies. MACE has been a spawning ground for citizenry and emerging political leaders.

Because black leaders have not had access to established groups other than the church, almost all have worked outside a structured framework. White leaders know fellow white leaders throughout the area because of organizational ties. Most black leaders find themselves working in a much more confined geographic territory. One black leader remarked that many black leaders are more dependent on individual charisma, whereas white leaders had the benefit of well-established organizations, which in turn may have an extensive outreach and access to external resources.

Black leaders were unanimous in identifying education and jobs as the central issues of the 1990's. Further, they agreed that the key to getting stronger schools is to attract whites back to the public schools. At this point, there is no agreement on how that is to be achieved. Black educators see their roles as making the schools attractive to all students. All educators feared that unless the school experience itself is positive, few if any of the present students will return as teachers. There is widespread concern that fewer blacks will pursue teaching as a profession.

### **Linking the Leaders Together**

One of the most basic activities of community leaders is to create linkages. Leaders must continually help pull the community together. Delta leaders agreed that if they are to be successful, they must bridge the chasm between the races. Whites and blacks concurred with one another that the election of Mike Espy as the congressman from the second district has reduced racial tensions. One white leader summarized the significance of this event as "having eliminated race as an issue in the congressional election. By this means a major point of contention has been resolved."

Congressman Espy himself is cited as an example of a leader who can work with equal effectiveness with either whites or blacks. He is often described as a bridge between the races. Delta leaders interviewed for this research gave the congressman high marks. They praised his "willingness to listen to all sides," and commented frequently that, "Congressman Espy represents all the interests of the Delta." Evidence of his presence is seen in the fact that he was the single most frequently cited Delta leader in response to the request to name the region's outstanding leaders.

Some of the Delta towns have begun their own bridge-buildings. Within the last four years community leaders have attempted to pursue policies designed to bring the races together. However, even before the cooperative work was possible, it was often necessary to create a new forum or organization that could accommodate effective dialogue. Whites were reluctant to be involved with existing black organizations and blacks were equally reticent to align themselves with extant white organizations. Consequently, some of the most meaningful joint ventures have come through newly created biracial organizations.

One such example is the Greenville Foundation. The originators of this organization were themselves surprised that native Deltans, white and black, had such great difficulty in communicating on sensitive racial issues. Working within existing organizations proved futile. Each side seemed incapable of understanding the position of the other. It took three years of consistent effort before communication was to a level that the biracial Greenville Foundation could be created. Simply put, it took that long to raise the trust to a level of cooperation. This experience underscores how difficult biracial leadership can be even among willing participants.

This long gestation period to establish trust and communication suggests the immediacy of addressing biracial concern and the patience necessary to make meaningful gains. The Greenville Foundation is over a year old. A forum is in place to forestall racial conflict. Moreover, the Foundation has identified five major categories for joint community action. To date, the issues of literacy and education have been the paramount activities, but any assessment in these areas is premature. The significance of the effort is that both sides are talking and working together.

Clarksdale has devised a slightly different format to achieve some of the same goals. The community has created a tri-racial leadership development program that was organized by member of all races. The program is a vehicle to bring together emerging leaders of various ages. It differs from many other leadership programs in part by being created by all races and being directed by an established black leader. The organization has already shown a willingness to address some of the most nettlesome racial and community issues.

Greenville and Clarksdale had the luxury of forming its multiracial organizations under normal circumstances. Indianola's biracial committee was forged under fire. The Indianola experience makes an excellent case study of community leadership in action. The case demonstrates rather clearly the role and importance of dispersed leaders who are as critical to the process as leaders at the top.

The events began in March 1986, when the city school board was faced with selecting a new superintendent of schools. The school board, composed of three whites and two blacks,



narrowed the choice of candidates and chose a white superintendent. One of the finalists for the position was a black principal who had a long history with the Indianola school system. The black candidate was the favorite of the black community.

Word of the selection spread through the community even before the official announcement. A small group of blacks, carrying placards expressing their own preference for superintendent, appeared at the formal ceremony. The white superintendent-to-be was questioned from the audience by a black leader concerning the superintendent's assessment of his support from the black community. The audience suggested that the board's choice lacked black support and since the school was 70 percent black, he should not accept the position. The superintendent declined to resign, but the two black school board members, noting they had initially withheld support for the majority choice, returned to their position, leaving the vote 3 to 2.

Black leaders next appealed to school board members and white community leaders to urge that the choice be rescinded. When their request was not fulfilled, a group of black leaders announced that they had exhausted the normal course of appeals and were reluctantly calling for a boycott of local businesses.

It is important to observe that the black leaders eschewed inflammatory language and made this appeal to the white community in a manner that allowed for continued dialogue. This style remained consistent throughout the whole bargaining period.

Once the boycott was in place, tempers on both sides escalated and the potential for a racial explosion rose dangerously high. The regional and national media added to the intensity with its own coverage. The local newspaper, however, played a key role in holding the situation in balance. In addition to continual editorials calling for calm rational pursuit, the newspaper was viewed as a reliable source of information throughout the community. Equally important, the news staff checked out each rumor and reported the accuracy of such rumors.

These efforts bought needed time for the community. White leaders worked behind the scenes but were unable to break the log jam. Finally, 15 of the town's key white leaders hired a local attorney to determine what could be done to buy the superintendent's contract. This effort failed. Students of leadership will find it instructive that the town's most influential white leaders, working in concert, were still unable to resolve the situation.

The Chamber of Commerce offered its good offices, but, as in the cases of Greenville and Clarksdale, the existing organization seemed tainted by previous activities and, thus, their efforts led to no avail. Meaningful action finally occurred after the negotiating attorney brought both sides together to form a biracial committee.

Even the newly formed biracial committee was initially unsuccessful. Then using resourceful conflict management skills, the committee went beyond the existing crisis to put all biracial school concerns on the table. Viewed from this holistic position, the parties were able to take from the table those issues on which they were willing to compromise. Once the total picture became the concern, the school board was able to act on behalf of the larger interest of the school and alter its position. The "group of fifteen" bought the superintendent's contract. The boycott ended and the former black principal was appointed as the school's first black superintendent.

Almost four years later in 1990, there remains some bitterness, hurt, and anger. Nevertheless, the biracial committee continues at work. It meets monthly, at which time all issues affecting the whole community are examined and discussed. The overwhelming majority of those interviewed stated that although some hard feelings remain, on the whole the community is much stronger and more able to address its problems.

This case is filled with human emotions and all the complications that accompany this stress. Its final solution resided with a wide spectrum of participants, who successfully played their leadership roles on a continuum of levels. It demonstrates that even the most well

meaning and powerful top leaders are unable to realize their visions without the cooperation of competent dispersed leaders.

Subsequent results include a biracial, locally owned industry that makes boxes for a local company. Many of the owners of the industry were in the school crisis. Some of these same entrepreneurs are currently putting together another economic package that will produce another home-grown factory.

These events of the past 4 years are even more significant when seen as part of Indianola's history. Indianola achieved fame and notoriety in John Dollard's *Caste and Class in Southern Town* as a model of social rigidity. It gained further national attention as the originating site of the Citizen's Council. This recent record of biracial cooperation should be added to accounts of the town's history.

The successes are a pleasure to report, but racial tension continues to run deep. The Delta has been the stage for heated confrontations. The term "black power" was first used in a speech by Stokely Carmichael in Greenwood and is a frightening legacy from the past.<sup>2</sup> Many white leaders still concern themselves with the spoken fear of a "mau-mau-ization" of the Delta. Blacks recall a bitter past and are skeptical of whites' motives.

### **Elected Leaders**

The Delta has long been a center of political strength in the state. While only a few governors have originated from the Delta in recent years, the region has nevertheless been at the vanguard of political power. The Delta had for many years the heaviest voter participation.<sup>3</sup> Part of its strength has been that the Speaker of the House, long regarded as the strongest position in state government, has been a Deltan for a long time. Walter Sillers was a prominent fixture as Speaker of the House (in the State Legislature) for many years. Subsequently, the position fell to C.B. "Buddie" Newman of Rosedale.

Moreover, since much of the agriculture in the Delta is linked to federal programs, the region has often been even more concerned with its voice in Washington. James O. Eastland of Doddsville first took his Senate seat in 1942, and for almost four decades was a strong voice for the Delta and the state. John C. Stennis, Eastland's Senate mate for most of that time, was from east-central Mississippi. Nevertheless, when Stennis first sought the Senate seat in a special election in 1947, he faced a strong six-man field. In the first primary, F.B. Jackson led the candidates with 26.3 percent of the vote. Stennis finished second, but was the winner in the Delta. Had it not been for the strong Delta support, the Kemper County native would not have made the runoff. It may not be totally correct to suggest that the Delta elected Stennis, but it played the most critical role.<sup>4</sup> Here again the heavy Delta voting participation was the key in the election.

Much of the political success of the Delta can be attributed to the fact that the Delta has been the most politically unified section of the state. Some of those bases for unification were identified earlier: the centrality of agriculture in the economy, the environmental threat from the surrounding rivers, business and social ties. But there is also the racial factor. Deltans, writing candidly in an earlier part of its history, noted repeatedly that the potential threat of a black electorate had solidified the white vote. David Cohn stated it directly, "Here the Negro

---

<sup>2</sup>Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and The Black Awakening of the 1960's* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 209.

<sup>3</sup>V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: A.A. Knopf), 5.

<sup>4</sup>F. Glenn Abney, *Mississippi Election Statistics, 1900-1967* (University, MS: Bureau of Governmental Research, University of Mississippi, 1968).

was a problem to the white man and the white man was a problem to the Negro."<sup>5</sup> And, "The Deltan has never been a free man in the sense that the Vermonter or the Westerner had always been a free man. The Deltan's whole society, its laws, customs, manners, and institutions, and how he bore himself in innumerable ways, was conditioned by the Negro. Nor was the Negro a free man since his society was conditioned by the presence of the white man."<sup>6</sup>

Some of the social fabric that unified this system began to unravel by the end of World War II. Some long-time Deltans said that they knew the old way of life was coming to an end by the close of the war. This transition has followed a rather convoluted course and at varying rates of speed.

The widespread use of new agricultural technology, including farm machinery and new chemical products and techniques, reduced the need for a large labor pool. Displaced workers frequently left the Delta in search of jobs in other regions, thus reducing somewhat the racial imbalance.

As the Delta began to industrialize, it attracted interregional migrants who moved with the branch factories that relocated in the area. The influence of these immigrants in the Delta and throughout the state and region has helped moderate some of the hard-line positions. Their values introduced a new cross-fertilization of political and social ideas. These non-Southern-born individuals accounted for only eight percent of the entire South's population in 1920. By 1980, the figure was above 20 percent.<sup>7</sup> Clearly many of the industrialists interviewed during this research have played a role in altering the political mind of the region.

Lastly, there has been the matter of generational politics. Consistently this research reveals distinctly different attitudes and political values between respondents under 50 years of age from those older than 50. While there were older people whose political views were moderate to liberal, the majority were much more likely to speak in stronger ideological tones. The younger generation tended to be more moderate, with some exceptions, and much less ideological in posture.

The political shifts in the Delta parallel the economic movements. The political sentiment among white leaders is still conservative. Both the economic and political transitions are well characterized by W.J. Cash's phrase "conservative modernization." There are appreciable changes, but the conservative social traditions, like strong, well-rooted vines, cling to the newer edifices.

With new political alliances in the State Legislature, the Delta representatives, though still a strong force, no longer carry the clout of earlier years. Any weakening of the Delta strength in the state chambers, however, has not diminished its agricultural voice in Washington. As indicated earlier, the legislation most directly affecting agriculture is constructed at a national level. The farming interests, working through the Delta Council, remain exceptionally strong in matters affecting agriculture.

Unquestionably the most dramatic change in elected leaders in the Delta has come with black participation in the electoral process. The early years were a period of great concern to whites and blacks. There was the initial white fear of complete black dominance. For their part, blacks had the awkward experience of learning to be full participants. This meant getting registered to vote, becoming enlightened voters, and eventually learning how to fulfill the responsibilities of public officer.

---

<sup>5</sup>Unpublished autobiography of David Cohn. The manuscript is part of the Mississippi Collection in the Mississippi Archives, The University of Mississippi, 4A.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 4B.

<sup>7</sup>Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 16.

It was a process of self-education. There was little institutional assistance. Although organizations such as MACE had a political education program, its resources were too limited for the whole Delta. The task, then and in hindsight, seemed herculean. Moreover, blacks who came to hold office knew their actions would be scrutinized by harsh, usually unsympathetic critics. Gaffes and failures would be public knowledge and might reduce the likelihood of other blacks holding similar offices.

The greatest political asset for blacks has been the sheer number of potential voters. As of 1988, blacks constituted 35 percent of the total population in Mississippi. They compose slightly less than 32 percent of the registered voters. In the Second Congressional District, which has been enlarged during the past two decades, blacks compose 53 percent of the registered voters.

Using their numerical advantage, blacks had elected 257 officeholders in place by 1988.<sup>8</sup> Twenty-five Delta towns or cities had black mayors as of 1990, including Clarksdale and Vicksburg, two of the largest towns in the 18 county area.<sup>9</sup> Altogether, 44 percent of all black, elected officials in Mississippi reside in the Delta.

The first major political triumph for the black Delta electorate was Robert Clark's election to the Mississippi Legislature in 1968. He became the first black legislator in Mississippi since reconstruction. Twenty years later, in 1988, 5 of the 20 black legislators were from the Delta.<sup>10</sup>

Black, elected officials are now beginning to organize themselves. The black legislators formed a black caucus to enhance their political muscle. Other black officials have followed suit. The black mayoral association was created, dissolved in time, and has reemerged at the beginning of the 1990's.

The Delta's elected black officials have been at the vanguard in opening the way for the other black officeholders. In 1980, 57 percent of Mississippi's black, elected officials were from the Delta.<sup>11</sup> By 1984, it was at 50 percent and by 1986 the percentage had dropped to its present level of 44 percent.<sup>12</sup>

Many black leaders, reflecting on those early days, smile when they recall their high expectations. They had thought that once they were inside the political bastion, they could address and resolve many major social issues. The progress has been very slow. Nevertheless, the flame of hope and expectation was apparent with every black official interviewed.

For many, the point of view is that "now we have our chance to improve life for the whole community." One respondent stated, "Some of us are now on the inside. Getting here was hard for both sides. We have always had to be on the outside and a part of two communities; now the theme is unity and black officials can help bring it about. Getting here has been too hard. We won't fail now."

The most apparent characteristic of elected leadership in the Delta is its fluidity. There is widespread change. One senses that each election for the foreseeable future will continue this transition, making any current assessment both difficult and then quickly obsolete. The composition of most elected offices offers a racial balance. This in turn seems to be causing the political ship to move toward a centralist position. Extremes are uncommon.

---

<sup>8</sup>*Black Elected Officials: A National Roster, 1988* (Washington: Joint Center for Political Science Press, 1988), 235.

<sup>9</sup>List was compiled from a copy provided by Mayor Unita Blackwell, president of the Black Mayor's Association.

<sup>10</sup>*Black Elected Officials, 1988*, 237.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 159-71.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 215-30 and *Black Elected Officials: A National Roster, 1986* (Washington: Joint Center for Political Science Press, 1986), 229-47.

There is a cautiousness among many elected officials and in some cases a reluctance to conduct business in an open forum. The apparent fear stems from a reluctance of becoming embroiled in a major controversy. It is questionable as to whether this strategy will work, however. Already where these situations exist, the mounting controversy is about the closed meetings.

One hears that this fear of volatile situations inhibits capable people from seeking office. Democracies are indeed messy places in which to conduct business, but that seems to be a part of the system. The words of Winston Churchill ring true here, "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms of government that have been tried from time to time."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Winston Churchill, Address to the House of Commons, 1947.

***The Economic***

***Picture***

## *Chapter*

# 12

### *Delta Economy: Business Climate and Policy Environment*

*by*

*John E. Gnuschke\**

There is a belief in some circles that the diversification of the rural economy is key to revitalizing the rural communities of the South. The key issue, however, is whether the bulk of rural communities in the region is positioned to capture these types of industries. Unfortunately, the evidence appears to suggest that it is [they are] not.

Granted, low taxes, low wage levels, minimal or no unionization, limited public expenditures for services, and the provision of land, buildings, or other sweeteners did induce businesses and industries to locate in the South's rural areas in years past. Often, these attributes provided Southern states (especially the rural areas of these states) with high ranking on the traditional business-climate-assessment measures. But on the new indicators of economic capacity being formulated for the high growth industries of today and tomorrow, rural Southern communities are judged as highly deficient.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, innovative federal, state, and local government policies are essential ingredients in any comprehensive plan to overcome the long-run structural deficiencies that serve as barriers to economic advancement for the Delta. Preparing Delta communities for the opportunities of the future will require an objective analysis of the role of current policies and the potential impact of new policies on the Delta's economy. The purpose of this chapter is to identify those local, state, and federal policies that define the business climate of the Delta; to determine how those policies affect the Delta's competitiveness; and to suggest alternative policies and directions to redefine the Delta's business climate.

---

<sup>1</sup>Southern Rural Development Center, *Building Partnerships for People: Addressing the Rural South's Human Capital Needs*, SRDC No. 117, (Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, Mississippi, August 1989), 6.

\*Director of the Bureau of Business and Economics Research and the Center for Manpower Studies and Professor of Economics at Memphis State University.

### **What is a Quality Business Climate?**

While businessmen and policymakers are in general agreement that a good business climate is an important factor for attracting new industries and for encouraging the expansion of existing industries, little agreement exists about what constitutes a good business climate. This issue is further complicated by the fact that industrial location studies indicate diversity among the factors that industries desire in a community. For example, some industries prefer traditional business climate factors—those that are more easily controlled by policy—while others place more weight on environmental, resource, or cost factors.

Location decisions often seem to be unique to each industry and are generally contingent upon a mix of factors, such as the availability of local labor and the ability to attract labor from outside the area, market location, infrastructure, energy costs, tax rates, and labor and environmental regulations. Also, quality of life concerns can have a major impact on location decisions. Quality of life encompasses many elements, such as health care, crime rate, educational level, cultural amenities, and recreational facilities.

Table 1 (page 206) contains a list of generic factors that have been found to be major determinants of the location decisions of many businesses. Communities that have deficiencies in these areas find it difficult to compete for economic opportunities. Consequently, most economic development policies attempt to remove one or more of the barriers listed in Table 1.

Clearly, the business climate created by state and local governments through policy initiatives is only one small aspect of the broader issue of providing a high quality business environment. Indeed, it is essential for a community to have high scores on many, if not most, of the factors on this list before it can be competitive. Positive attitudes and probusiness policies are necessary but not sufficient conditions for an area to be attractive to new industries. State and local areas have been forced by competition to develop myriad separate policies to address deficiencies in all of the broader business environment determinants. Unfortunately, few Delta communities have been able to generate lasting competitive advantages by passing policies that address these issues. Most innovative public policies and practices have been duplicated quickly by other states and other communities. As a result of this tendency toward policy duplication, most states and communities have policies related to industrial recruitment and economic development that are similar, if not identical.

For example, Table 2 (page 207) contains a list of financial incentives and special services available in Mississippi and in surrounding states. Few differences exist among the incentives available in each state.

### **Where Does Mississippi Rank When Evaluated On Business Environment Factors?**

This is clearly one question for which the answer may be simply, "it depends." The ranking instrument, the factors each instrument reveals as being important, and the period of analysis can produce a variety of results. Most studies use evaluation criteria that examine the following five general factors:

1. Government policy: tax effort, government expenditures, business incentives.
2. Labor costs: hourly wages, unionization.
3. Energy costs.
4. Available work force.
5. Quality of life: education, health care, crime rate, cost of living, and transportation.

Beyond these general environmental, labor market, infrastructure, and amenity factors, few consistencies exist among the findings of groups that evaluate local business conditions. As a result, there are differences in opinions about the relative attractiveness of Mississippi's



business environment. Similar differences would certainly exist for the Delta. For example, in Table 3 (page 208) the *Grant Thornton Manufacturing Climate Study*, an annual report evaluating all states, ranked Mississippi seventh overall in 1988. The Thornton evaluation contrasted sharply to findings of the Corporation for Enterprise Development shown in Table 4 (page 209). *Making the Grade: The 1988 Development Report Card for the States* evaluated each state on the areas of economic performance, business vitality, capacity, and policy. It assigned each state a grade for every factor. Mississippi received an "F" in all areas except policy, where it received a "C."

To balance these narrow and limited assessments of the environment in Mississippi, the *Long-Range Economic Development Plan for Mississippi* completed in 1988 listed a wide range of factors and indicated the state's relative rank for each of them. This information, shown in Table 5 (pages 209-212), identifies specific strengths and weaknesses in the state's economy and in the overall business environment.

While both positive and negative factors are highlighted, the number of educational deficiencies remain a major barrier to economic development in the state. These educational deficiencies are major determinants of the labor force deficiencies also shown in the table. In addition, the negative picture of the overall business environment is not improved substantially when the other factors are examined. An unacceptable crime rate, pollution, perceived transportation problems, and business performance records highlight the fact that fundamental changes must occur before the performance of the Delta economy can be expected to improve.

In the past, Mississippi has attracted industries seeking locations where wages, taxes, energy costs, and unionization levels were low. In addition, Mississippi has benefitted from having an abundant supply of human and natural resources. An underutilized supply of human resources, primarily unskilled labor, and natural resources, primarily unexploited forests, petroleum, and water resources, have made Mississippi an attractive location for employers interested in utilizing these resources.

Unfortunately, those industries that place higher value on quality of life, education, productivity, income, crime rate, and other location factors have not been attracted to the state. Potentially, this dichotomy could create an eventual crisis for the state. If Mississippi is unable to improve its performance on a large number of the quality of life, education, and income factors shown in Table 5, it will be forced to continue to depend upon resource-exploitative industries and will be unable to diversify and protect its economy. The ability of Delta communities to respond to these issues and to eliminate obvious deficiencies that are barriers to future economic development will determine the direction of the Delta economy.

### **What Other Economic Development Policies Currently Exist?**

To some extent, all federal and state policies affect the economic development of rural Delta counties. It can be argued that any policy that benefits urban areas or that facilitates the economic growth of non-Delta counties is, in fact, a policy that works against the development of the rural Delta. For example, communities with few defense industries typically benefit little from federal policies that build up defense expenditures.

By contrast, communities where agriculture and agribusiness are the cornerstone of the local economy find that federal policies that positively affect agriculture give new life to the local economy. At the state level, education, transportation, or other expenditures that make it easier for urban areas to grow also make it more difficult for small Delta communities to compete for jobs. Balancing the total needs of disadvantaged rural areas with those of more populous urban areas is essential if rural areas are to prosper.

Without jobs, rural areas will continue to be dependent upon cyclically sensitive manufacturing and agriculture that limits income and employment opportunities for their resi-

dents. If employment opportunities and options for economic advancement are not available in rural areas, then a long-term out-migration of people and a decline in resources will continue to foster a deterioration of the human resources and economic bases of these areas. Few gains can be expected in an economic environment where children who become educated must leave the area to find work, and children who are not educated must stay and seek work in a saturated labor market.

Economic development is clearly not a new subject for discussion in the nation, the State of Mississippi, or the Delta counties. State policies, the practices of agencies and bureaus, and the expenditure of millions of research dollars have and continue to attempt to improve the well-being of residents of the Delta. To date, these efforts have not been sufficient to have a dramatic impact on the Delta's developments. However, growth areas in the Delta do exist and have demonstrated success. Typically, counties that border on urban areas have, for example, been able to siphon off growth opportunities because of their locations. In these cases, federal, state, and local policies have had a positive impact when combined with the counties' good fortunes in being located in close proximity to an urban growth center. Still others have blossomed as service centers for large agricultural areas or have been successful in attracting a major employer. Other communities have benefitted from transportation, education, or recreational expenditures, while other less fortunate, but equally deserving, communities have suffered from the lack of the same competitive assets.

Overcoming federal and state policies that have favored one area over another has been an impossible task for most communities. Local investments, expenditures, and policies that support growth require a local tax base that simply does not exist in Mississippi. In many cases, the level of taxes that would be required to support these activities locally would make the area even more unattractive to the businesses they are trying to attract and support. Without federal or state support for these activities, most local communities simply cannot offset the disadvantages they inherit because of their geographic location, political affiliation, or other factors that have influenced federal and state decisions in the past.

Thus, the shifting pattern of policy effectiveness that focuses on local initiatives and de-emphasizes federal and state policies places many Delta counties at a severe competitive disadvantage. Offsetting established historic patterns of investments in education, training, transportation, and other sectors with local incentives and programs is difficult at best and is impossible for most rural areas.

Acting alone, it is unlikely that individual rural communities or counties can effectively participate in an increasingly sophisticated international competition for jobs. Current federal, state, and local support for programs that unite communities, counties, and multistate areas in regional development efforts may hold some promise of success. Clearly, federal and state efforts that assist local communities on the basis of long-term need are essential if rural areas of the Delta are to compete effectively for jobs.

### **How Do Tax and Financial Incentives Influence Industry Recruitment and Economic Development?**

Tax and financial incentives available to industry and positive progrowth government policies have not been sufficient to offset many of the structural barriers to growth that exist in the Delta. As shown in Table 6 (page 212), the overall tax structure in Mississippi is consistent with that of other midsouth states and is balanced on a wide array of income, sin, and sales taxes. In the past, many Southern states, including Mississippi, have increased their attractiveness to industries interested in low tax burdens and tax-based incentives. The State of Mississippi has frequently provided employers with tax incentives in the form of exemptions in order to attract them initially and later to encourage them to expand.

The long-run effect of this strategy has not been as desirable for the Midsouth as it was once believed. In the first place, the tax exemptions and exceptions restricted state and local tax bases and shifted to other taxpayers the burden of paying for essential state and local government services. To offset every tax break, individual taxpayers and existing industries were asked or required to pay higher taxes. This has resulted in a general decline in the quality of some of these services, such as education, as well as other negative impacts.

In the second place, the types of industries that have been attracted to Mississippi and other Midsouth states have been, in many cases, the least desirable industries to pursue. Industries attracted by tax breaks and low wages created jobs with few high-income opportunities and little job security. Those industries frequently exhibited minimal long-run commitment to the needs of the state or local communities.

In spite of these problems, tax incentives continue to be used for economic development. As shown in Table 6, most states offer some mix of incentives. Mississippi offers 11 of the 14 major tax incentives, Louisiana offers 12 of the 14 incentives, and Tennessee offers only 7 of the 14. In each state, some unique combinations of tax exemptions exist for industries. Most of the exemptions are outlined below:

1. Corporate Income Tax Exemptions

There are three programs:

- Mississippi Enterprise Zone Program
- Mississippi Advanced Technology Program
- Mississippi Corporate Headquarters Relocation

These allow a \$1,000 credit per net new employee per year for 10 years. With the Enterprise Zone Program, a business must locate or expand in one of 25 counties designated as an enterprise zone. In the advanced technology program, an area must be identified as having advanced technology for the tax exemptions to be available.

Two-thirds of the states in Table 6 have some form of corporate income tax credit. Most of Mississippi's neighboring states, except Tennessee, offer some form of corporate tax exemption.

2. Excise Tax Exemption

Mississippi does not have an excise tax exemption, nor do most of the other states in the Mississippi area. Alabama is the only state that provides this.

3. Ad Valorem Tax Exemption

In Mississippi, county boards and municipal authorities can grant exemptions on tangible property used in or necessary to the operation of manufacturing and other new enterprises of public utility, excluding autos or trucks.

All states near Mississippi offer the ad valorem tax exemption. Arkansas allows some cities to use the exemption.

4. Ad Valorem Exemption on Equipment

Mississippi also has an ad valorem exemption on equipment. Seventy percent of all states have this exemption, as do all of Mississippi's neighbors, except Tennessee.

5. "Free Port" Exemption  
Mississippi has this exemption, as do all other states, except Alaska and Texas.
6. Ad Valorem Exemption on Manufacturers' Inventories  
Manufacturers' inventories are those held by manufacturers and located in-state, which are not to be sold or shipped at retail to the final customer. Mississippi has this exemption; Louisiana is the only state in the area that does not.
7. Sales/Use Tax Exemption on New Equipment  
All states in the area offer this exemption.
8. Exemption on Raw Materials Used in Manufacturing  
Mississippi, as well as the rest of the states in the area, has some form of this exemption.
9. Exemption for Job Creation  
Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana have this exemption. South Carolina, Alabama, and Tennessee do not.
10. Industrial Investment  
Mississippi and the other states in the area offer this incentive.
11. Tax Credit for Use of Specific State Products  
Mississippi does not offer this credit. Arkansas and Louisiana do.
12. Tax Stabilization Agreements  
Mississippi does not offer this incentive. Only five states do, and Louisiana is one of them.

In summary, some of these incentives may be necessary to make a community with weaknesses more "sellable." Also, they may help provide an edge to areas that are otherwise similar and must compete for industries. However, policymakers should be aware that incentives may discriminate against existing businesses and may negatively affect the services that can be offered by a community. Furthermore, for many industries, it is apparent that state and local services, infrastructure quality, and quality of life factors are as important as tax exemptions in industry location decisions.

### **How Does Human Resource Development and Education Influence Business Climate and Economic Development?**

In tracing patterns of growth and growth determinants in the South, Rosenfeld, Bergman, and Rubin found that. . .the most important growth factors for the average nonmetro county are: *education, education, and education*. The current conventional wisdom about education's beneficial effects on jobs is fully supported: growth and education go hand-in-hand. Counties with higher levels of educational attainment acquired more new jobs and raised per capita income of the population. Throughout the analysis, nonmetro education proved to be highly significant and very nearly the decisive factor in economic growth.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Stuart A. Rosenfeld, Edward M. Bergman, and Sarah Rubin, *Making Connections: After the Factories Revisited* (Southern Growth Policies Board, Research Triangle Park, NC, February 1989), 61.

Consequently, a primary area of concern in Mississippi is the inability of rural areas to support an education system that can compete with better funded urban systems. In *Rural Economic Development in the 1980's*, Ross and Rosenfeld point out the nature of the dilemma faced by rural areas: "The economic vitality of rural communities depends on the availability of a high-quality work force. The public investment in education and training programs has been substantial, but the allocation of resources to rural areas is proportionally less than to urban areas."<sup>3</sup>

As a result of the unequal funding of schools, many states are being asked or required by the courts to reallocate resources so that rural and urban school systems are more equally funded. While equal funding will help reduce the disadvantages faced by rural school systems, it will not eliminate the long-term educational disadvantages that exist in rural areas because of policies that historically have supported urban systems or have failed to provide adequate resources for rural students. "Despite equalization formulas and, in most states, population density factors that provide added funding to small schools or districts to compensate for diseconomies of scale, rural schools spend less state and local money per student than urban schools."<sup>4</sup> Only high-cost remedial and compensatory programs can help eliminate the educational deficits that exist in rural areas.

This is not to say that all rural school systems are inadequate. In fact, Ross and Rosenfeld found that "rural schools with highly qualified and committed teachers, sufficient resources, student participation in a wide range of activities, leadership training, and community support have indeed been good sources of human resources. But, on average, rural schools have fewer resources, less adequate facilities, and less experienced teachers than urban schools."<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion, a task force established by the Southern Rural Development Center to examine Alternatives for Leadership and Human Resource Development in Rural Communities in the South concluded that,

In surveying the rural South, it is clear that the fundamental problem impeding realization of measured improvements in the economic climate of rural Southern communities is the state of the region's human resources. Vibrant economies are unsustainable in a rural South that leads the nation in the rate of high school dropouts, in the proportion of adults suffering from functional illiteracy . . . or in an area having the lowest percentage of college-educated adults. . . . The necessary precursor to the realization of an economic development renaissance in rural communities of the South is a full-fledged commitment to enhancing the human capital resources of these localities—to addressing the serious problem of high school dropouts and to attacking the issue of adult illiteracy. Only in this way can economic security for the South's rural communities and its citizens be truly enhanced. . . .<sup>6</sup>

### **Have Economic Development Policies Been Effective?**

In the rural South, the conditions associated with poverty may well be the greatest hindrance to attracting businesses and industries. Although much has been made of industry's preference for the nonunionized South, the track record of industrial relocation in impoverished, poorly educated rural areas has not been impressive. While it is true that

---

<sup>3</sup>Peggy J. Ross and Stuart A. Rosenfeld, "Human Resource Policies and Economic Development," *Rural Economic Development in the 1980's* (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Washington, DC), 15-1.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 15-6.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Southern Rural Development Center, *Building Partnerships for People*, 7.

underdevelopment generates and perpetuates poverty, it is also true that poverty discourages development. Lacking special incentives, most businesses seeking new sites are not drawn to places where the labor force is poorly educated, services are scanty, and cultural opportunities are few.

With their inadequate tax bases and part-time officials, many rural communities in the South lead a hand-to-mouth existence that beggars the future at the expense of immediate survival. In the hard times of the early to middle 1980's, it has been difficult for those who are getting poorer either to make investments themselves or attract capital from other sources. Rural development schemes for the future must, therefore, be integrated with schemes to create more public sector responsiveness to the needs of the South's rural poor.<sup>7</sup>

Increasing competition for jobs has served as a catalyst for dramatic policy changes in many Delta counties. The competition has generated an interest in and support for community economic development efforts, policies, programs, and actions that facilitate economic growth. A proliferation of diverse and bewildering federal, state, and local government policies and decisions has attempted to provide employers with the incentives for growth. Every state and local area has attempted to gain a competitive advantage by providing potential employers with a package of incentives that are uniquely attractive. But, as has been suggested, such short-term policy has been enacted at the expense of local businesses that must make up the difference in terms of taxes and at the expense of the state's human resources who suffer from a decline in the quality of services provided.

Initially, each community found new incentives, such as tax relief and public funding for buildings and infrastructure investments, relatively easy to develop and administer. But, as word of programs and policies that were successful spread across the country, communities no longer found it easy to gain a competitive advantage. Traditional policies and programs became a necessary but not sufficient condition to attract new employers to an area, especially those employers that might provide real economic improvement.

At the same time, it became obvious that federal policies designed to help all states equally, and state policies designed to help all counties equally, would not differentiate among either states or counties. The push for targeted state programs with increasing local control or for more decentralized control of economic development activities has resulted from the increased competition among and between neighboring communities and counties. Thus, local incentives and policies now play a central role in preparing communities for economic growth.

Unfortunately, many Delta communities and counties have been placed at a tremendous disadvantage by the focus on local policies. Because of their historical reliance on agriculture, these areas have suffered constant employment and income problems created by the frequently depressed and constantly changing agricultural economy. As a result, few Delta communities and counties have the resources necessary to compete with high-growth urban, suburban, or occasionally rural growth centers. Most Delta areas have been unable to marshal the time, energy, money, and programs to effectively compete for new and emerging jobs.

Balanced federal and state policies that do not compensate for historical inequalities among counties and communities simply continue to perpetuate those inequalities. Without targeted programs, rural areas that have been depressed will continue to be depressed, because they suffer from long-standing disadvantages when competing with more affluent and better prepared counties.

Heroic community programs have benefitted some communities in the Delta, while other sister communities have lagged behind in development efforts. Clearly, any meaningful

---

<sup>7</sup>Kenny Johnson, "The Southern Stake in Rural Development," *Rural Flight/Urban Might: Economic Development Challenges for the 1990s* (Southern Growth Policies Board, 1986 Commission on the Future of the South, Research Triangle Park, NC), 13.

economic plan for Mississippi must focus on initiatives that distribute federal and state incentives on the basis of need. Leveling the playing field is an essential ingredient for balancing economic growth. In many cases, this means that senators, congressmen, governors, and state legislators must be encouraged to develop target programs and incentive packages that redistribute resources to those areas of the state that are most in need and least able to compete in the marketplace for jobs.

Even state revenues may not be sufficient to provide an adequate set of tools for economic development in many areas of the Delta. The *Mississippi Comprehensive Intermodal Transportation Plan*<sup>8</sup> prepared in 1983 highlights the inability of the state to support the existing highway and air transportation systems that are essential ingredients in developing local economies. In a state where a large percentage of the rural roads are still unpaved, where paved roads require constant maintenance, and where little state aid exists to support local airports or match federal funds for larger airports, local communities are left to search for other sources of tax dollars to develop and maintain essential transportation services. The absence of state funds is compounded by the cutbacks in federal support for highways, airports, river ports, and public transit.

Table 7 (page 213) contains information on the leading budgetary issues that were to be handled in the 1989 legislative sessions in Mississippi and adjacent states. Clearly, massive educational funding issues existed in every state. Unfortunately, with slow growth economies and already tight budgets, state resources were simply not available to address even the top priority issues in most Midsouth states. As a result, the budget issues for 1990-1991 and the future will continue to emphasize but underfund key programs that are essential for economic development.

Not only are most state and local communities having difficulty keeping up with the funding requirements for essential services and infrastructure needs, they are incapable of generating the needed tax dollars required to upgrade existing programs and to support needed programs. Offsetting major long-term structural problems and deficiencies is simply not possible within the resource constraints of most Midsouth states.

In summary, competitors from other state and local areas can be expected to match or even improve upon economic development policies provided to potential employers by Delta communities. Consequently, the role of government policies is questionable. For example, in a recent article on the "Entrepreneurial Economy," Peter Drucker asked, ". . . can government really plan for the unknown?" He concluded, ". . . no one can plan for what does not yet exist; all one can do is encourage or discourage it. . . . Beyond trying not to stunt this new economic growth, the only thing government can effectively do is to remove obstacles. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Rosenfeld, Bergman, and Rubin concluded, "In the end, the best one can hope for is a sound mix of 'enabling' state policies that leave open to local officials and citizens the fullest opportunity to improve their economic and social conditions. . . . If pressed to name policies that could 'enable' and revitalize rural growth, however, intelligence, participation and connections would be at the top of the list."<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Executive Summary," *Mississippi Comprehensive Intermodal Transportation Plan* (Columbia, SC: Wilbur Smith & Associates, March 1983).

<sup>9</sup> Peter Drucker, "Our Entrepreneurial Economy," *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1984, 64.

<sup>10</sup>Rosenfeld, Bergman, and Rubin, *Making Connections: After the Factories Revisited*, 63.

## Conclusions

The right choice of public policy can raise cost effectiveness of taxpayers' dollars. The wrong choice can undermine economic development, discrediting hope in the process. Public authorities cannot take the position of simply "getting out of the way" of business investment in chronically underdeveloped economies. Leaders from the public and private sectors must work together to establish the right mix of capital investment and public policy that raises factor productivity and controls market environment risk well enough to stimulate accelerated private investment.<sup>11</sup>

It is unfortunate that a major conclusion of this analysis of the Delta's business climate and policy environment must be that after many years of effort, the barriers to economic progress that existed years ago have not been overcome and will continue to impede the economic development of the Delta. The ideal mix of public policy and human and physical capital formation initiatives has not been designed. Poor long-term economic growth records compound prolonged poverty, high unemployment, low income levels, inadequate housing, poor health care, underfunded education, insufficient adult training, and other characteristics that describe many areas of the Delta. Public policies have simply been unsuccessful in addressing the numerous obstacles to economic progress that inhibit economic growth in much of the Delta.

The financial and tax incentives provided to potential employers have been necessary but not sufficient to dramatically improve employment and income opportunities available in the Delta. In fact, many federal and state policies that provide identical incentives for all communities ultimately shift the economic development battle to the local level. Unfortunately, this is the level where most Delta communities are least able to compete for economic survival. Long-run structural barriers to growth place Delta communities at a competitive disadvantage when dealing with other more affluent areas. Balancing the playing field requires that federal and state policies recognize the nature and severity of the structural inequalities that place Delta communities at a long-term and seemingly insurmountable competitive disadvantage.

Clearly, the most serious deficiency is the absence of a balanced, high-quality human resource development program. The need for a balanced program that provides for the development of a generation of children and at the same time does not sacrifice generations of adults is essential if meaningful economic progress is to be realized. Obviously, the quality of education available for the next generation is extremely important but does not outweigh the need to find and fund programs to upgrade the existing labor force. Most Delta communities cannot adequately fund traditional educational programs, let alone design and implement education and training programs for generations of adults who, by choice, necessity, or neglect, failed to obtain the skills required by employers.

Can state government provide the financial resources required to meet the need to upgrade the Delta's human resources? The answer seems to be an emphatic no. Providing resources for traditional primary, secondary, and postsecondary educational systems has placed Mississippi in a continuous tax crisis. In general, poor states and poor communities do not have the resources necessary to fund both traditional and remedial adult education systems. At best, state policies could be designed to compensate for previous inadequacies by shifting funding priorities to those areas most in need. However, serving those most in need is an expensive, long-term investment that will require a reallocation of funds, and a serious effort to find new sources of funds.

---

<sup>11</sup>William N. Weirick, "Successful Strategies for Regional Economic Development," *Delta Business Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Center for Business and Economic Research, Northeast Louisiana University, Monroe, LA, Fall/Winter 1989), 30.



Even existing federal programs do not significantly help states. Federal job training programs available under the Job Training Partnership Act are currently inadequate to offset the education and training needs of hundreds of thousands of adult Delta citizens. In general, these programs are poorly funded, short-term oriented, and generally insufficient to address the massive needs of the Delta labor force.

Consequently, new training programs and new compensatory education programs at the federal level must be a key source of funding for any future efforts to provide costly remedial education and training programs in the Delta. Programs that target those areas most in need must be developed to help the disadvantaged communities in the Delta. A massive influx of federal support is essential to sustain state and local efforts to provide employers with an adequately trained labor force.

While education and training initiatives are highlighted, they are not the only public policy areas that must be addressed to reduce the barriers to growth that exist in the Delta. In every case, the solution to removing the barriers involves tax resources that do not exist at either the state or the local level of government. Costly investment initiatives must be funded from outside—primarily through federal revenue sources. While Delta residents want and deserve to have improved employment and income opportunities, they currently lack the resource base necessary to support the improvements in physical and human capital required to make economic progress a reality. Clearly, new compensatory federal and state initiatives are essential to improve the economic well-being of the citizens of the Delta.

**Table 1. Location Factors (Results are based upon a survey by Louis Harris & Associates of 403 business leaders with corporate sales of over \$250 million.)**

---

Absolutely Essential Factors in Location Decisions

Easy access to domestic markets, customers, or clients

Cost and availability of labor

Business climate created by state and local government

Quality of life for employees

Easy access to international markets, customers, or clients

Factors Not Considered Important by Executives

Good public schools

Low crime rate

State/local taxes that are not burdensome

Affordable housing

Enough streets and highways

"Good social climate"

Adequate public transportation

Good college and universities

Good cultural activities

Good recreational activities

---

Source: State Policy Reports, Vol. 5, No. 13, July 16, 1987.

**Table 2. Financial incentives and special services for Mississippi and adjacent states.**

Incentives	Mississippi	Alabama	Arkansas	Louisiana	Tennessee
State-sponsored industrial development authority	X	X	X		
Private-sponsored development credit corporation	X	X	X	X	
State authority/agency revenue bond financing	X	X	X	X	
City/county revenue bond financing	X	X	X	X	X
City/county general obligation bond financing	X	X	X	X	X
State loans for building construction, equipment, and machinery	X	X	X	X	
City/county loans for building construction, equipment, and machinery	X	X		X	
State loan guarantee for building construction, equipment, and machinery	X		X	X	
State financing—existing plant expansion	X	X	X	X	X
State machine funds—city/county industrial financing programs		X		X	
State incentives to establish plants in areas of high unemployment	X	X	X	X	X
City-county incentives to establish plants in areas of high unemployment	X		X	X	
State-financed speculative building		X		X	
City/county financed speculative building	X	X		X	X
State-owned industrial park sites	X	X			
City/county-owned industrial park sites	X	X	X	X	X
State funds to city/county development—related public works projects		X	X	X	X
State funds—city/county master plans		X		X	X
State funds—city/county recreational projects		X	X	X	X
State programs for promoting research and development	X	X	X	X	X
State programs to increase export of products	X	X	X	X	X
University research and development facility	X	X	X	X	X
State/University feasibility study	X	X	X	X	X
State-supported training of "hard-core unemployed"	X	X		X	X
State incentive to industry to train "hard-core unemployed"	X			X	X
State help in bidding for federal procurement contract	X		X	X	X

Source: Long Range Economic Development Plan for Mississippi (Jackson, MS: Center for Policy Research and Planning, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, December 1988).

**Table 3. Grant Thornton Manufacturing Climate Study, July 1988.**

Overall Rankings: Mississippi	National Rank
All factors	7
Government factors	7
Nongovernment factors	7
Government fiscal policies	6
Employment costs	5
Labor costs	4
Use of resources	36
Quality of life	48
Tax effort	19
Change in tax effort	16
Expenditure growth vs. personal income growth	25
Debt vs. personal income growth	2
State business incentives	14
Average unemployment compensation benefit	18
Unemployment compensation trust fund net worth	1
Statutory average workers' compensation cost per case	17
Workers' Compensation Insurance levels	11
Wages	1
Changes in wages	30
Unionization	8
Change in unionization	10
Available work force	47
Manhours lost	1
Value added	33
Energy cost	11
Education	45
Health care	48
Cost of living	34
Transportation	44

Source: Long Range Economic Development Plan for Mississippi (Jackson, MS: Center for Policy Research and Planning, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, December 1988).

**Table 4. Making the grade: 1988 Development Report Care for the States: Mississippi.**

Factor	Grade
<u>Performance Index</u>	F
Employment, earnings, and job quality, equity, environmental health, and safety	
<u>Business Vitality</u>	F
Competitiveness of existing businesses, entrepreneurial energy, structural diversity	
<u>Capacity</u>	F
Human resource capacity, technological resource capacity, financial resource capacity, physical infrastructure and amenity, resource capacity	
<u>Policy</u>	C
Improving governance and regulation, creating stable and equitable tax and fiscal environment, investing in education, investing in infrastructure and amenities, mobilizing capital, promoting new enterprise and strengthening existing business, investing in disadvantaged individuals and communities, agricultural development	

Source: Long Range Economic Development Plan for Mississippi (Jackson, MS: Center for Policy Research and Planning, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, December 1988).

**Table 5. Factor rankings from Long-Range Economic Development Plan for Mississippi.**

Factor	Rank
<u>Education</u>	
SAT Scores (1981-82 and 1984)	16
ACT Scores (1988, out of 28 states that require ACT)	28
High school courses required for graduation (1984)	50
Teacher competency testing (1984)	Yes
Teacher recertification required (1984)	Yes

(continued)

**Table 5 (continued). Factor rankings from Long-Range Economic Development Plan for Mississippi.**

Factor	Rank
Student charges in public colleges by state (1984)	2
Library circulation (check-outs per capita, 1983)	50
Higher education enrollment (as percent of state population, 1980)	45
Vocational enrollment (absolute terms, 1980)	36
Federal aid to public schools (percent of total educational expenditures, 1986-1987)	1
Per pupil expenditure (1985-1986)	48
Computers in classroom (percentage of schools using, 1982)	25
Teachers' average salary (1986)	49
Percent increase in salary (1976-1977 to 1986-1987)	18
Pupil/teacher ratio (from highest to lowest, 1986)	12
<u>Crime Rate</u>	
Justice spending per capita (1983)	49
Crime rate (1983)	48
Property crime (1980)	48
Violent crime (1980)	33
<u>Pollution</u>	
Open dumps (1983)	5
Landfills (1982)	17
State government environmental expenditures (1980)	9
<u>Labor Force</u>	
Labor, blue collar (percent of work force, 1980)	6
Labor, white collar (percent of work force, 1980)	43
High school graduates (percent of population, 1980)	47

(continued)

**Table 5 (continued). Factor rankings from Long-Range Economic Development Plan for Mississippi.**

Factor	Rank
College graduates (as percentage of population, 1980)	44
Manufacturing output (in dollars, 1980)	29
Physicians (1979)	49
Dentists (1979)	50
Lawyers (1981)	32
Unemployment (1982)	13
Long-term unemployment (percentage unemployed 1 year +)	14
Unemployment among teens (1980)	4
Unemployment among nonwhites (1980)	21
Unemployment among women (1980)	4
Union membership (1978, non-agricultural employees)	44
Strikes (working days lost, 1980)	37
<u>Highway Transportation</u>	
Vehicle miles per capita (1985)	36
State highway capital outlay (1985)	30
Total existing mileage (1985)	28
State highway maintenance (1985)	29
Motor vehicle traffic deaths (1981)	7
<u>Business</u>	
Stock ownership (1981)	50
Bank assets (1982)	31
Business failures (1980)	27
Value of manufacturing shipments (1980)	29
Employment in small establishments (1979)	23

(continued)

**Table 5 (continued). Factor rankings from Long-Range Economic Development Plan for Mississippi.**

Factor	Rank
Employment in establishments with 500 + employees (1979)	30
Business concerns (1980)	33

Source: Long-Range Economic Development Plan for Mississippi (Jackson, MS: Center for Policy Research and Planning, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, December 1988).

**Table 6. Tax exemptions for Mississippi and adjacent states.**

Exemptions	Mississippi	Alabama	Arkansas	Louisiana	Tennessee
Corporate income tax credit	X	X	X	X	
Excise tax exemption		X			
Ad valorem tax exemption or moratorium on land, capital improvements	X	X	X	X	X
Ad valorem tax exemption or moratorium on equipment, machinery	X	X	X	X	X
Inventory ad valorem tax exemption on goods in transport (Free port)	X	X	X	X	X
Ad valorem tax exemption on manufacturer inventories	X	X	X		X
Sales/use tax exemption on new equipment	X	X	X	X	X
Tax exemption on raw materials used in manufacturing	X	X	X	X	X
Tax incentive for new job creation	X		X	X	
Tax incentive for industrial investment	X	X	X	X	X
Tax credit for use of specified state products			X	X	
Tax stabilization agreements for specified industries				X	
Tax exemption to encourage research and development	X			X	
Accelerated depreciation of industrial equipment	X			X	X

Source: Long-Range Economic Development Plan for Mississippi (Jackson, MS: Center for Policy Research and Planning, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, December 1988).



**Table 7. Leading budgetary issues in 1989 Legislative Sessions, Mississippi and adjacent states.**

State	Issue Ranked 1st	Issue Ranked 2nd	Issue Ranked 3rd
Mississippi	Education--overall funding for K-12 and higher education	Economic Development--reorganization and funding	State Personnel--salary level and higher education funding
Alabama	Education--increase per student funding	Health/Social Services--infant mortality rate	Environment--waste management--quality of drinking water
Arkansas	Education--change in state/local funding	Transportation--highway finance	State Personnel--salary levels
Louisiana	No response/no legislative meeting in 1989	No response/no legislative meeting in 1989	No response/no legislative meeting in 1989
Tennessee	Education--equity in funding--teachers' salaries	Health/Social Services--Medicaid	Corrections--new prisons--sentencing guidelines

Source: Leading Fiscal Issues in the 1989 Legislative Sessions, LPT #65 (Denver, CO: National Conference of State Legislatures, December, 1988).

## ***Chapter***

# **13**

### ***Delta Economy: Local Government Capacity***

***by  
Martin Wiseman\****

The notion of local government capacity pertains to the ability to accomplish a variety of functions carried out at the county and municipal levels. Some of these would include the level of professional management capabilities, the variety of services delivered, the quality of services, and the ability to respond to unforeseen situations. At the root of all of these, however, is the element of financial capacity. The revenues available to a local government play a controlling role in the ability, or lack thereof, to provide the aforementioned elements at a satisfactory level. Conversely, appropriately designed governmental structure may provide the efficiency necessary to better utilize available revenues. Such an arrangement holds the possibility of freeing funds for additional services, thereby expanding local government capacity.

This section of the report will examine these components of local government capacity. More specifically, it will examine the capacity of local governments in the Mississippi Delta to address problems in the provision of basic governmental services and the potential for these governments to go beyond this in contributing to solutions to the array of conditions affecting citizens of the Delta. In this regard, it is perhaps an understatement that rural America is under financial stress. This situation is magnified in the case of the Mississippi Delta. The resource-based economies that have served individuals living in the Delta face major structural problems. Agricultural incomes are down as reported so often by the media. However, there is a more subtle, longer term set of problems.

Many Delta local governments now face a less secure financial future. Declining farm property values are eroding the local property tax base in these agriculturally dependent communities. In rural communities generally, drops in local income cause main street property

values to fall, while demands for many publicly provided services increase, creating a squeeze between falling revenues and higher costs.<sup>1</sup>

Local governments in the Mississippi Delta face the prospect of dealing with, on the one hand, a shrinking tax base and, on the other, a shift of the tax burden toward an already stressed agricultural sector. Many localities will face financial problems as a result of the restructuring of the rural economy. In some instances, the financial stress will be so severe that local public services will deteriorate to substandard levels.<sup>2</sup>

The following two parts of this section will deal, respectively, with some indicators in the area of county property tax base and with municipal revenues.

### **Overview of County Tax Base and Tax Burden Data**

In any research related to the notion of area development, the issue of funding must arise. If the application of research findings is aimed solely at short-term projects, then funding sources may be identified by which one will provide "one shot" grant money or financing over a defined period of time. If the intent is to provide a substantial funding stream over a long period of time, then more permanent sources of revenue must be identified. A political subdivision with taxing authority must look to its own tax base as a permanent source of revenue for ongoing functions and for those additional programs designed to accomplish development of the type desired by that unit of government.

The issues that must be addressed in order to best approach the problem of targeting resources generated from the local tax base are numerous. They involve the identification of the appropriate types of commitment by local governments and the structure necessary to affect that commitment. Further, current conditions must be identified with respect to expenditures and the tax and revenue base necessary to support those expenditures. In this way, one may identify the greatest points of pressure on local revenues and those sectors of the local economy shouldering the greatest burden in funding these expenditures. Finally, approaches must be designed to bring about the necessary adjustments over the long term to enable the expansion of local government capacity to the level necessary to portend a pattern of growth.

While these approaches to the analysis of the role played by local government in development efforts seem quite simple, in reality they involve hundreds of variables that, when analyzed, may yield some answers to current inadequacies and point to further efforts in revitalizing and redirecting these governmental units. The case at hand is that of the Mississippi Delta. This is an 18-county region along the Mississippi River in the northwest half of the state. This region differs from the rest of the state and indeed the rest of the nation on almost any variable one would care to identify. These variables would pertain to every imaginable demographic statistic as well as to those related to modes of government operations and finance. This segment of research will pertain to a very basic overview of data relating to the largest source of local revenue—county and municipal taxes. The approach will be to analyze the tax burden carried by each identifiable category of property in the property tax base and to further examine the role played by various types of property within these categories. Of greatest value here will be the comparison of Delta counties with non-Delta counties in these analyses. Based on the results produced here, it may be hypothesized that correlations may be established between tax-base-related data and various demographic indexes. In addition, a cursory examination of municipal revenues from sources other than the

---

<sup>1</sup>Thomas F. Stinson, "The Farm Crisis and the Future of Rural Local Governments," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* F:4 (Fall 1987).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

property tax will be undertaken. These data should be useful in determining how deficiencies in local government capacity are related to the overall economic and demographic conditions in the Delta. Furthermore, this should allow for prescribing corrective measures for long-term change.

### Definitions and Units of Measurement

The property valuation and assessment process for county and municipal governments in Mississippi places property into four general categories. These may be defined as:

- Category 1     Real property
  - 1.     Land
    - a. Agricultural land (cultivable)
    - b. Other (cultivable)
    - c. Urban
  - 2.     Improvements
    - a. Residential (homestead)
    - b. Residential (rental)
    - c. Commercial, industrial, and farm buildings
- Category 2     Personal property (business and industrial)
- Category 3     Automobiles
- Category 4     Public utilities

Because of statutory requirements pertaining to revenue levels, it is not enough simply to know the appraised value of each of these categories of property. The ceiling placed on total revenues generated from the property tax in each county and municipality has a great deal to do with controlling the burden placed on each category. Revenues are produced by applying a tax rate to the assessed value of all property. The unit of taxation for Mississippi counties is the "mil." A single mil is equal to a tax of \$1 per \$1,000 of assessed value. Thus, we may offer the following definitions with regard to tax rates:

*Mil* = \$1 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

*Millage Rate* = Total of mills levied by a given taxing district. For example, a county that levied 60 mills for funding its budget would have a millage rate of 60.

*Property Tax Revenue* = Total avails of the millage rate when multiplied by the assessed value.

*10 percent Revenue Cap* = Refers to the maximum increase allowed in property tax revenue from one year to the next. For example, a county that generates \$10,000,000 from the property tax in 1986 may generate \$11,000,000 in 1987. A *very important exception* exists in the case of "new" property. Property going on the role for the first time during a taxing year is exempt from the 10 percent cap. Thus, a new home or commercial building will contribute additional value over and above the revenue plus 10 percent. This enables tax base growth.

*Property Tax Index* = County-specific measure used to establish true value of improvements. This index has features of the local economy as its basis. It is an important indicator of growth rate and level of economic activity. Generally, counties with higher levels of economic activity will have a higher index.

Table 1 (page 226) displays assessed values by class of property. Of greatest interest in examining this table is that the average for Delta counties is lower as a total than the average for non-Delta counties, and this lower assessed value is reflected across the four classes of property.

This condition is quite important, particularly when viewed in the context of the data contained in Table 2 (page 227), which reveals little difference in the proportion of tax burden borne by the classes, as compared to those classes in non-Delta counties. The averages of total dollar values show quite clearly that there exists less "taxable value" in the Delta. Thus, if it is assumed that local governmental services will cost the same in the Delta, the only alternative in raising the necessary revenues will be in increasing the rate of taxation.

When these values are displayed as a proportion of the total value in percentage terms, we are able to gain insight into the relative tax burden of each of the four classes. Table 2 reveals that the tax burdens for Delta counties are not markedly different from the tax burdens of non-Delta counties. The average real property values for Delta counties carry a slightly higher burden than in non-Delta counties. The tax burden for the Personal and Auto classes is slightly lower for Delta counties.

It should be helpful to examine the assessed-value figures and the tax burdens in each of these categories, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. This will allow for some speculation as to which of these categories would be most impacted by changing conditions in the Delta.

The real property category comprises the bulk of the assessed value in Delta as well as non-Delta counties. In Delta counties, however, the average assessed value of real property is \$58.7 million, as compared to \$69.1 million for the non-Delta counties. Thus, it can be assumed that there is generally less taxable value in Delta real estate. All types of real property are in less supply and probably of less value in the Delta. This is a direct reflection of data contained in other sections of this report, particularly that related to housing, income, and manufacturing facilities, to name a few.

Personal property values relate to the value of all implements of business and industrial facilities not a part of the permanent structure (real estate). Thus, increased value in this area would be a reflection of increased activity in the construction and equipping of businesses and industrial facilities. In the Delta, the average value of personal property is \$8 million per county. This compares with the \$11 million per county average for non-Delta counties. Again, with regard to the Delta, this is an indication of a lesser developed inventory of business and industrial equipment.

Automobiles are assessed by the State Tax Commission of Mississippi, and their values are assessed by the respective counties via computer. In this category as in the others, the average assessed value for the Delta is noticeably lower. There is approximately a \$4 million gap between the \$11.1 million auto assessed value in the Delta and the non-Delta assessed value for autos of \$15.1 million. It may be hypothesized that this is also a reflection of income and per capita automobile ownership. Income levels would have some impact on the value of automobiles purchased and the number of persons able to purchase an automobile.

The final category is that of utilities. Like automobiles, utility values for tax purposes are set by the State Tax Commission. The counties receive a tax roll from the State Tax Commission listing the assessed value of the specific utility's entire physical plant chargeable to a particular county. In reality, there is less opportunity for variability here than in the other categories, because the proportion of a company's physical plant chargeable to any one county is fairly small. If there was a general increase in demand caused by an increase in population density and an increase in demand caused by increased industrialization and business activity, then the possibility exists that there would be a concomitant need to increase the size of the investment in physical facilities throughout the Delta. This would possibly be reflected in increased values of utility assessments.

The property tax base in the Delta is generally smaller than for those counties in the rest of the state. If you consider the comparison of relative tax burdens contained in Table 2 alone, these significant differences would not be apparent. In examining Table 2, it can be seen that the average assessed value burden for Delta counties in the personal and utility categories is virtually the same as that for non-Delta counties. The assessed value burden for autos in Delta counties is clearly lower than that for non-Delta counties. It is in the real property category that a somewhat meaningful reversal is revealed. The Delta exhibited a greater dependence on the real property segment of the tax base than non-Delta counties. This is particularly significant in light of the previous discussion of the relative values of the respective categories for Delta and non-Delta counties. It means that regardless of the lack of value in the real property category, it must still bear a high proportion of the property tax burden. A breakdown of this category will be particularly revealing.

Table 3 (page 228) contains the dollar values of assessments in the real property class. These data are useful in gaining an indication of volume differences across all categories between Delta and non-Delta counties.

Table 4 (page 229) presents some striking comparisons when tax burdens are considered. First, the proportion of tax burden carried by the cultivatable land category in Delta counties is more than triple that of non-Delta counties. In other words, the tax burden shouldered by farmland in the Delta is much greater than in the rest of the state. In every other category in the real property class, the tax burden is lower in Delta counties than in non-Delta counties. Issaquena, Tunica, and Sharkey Counties all exhibit astounding dependence on farmland as the major portion of the tax burden and, thus, the most important revenue generator.

Given the data contained in the section on agriculture, this scenario is significant. With fewer owners holding larger farm parcels, the task of producing county revenues is becoming the responsibility of fewer people in a narrowly defined sector of the economy.

If you keep in mind that there is a ceiling of 10 percent annually on new revenue production, then it becomes obvious that an increase in the burden in one category will result in a concomitant decrease in the burden of another. Thus, an increase in the nonagriculture-related sectors, based on new value creation, would broaden the tax base and reduce the pressure on the farm land category.

### **Importance of Municipal Revenue Sources**

County tax burdens paint only part of the picture of local government capacity. If the picture is to be completed, the role of municipalities must be considered. This is so because in this early stage of assessment we are interested in gaining some indication of the level of resources available in the entire revenue pool of each respective county.

With respect to the contributions made by municipalities, this portion of the section will contain data pertaining to actual revenues. These revenues will appear in three categories: ad valorem taxes, intergovernmental revenues, and total revenues. Intergovernmental revenues is by far the largest category because it contains the biggest contributor to municipalities—the sales tax—as well as all other revenues coming from other governmental sources. It will be noted that there is a significant difference in the total of ad valorem and intergovernmental revenues and the total revenues categories. This difference is composed by a wide variety of small revenue sources, such as fees, fines, permits, and several others. In many cases, municipalities did not report a breakdown of these revenues, so they were not included as a specific group because data were not available.

With regard to the data in general, a few observations should be made. First, the Delta contains a greater than would be expected number of the state's municipalities. There are 87 of the state's 292 towns in the 18 Delta counties. This is approximately 30 percent of the towns in the state. Secondly, these towns, with some obvious exceptions, are very small. Many are

"throwbacks" to the old company store and headquarters locations of plantation days. Thirdly, when businesses are located outside of municipalities, the entire sales tax goes into the state treasury. Municipalities then receive a reimbursement equivalent to 20.5 percent of the sales tax collected for sales within their boundaries. Thus, this large number of municipalities does represent greater opportunities for sales tax recovery due to the number of reimbursement locations. However, the other side of the coin holds that these mostly small municipalities must expend these scarce resources in providing basic services.

Table 5 (pages 230-234) totals municipal revenues in the three categories for all municipalities in each respective county. From these county totals, a Delta and non-Delta total and average are derived. These two latter categories are quite revealing. In examining the municipal ad valorem category, one can easily detect that the non-Delta county average is almost exactly double that of Delta counties at \$406,219 to \$202,559, respectively. This same pattern holds for intergovernmental revenues. The non-Delta average for municipal revenues within a county is \$753,023, and the Delta average is \$386,188.96.

Total revenues are somewhat less than double for non-Delta counties over Delta counties. These categorical gaps exist in spite of the fact that the Delta has proportionately more municipalities than the counties in the rest of the state. Since ad valorem revenues are a function of real estate values and sales tax revenues relate to income patterns, explanations for this poor performance of Delta municipalities may be discovered in the Agriculture and Income sections of this report.

Table 6 (page 235) contains data reflecting the proportionate relationships of categories in the municipal revenue base. There are only small differences in data for municipalities in Delta and those in non-Delta counties. The Delta counties exhibit a slightly higher revenue burden in the ad valorem category than do non-Delta counties. Municipalities in non-Delta counties have a somewhat higher revenue burden in the intergovernmental category. The "other" category is virtually the same. More analysis is necessary to explain in detail the differences that do exist. One possible explanation is that, because Delta counties receive less sales tax revenue (something in which they have very little control), they are forced to compensate in the ad valorem category by adjusting tax rates upward.

If one were to consider where to begin in a search for corrective measures, the answers would be found in expanding the property tax base in the areas of industrial development (even with exemptions for new industry) and subsequent construction of residential property and increased urban land values. With regard to sales taxes, new sources of higher personal income would obviously expand revenue generation capabilities in this area.

### **Revenues, Expenditures, and Expansion of Property Tax Base as Indicators of Local Fiscal Capacity**

The discussions in the previous sections have been revealing with regard to the process of establishment of the local tax and revenue base. By examining additional data, we may gain insight into the reasons why these conditions exist, and we may also look at some of the impacts produced.

One question that has no doubt arisen pertains to the relative level of development of real property in the property tax base. In other words, we may ask if the Delta is growing at a rate that would close the gap in local revenue production capabilities as compared to non-Delta counties. Initial indicators of such growth pertain to the value and volume of new construction taking place in the Delta. It should be remembered that such new construction is exempt from the 10 percent limit on new revenue and may be taxed at the full rate, and revenues generated from such property are added to the local treasury over and above the 110 percent allowed on existing property. Thus, significant growth has a healthy and immediate

impact. Table 7 (page 236) contains data pertaining to construction authorized by permit for 1986.

In every category, indicators of construction are markedly lower for Delta counties as compared to non-Delta counties. The value of construction authorized by permit averaged \$5,184,000 for the Delta counties. This compared to a figure of \$23,151,000 for the non-Delta counties. If we look at the number of new private houses authorized by permit, we are confronted with yet another startling statistic. In 1986, the Delta counties averaged 39 permits for the construction of private houses, while non-Delta counties for the same period averaged 228.

This situation is repeated in the case of the value of nonresident construction. This category is particularly interesting in that it relates to growth in the inventory of business and industrial real estate. While the non-Delta counties averaged \$7,987,000, Delta counties averaged \$1,668,000, with two counties, Tallahatchie and Issaquena, showing "0" for nonresidential construction value. This statistic may be further broken down to focus solely on the value of industrial construction. Delta counties average \$33,000 spent on industrial construction, while non-Delta counties showed an average of \$138,000 on industrial construction. All of these data are indicative of a rather disturbing condition, particularly in light of the fact that growth in revenues is virtually mandatory if Delta localities are going to accomplish that which will be required of them in the coming years. These data are important also to those who are currently shouldering the major portion of the tax burden. The only way to raise new revenue without raising the tax rate is to expand the tax base at a pace sufficient to offset increasing expenditures. Obviously, without such an expanded tax base those who already own property will simply be asked to pay more. In the case of the Delta, previous data have shown that the burden of an increased tax rate would fall most heavily on the farmland owner. This leads to a question of how much more a Delta taxpayer is able to pay in the absence of tax base expansion.

Table 8 (page 237) contains some basic data relating to taxes and general revenue raised. The figures in this table represent a composite of all local government taxes and revenues within a county's boundaries, including county and municipal governments. With regard to taxes, these data would include county and municipal property taxes. The figures for the core Delta counties and the fringe Delta counties are identical at an average of \$4.5 million per year. That same figure for non-Delta counties is \$12 million per year in all tax revenues. Further examination of the specific counties reveals the logical condition that the highest tax generation figures are associated with counties with the largest cities. Washington County (city of Greenville), Warren County (city of Vicksburg), Bolivar County (city of Cleveland and several small towns), Coahoma County (city of Clarksdale), and DeSoto County (several towns and Memphis spillover effect) are all illustrative of this condition. These cities serve as trade centers for surrounding areas and, as such, they represent a case in point of how this type of activity translates into public revenue.

Additional interpretation of these data is possible when the category of taxes per capita is examined. This is roughly a measure of tax effort expended by the citizens of a specific county. There are other variables that would affect taxes per capita, but this is a useful measure for comparative purposes. The core Delta counties pay \$152 per capita, per year in taxes. This compares to \$141 per capita, per year for non-Delta counties. Further examination of specific Delta counties reveals a wide gap between the highest and the lowest counties in terms of per capita taxes. This is somewhat difficult to explain given the identity of some of the counties in either category. For example, it may be assumed that in the case of Tallahatchie, Humphreys, and Sharkey Counties in the core Delta, and Carroll and Holmes Counties in the fringe Delta, that low property values and low incomes limit the monies



available to be taxed. This, however, would not explain the comparably low per capita tax figure for DeSoto County, which is more affluent.

In general, with regard to per capita taxes, it would be fair to assume that the Delta is making a reasonable tax effort compared to the rest of the state. This will be even clearer as we look briefly at property taxes per capita.

We have examined in detail the condition of the property tax base in the Delta as it pertains to assessed value. The results of this may be seen in the taxes paid on this value on a per capita basis. The property taxes per capita of the core Delta counties are \$147, as compared to \$135 for the non-Delta counties. Ironically, the fringe Delta counties have a lower property tax per capita than the non-Delta counties, and if Warren County was removed from this group, this figure would be significantly lower. Again speculation would lead us to believe that these figures appear as they do as a result of agricultural land values and, to some extent, lack of developed trade centers. This would be borne out in the case of Issaquena, Quitman, and Tunica Counties—all heavily row-cropped counties with only very small municipalities. The cases of some other similar counties are somewhat more difficult to explain. Humphreys, Sharkey, and Tallahatchie Counties in the core Delta have a low per capita property tax. This is possibly the result of higher populations in those counties with little additional tax revenues, as compared to Issaquena, Quitman, and Tunica Counties. Carroll and Holmes Counties in the fringe Delta experience similar low property taxes per capita. This is probably due to the dual effects of much lower non-Delta land values and lack of compensating values associated with trade centers. As in other cases, DeSoto County, with high population and comparative affluence, represents an anomaly whose explanation is outside the scope of this study.

All of this discussion becomes clearer when considered in light of the comprehensive category of general revenue per county. The core Delta counties have an average of \$26 million in all revenues, as compared to \$65.7 million for the non-Delta counties. The fringe Delta counties are lowest at \$22.3 million per county. Only one core Delta or fringe Delta county performs above the non-Delta county average. Washington County has general revenues of \$73.4 million. This is quite revealing given the previous data for per capita taxes. It demonstrates that, in spite of significant tax effort on the part of Delta counties and municipalities, revenues still fall far short of the average of those counties outside of the Delta. In sum, if the fault for this limited revenue generation capacity evident in the Delta cannot be placed on tax rates or tax effort, then the small tax base must be considered as the source.

The ultimate question with regard to these conditions concerns the net effect on the capabilities of the Delta to address developmental problems at a level that would produce change. What is the nature of the Delta's buying power as compared to non-Delta counties? An indicator of this may be gained by examining expenditure levels. Two general variables serve to illustrate these expenditure levels. Table 9 (page 238) contains data related to total expenditures and expenditures per capita. In addition, Table 9 contains data related to the level of expenditure on some of the major items addressed by local government.

The data contained in the total expenditure variable are quite revealing and, as would be expected, mirror to a large extent the total revenue data. Total expenditures by all local governments in the core Delta counties average \$26.5 million per year. This expenditure level compares to the \$62.1 million average for non-Delta counties. The fringe Delta counties are even lower at \$22.6 million. Little in the way of explanation is needed in order for it to be obvious that local governments in Mississippi Delta counties operate on a smaller scale than do their counterparts outside of the Delta. If we follow this data with an examination of the data pertaining to the per capita expenditure levels, this assumption may, at least in part, be confirmed.

The direct general expenditure per capita for the core-Delta counties is \$89.6. This compares to \$84.8 per capita for non-Delta counties and a low of \$77.4 per capita for the fringe Delta counties. Thus, the expenditures per capita for core Delta counties, like taxes per capita for those counties, are higher than for the remainder of the state. If the non-Delta portion of the state is used as a measuring stick, then it may be said that, as conditions now stand, the core Delta is performing at as high a level as could be expected given the status of overall economic, demographic, and social conditions. The low level of expenditures per capita for the fringe Delta is also reflected in the lower level of taxes per capita in those counties. The most notable of these is Carroll County at an expenditure level of \$57 per capita. Carroll County, like Humphreys County in the core Delta, is not failing to carry its load but rather is strapped by a small tax base as indicated by its assessed values and the absence of value-generating trade centers.

The effects of this general lack of fiscal capacity are revealed in an examination of the expenditure categories in Table 9. It should be kept in mind that, in many counties, budgets are quite small given the small amount of revenues to work with. There are few differences in costs of basic services from one county to another. For example, a mile of road in Carroll County will cost roughly the same to construct as a mile of road in Tunica County. Differences in the proportion of expenditures for various items begin showing up as increased revenues allow for expenditures over and above the basic level of services. Expenditures for police protection are similar regardless of whether the county is classified as core Delta, fringe Delta, or non-Delta. The range is from 2.9 percent of the total expenditures in non-Delta counties to 3.4 percent in both core Delta and fringe Delta counties.

The proportion of expenditures on education is almost identical for core Delta and non-Delta counties. When Issaquena County is eliminated (because it has no school district), the core Delta average rises to 48.9 percent of total expenditures. The fringe Delta counties spend a somewhat higher proportion on education at 55.1 percent. Large differences among counties, and to some extent sections, appear with regard to the health care and hospitals variable. The core Delta counties spend 14.6 percent of total expenditures in this areas, as compared to 19.8 percent in the non-Delta counties. The fringe Delta counties spend an extremely small 7.5 percent on health care and hospitals. When one considers the small nature of core Delta and fringe Delta budgets and the extreme health care needs in these areas, this must be a cause for concern.

Finally, core Delta and fringe Delta counties spend slightly more on road construction and maintenance (highways) than do non-Delta counties. These figures show that core and fringe Delta counties allocate an identical 15.9 percent of their total expenditures for highways, as compared to 13.4 percent of total expenditures for non-Delta counties. An examination of specific counties reveals that the counties with smaller revenue bases and lower levels of expenditures spend a higher proportion of their budgets on highways. This limits the amount of funds available for expenditure in other areas.

The previous discussion would indeed indicate that there are grave problems in the area of fiscal capacity of the Delta counties. These problems must be addressed in the process of finding solutions to other problems facing this region. It cannot be expected that state and federal dollars will insure the availability of development capital over a long period of time. Further, it cannot be assumed that periodic influxes of outside dollars will be sufficient to provide basic services at a level necessary to enhance development opportunities. The level of revenue-generating capacity of localities in the Delta is extremely low, and this is reflected in expenditure levels in general and in specific categories. The bottom line reflects the fact that for revenue levels to increase, the values in their various forms from which these revenues are extracted must be increased. An increase in income levels will provide more discretionary dollars, whose expenditure will be reflected in increased sales tax revenues. An increase in

business and industrial development will be reflected in an expanded and diversified property tax base. This type of development will be accompanied by population growth that would create greater demand for housing and, thus, increase residential property values. There is much work ahead before these conditions come to bear. There are, however, actions local governments in the Delta may take to position them to stretch current resources and prepare them to take advantage of opportunities as they develop.

**Management Capacity and Local Government Structure**

This section contains an overview of the element of management capacity and the role it plays in contributing to greater efficiency and effectiveness in government operations. This subject is being addressed under the assumption that the local governments of the Delta would be well advised to take every measure to ensure that no dollars are used unnecessarily, and that these governments are poised structurally to take advantage of every available opportunity that may present itself.

Increased management capacity carries with it the notion of increased decision-making capacity on the part of a specific local government unit. This opens the door for creative policy making of the type necessary to address the situation in which the Delta finds itself.

The first element to be discussed in this regard is the element of local government structure. This is the element under the greatest local control. There are various options for structuring municipal governments available in the Mississippi statutes. At this point, it is not clear whether any of these would offer a potential advantage over any other in the areas being discussed here. The same cannot be said for options available to the counties.

County governments have been the topic of a great deal of discussion and scrutiny in the past several months. The county unit system, which consolidates several county functions into a unified county government with professional administration, offers an opportunity for significant accomplishments on at least two objectives. First, it theoretically frees scarce resources by eliminating duplicate services; second, it requires that a county administrator be hired to serve as chief administrative officer of all operations.

Consolidation of previously beat-specific operations offers a means of affecting savings through greater control over the costly road and bridge budget. It allows for prioritization of work in this area and avoids costly division of monies purely on the basis of political boundaries.

Possibly of greatest importance with regard to the attractiveness of the unit system as an option for county government structure is the requirement that counties have a county administrator. This offers the obvious advantage of having a central decision maker to carry out policy. If properly defined by a specific county, it offers a great deal more. The county administrator may be assigned matters for policy research. He may be assigned duties related to procurement of federal grants and economic development. The county administrator may be made the chief negotiator in behalf of the county in matters relating to interlocal cooperation agreements, intrajurisdictional matters, and regional authorities. In short, the county administrator is not only important as the overseer of daily operations, but he also allows for a professional approach to the search for creative solutions to the myriad of problems extant in the Delta counties.

To date, 13 of the 18 Delta counties have voted in public referendums to convert to the unit system. Those counties converting to the unit system are:

- |           |              |        |
|-----------|--------------|--------|
| Bolivar   | Tallahatchie | Tate   |
| Coahoma   | Tunica       | Warren |
| Leflore   | Washington   | Yazoo  |
| Quitman   | DeSoto       |        |
| Sunflower | Panola       |        |

Those voting to retain the beat system are:

Humphreys	Sharkey	Holmes
Issaquena	Carroll	

There exists another set of structural alternatives that is somewhat beyond the control of a single jurisdiction. These exist solely as means of stretching scarce resources. These multijurisdictional solutions may be placed into three categories: interlocal cooperation agreements, multijurisdictional service areas, and regional authorities.

Interlocal cooperation agreements are executed between two or more cities or between cities and the surrounding county. They are usually designed to jointly fund a major service previously provided by each jurisdiction separately. Examples include countywide fire and ambulance services, countywide solid waste management, and countywide road and bridge construction and maintenance. When these agreements have been used, they have resulted in significant savings for the local governments involved.

Another similar option authorized in the 1989 session of the Mississippi Legislature is that of multijurisdictional service areas. The principle is virtually identical to that described, with respect to interlocal cooperation agreements, except that multijurisdictional service areas may encompass several counties rather than being confined to the governments within one county. The goal is to save resources for the participating governments.

A final approach to cost-saving measures related to structure is that of regional authorities. The mission of regional authorities is broader, because they are usually intended to provide several governments in a region with services or facilities that would be unobtainable without a combined effort. This differs from the mission of the other structural reforms that are largely designed to provide existing services for less cost. Examples within the Delta include regional water authorities, seawall authorities, and Mississippi River levee districts.

These structural alternatives offer several features that would aid in expanding the capacity of local government in the Delta. Delta county and municipal governments need the skills available in a county administrator, including the potential for securing outside funding for economic development. The cost-savings potential for the various structural alternatives cannot be ignored. They do require that local governmental units work together to solve problems. In this way, these financially strapped county and municipal governments may start realizing the benefits of the availability of discretionary dollars to provide services over and above the basics.

### **Significance of Revenue and Management-Related Data To Efforts Like the Delta Project**

The myriad of problems in the Delta relates, in part, to past inability of local units of government to cope with them. Funding of public education, public health problems, welfare problems, transportation, economic development activities, employment opportunities, and hundreds of other problems all depend to varying degrees upon public solutions. Many questions have been addressed during the course of this segment of the Delta project. Some pertain to structure: What flaws exist in the structure of local units of government, both county and municipal, which, when corrected, will allow these problems to be solved? Others pertain to capacity: What capabilities must exist at a minimum level to allow Delta counties an opportunity to improve? Still, others pertain to the balance of revenues with current mandatory expenditures and the additional expenditures required for development: What responsibilities do municipalities in the Delta have? What must occur in the area of municipal sales and property tax revenue in order for these responsibilities to be addressed? What responsibilities do counties have? What changes in the current county property tax capabilities

will enable these responsibilities to be addressed? These lead to questions of an intergovernmental nature. Given the sales-tax-generating power of transfer payments, municipalities have available a resource that translates into an enhancement of that tax base. Counties must rely almost exclusively on property ownership for their tax bases. What problems are caused by these inequities? Are there solutions to problems available from other levels of government, including the normal federal and state funding sources, plus a variety of creative combinations, such as multicounty or multicity districts and compacts? These and other questions will be addressed during the course of this project. The entire range of socioeconomic variables will come to bear on the solutions to the problems of local government in the Delta. As the capacity of local government to deal with a variety of problems is expanded, then it may play a pivotal role in undergirding all of the changes that must take place in the Delta.

**Table 1. Assessed value by class, 1985 (figures are in dollars).**

County	Real	Personal	Autos	Utilities	Totals
Bolivar	93,444,640	9,638,673	13,405,721	21,747,480	138,236,514
Carroll	22,469,514	951,117	4,840,082	3,124,775	31,385,488
Coahoma	70,953,690	10,556,598	12,367,934	10,122,233	10,400,455
DeSoto	129,323,311	10,349,552	28,980,707	11,994,854	180,648,424
Grenada	43,251,067	11,828,494	10,372,866	9,009,894	74,462,321
Holmes	42,684,827	3,833,652	6,701,769	6,940,607	60,160,855
Humphreys	32,091,585	1,981,800	5,687,480	4,930,210	44,691,075
Issaquena	14,728,938	310,159	1,110,138	2,320,889	18,470,124
Leflore	93,038,075	9,058,533	14,796,186	14,439,829	131,332,623
Panola	51,708,810	8,783,276	9,964,310	13,539,608	83,996,004
Quitman	26,604,090	2,790,760	3,801,327	4,705,466	37,901,643
Sharkey	23,416,448	1,578,418	3,363,738	4,628,413	32,987,017
Sunflower	67,728,240	9,766,910	13,559,318	9,094,965	100,149,433
Tallahatchie	39,233,680	1,795,886	5,325,677	5,939,183	52,294,426
Tate	36,416,449	5,883,768	8,300,255	9,033,759	59,634,231
Tunica	22,633,067	1,392,925	2,774,416	4,224,598	31,025,006
Warren	120,066,010	28,711,615	26,402,860	49,854,900	225,035,475
Washington	129,615,180	22,004,630	27,433,250	52,541,298	231,594,358
Yazoo	57,099,910	11,158,370	12,477,920	11,872,772	92,608,972
<b>Average (Delta Counties)</b>	58,763,554	80,197,440	11,140,313	131,613,544	910,849,707
<b>Average (non-Delta Counties)</b>	69,129,748	11,047,617	15,136,461	197,092,043	114,591,653
<b>Average (All counties)</b>	66,727,825	103,459,174	14,210,524	181,920,195	109,144,983

Prepared by Monitor MISSISSIPPI Laboratory, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University

**Table 2. Assessed burden by class, 1985 (figures are in percentages).**

County	Real	Personal	Autos	Utilities	Total
Bolivar	67.60	6.97	9.70	15.73	100.00
Carroll	71.59	3.03	15.42	9.96	100.00
Coahoma	68.22	10.15	11.89	9.73	100.00
DeSoto	71.59	5.73	16.04	6.64	100.00
Grenada	58.08	15.89	13.93	12.10	100.00
Holmes	70.95	6.37	11.14	11.54	100.00
Humphreys	71.81	4.43	12.73	11.03	100.00
Issaquena	79.74	1.68	6.01	12.57	100.00
Leflore	70.84	6.90	11.27	10.99	100.00
Panola	61.56	10.46	11.86	16.12	100.00
Quitman	70.19	7.36	10.03	12.41	100.00
Sharkey	70.99	4.78	10.20	14.03	100.00
Sunflower	67.63	9.75	13.54	9.08	100.00
Tallahatchie	75.02	3.43	10.18	11.36	100.00
Tate	61.07	9.87	13.92	15.15	100.00
Tunica	72.95	4.49	8.94	13.62	100.00
Warren	53.35	12.76	11.73	22.15	100.00
Washington	55.97	9.50	11.85	22.69	100.00
Yazoo	61.66	12.05	13.47	12.82	100.00
<b>Average (Delta Counties)</b>	67.41	7.66	11.78	13.14	100.00
<b>Average (non-Delta Counties)</b>	64.49	8.35	14.37	13.47	100.00
<b>Average (All Counties)</b>	65.17	8.19	13.77	13.40	100.00

Prepared by Monitor MISSISSIPPI Laboratory, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University.

**Table 3. Assessment of real property by category, 1985 (figures are in dollars).**

County	Total Value of Realty	True Value	Cultivable Land	Buildings and Improvements	Uncultivable	Urban Real Estate	Urban Improvements
Bolivar	93,444,640	624,738,684	37,803,030	18,919,000	2,425,920	8,230,700	26,065,990
Carroll	22,469,514	149,796,759	5,945,577	7,607,836	6,479,943	418,103	2,018,055
Coahoma	70,953,690	473,022,726	22,908,056	10,885,355	1,035,210	7,257,383	28,867,686
DeSoto	129,323,311	878,830,918	18,739,242	44,359,384	3,677,069	13,390,611	49,157,005
Grenada	43,251,067	288,337,919	6,812,435	12,166,337	2,630,035	4,222,500	17,419,760
Holmes	42,684,827	285,977,660	15,493,416	8,415,710	6,058,710	1,945,130	10,771,861
Humphreys	32,091,585	214,634,495	12,566,320	7,793,725	4,591,845	1,486,505	5,653,190
Issaquena	14,728,938	98,191,730	9,591,849	1,844,830	3,292,259	0	0
Leflore	93,038,075	620,253,833	20,740,147	17,850,099	5,814,315	13,733,995	34,899,519
Panola	51,708,810	344,599,225	10,750,450	15,461,840	5,605,560	4,511,340	15,379,620
Quitman	26,604,090	177,263,490	13,661,870	5,937,470	469,070	1,499,930	5,035,750
Sharkey	23,416,448	156,095,445	13,202,910	3,658,603	693,935	1,061,760	4,799,260
Sunflower	67,728,240	454,969,000	24,922,910	12,189,670	1,300,770	5,500,080	23,814,810
Tallahatchie	39,233,680	261,526,562	20,519,620	8,969,220	2,988,810	1,107,510	5,648,520
Tate	36,416,449	242,776,326	8,438,158	14,196,901	2,341,413	2,950,062	8,489,915
Tunica	22,633,067	153,116,889	13,530,390	4,375,022	1,028,915	891,915	2,806,825
Warren	120,066,010	800,922,159	16,640,120	42,900,000	7,700,110	13,709,620	39,116,160
Washington	129,615,180	888,261,680	32,996,800	31,498,190	5,317,920	15,024,830	44,777,440
Yazoo	57,099,910	380,681,990	18,439,880	13,703,910	6,279,620	3,723,750	14,952,750
<b>Average (Delta Counties)</b>	58,763,554.26	394,420,920.5	17,037,009.47	14,880,689.58	3,670,075.21	5,298,194.95	17,877,585.05
<b>Average (non-Delta Counties)</b>	69,129,746.71	464,143,141.2	5,194,728.89	19,276,577.41	6,869,176.90	8,825,796.06	28,966,818.08
<b>Average (All Counties)</b>	6,672,784.07	447,987,992.5	7,938,671.95	18,258,018.04	6,127,921.63	8,008,425.07	26,397,361.65

Prepared by Monitor MISSISSIPPI Laboratory, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University.



**Table 4. Percent assessment of real property by category, 1985 (total real property assessment is in dollars).**

County	Total Real Property Assessment	Culti-vatable	Building and Improvements	Unculti-vatable	Urban Real Estate	Urban Improvement
Bolivar	93,444,640	40.46	20.25	2.60	8.81	27.89
Carroll	22,469,514	26.46	33.86	28.84	1.86	8.98
Coahoma	70,953,690	32.29	15.34	1.46	10.23	40.69
DeSoto	129,323,311	14.49	34.30	2.84	10.35	38.01
Grenada	43,251,067	15.75	28.13	6.08	9.76	40.28
Holmes	42,684,827	36.30	19.72	14.19	4.56	25.24
Humphreys	32,091,585	39.16	24.29	14.31	4.63	17.62
Issaquena	14,728,938	65.12	12.53	22.35	0.00	0.00
Leflore	93,038,075	22.29	19.19	6.25	14.76	37.51
Panola	51,708,810	20.79	29.90	10.84	8.72	29.74
Quitman	26,604,090	51.35	22.32	1.76	5.64	18.93
Sharkey	23,416,448	56.38	15.62	2.96	4.53	20.50
Sunflower	67,728,240	36.80	18.00	1.92	8.12	35.16
Tallahatchie	39,233,680	52.30	22.86	7.62	2.82	14.40
Tate	36,416,449	23.17	38.98	6.43	8.10	23.31
Tunica	22,633,067	59.78	19.33	4.55	3.94	12.40
Warren	120,066,010	13.86	35.73	6.41	11.42	32.58
Washington	129,615,180	25.46	24.30	4.10	11.59	34.55
Yazoo	57,099,910	32.29	24.00	11.00	6.52	26.19
<b>Average (Delta Counties)</b>	58,763,554.26	34.9737	24.1389	8.2378	7.1778	25.4718
<b>Average (non-Delta Counties)</b>	69,129,746.71	9.7489	36.6078	16.3784	8.0548	29.2176
<b>Average (All Counties)</b>	66,727,824.07	15.5937	33.7186	14.4921	7.8516	28.3496

Prepared by Monitor MISSISSIPPI Laboratory, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University.

**Table 5. Mississippi municipal revenues, by county, 1986.**

County	City	Ad Valorem Tax Revenues (1)	Intergovern- mental Revenues (2)	Total Revenue (3)	Column (3) - Column (1) + Column (2)
<b>Bolivar</b>					
	Alligator	15,000.00	15,000.00	45,000.00	
	Benoit	14,130.96	44,608.81	65,559.98	6,820.21
	Beulah	15,000.00	15,000.00	45,000.00	
	Boyle	15,000.00	15,000.00	45,000.00	
	Cleveland	663,076.90	1,683,637.09	2,907,183.66	560,469.67
	Duncan	15,000.00	15,000.00	45,000.00	
	Gunnison	15,000.00	15,000.00	45,000.00	
	Merigold	33,140.35	35,003.63	85,294.04	17,150.06
	Mound Bayou	149,811.00	4,929.00	248,952.00	94,212.00
	Pace	15,000.00	15,000.00	45,000.00	
	Renova	18,806.30	14,360.50	40,232.18	7,065.38
	Rosedale	115,017.06	173,772.55	461,213.46	172,423.85
	Shaw	107,218.74	165,240.28	422,090.57	149,631.55
	Shelby	114,587.84	243,924.55	462,861.86	104,349.47
	Winstonville	7,328.26	5,139.18	15,151.52	2,684.08
<b>County Total</b>		1,313,117.41	2,460,615.59	4,978,539.27	1,114,806.27
<b>County Average</b>		87,541.16	164,041.04	331,902.62	123,867.36
<b>Carroll</b>					
	Carrollton	4,640.29	4,275.63	13,781.85	4,865.93
	North Carrollton	8,891.94	37,047.49	80,378.01	34,438.58
	Vaiden	26,619.00	138,610.00	310,019.00	144,790.00
<b>County Total</b>		40,151.23	179,933.12	404,178.86	184,094.51
<b>County Average</b>		13,383.74	59,977.71	134,726.29	61,364.84
<b>Coahoma</b>					
	Clarksdale	1,084,747.45	1,980,160.93	4,996,740.08	1,933,831.70
	Friars Point	19,104.00	27,155.00	152,316.00	106,057.00
	Jonestown	10,000.00	20,000.00	50,000.00	
	Lula	11,140.74	39,179.59	72,696.66	22,376.33
	Lyon	19,994.81	29,887.45	77,825.26	27,943.00
<b>County Total</b>		1,144,987.00	2,096,382.97	5,349,578.00	2,090,208.03
<b>County Average</b>		228,997.40	419,276.59	1,069,915.60	522,552.00

(continued)

**Table 5 (continued). Mississippi municipal revenues, by county, 1986.**

County	City	Ad Valorem Tax Revenues (1)	Intergovern- mental Revenues (2)	Total Revenue (3)	Column (3) - Column (1) + Column (2)
<b>DeSoto</b>	Hernando	216,900.00	509,549.00	1,052,580.00	326,131.00
	Horn Lake	248,613.00	203,390.00	662,691.00	210,688.00
	Olive Branch	531,921.36	32,458.00	878,857.17	314,478.58
	Southaven	2,563,904.00	146,894.00	3,024,906.00	314,108.00
<b>County Total</b>		3,561,338.36	892,291.03	5,619,034.17	1,165,405.58
<b>County Average</b>		890,334.59	223,072.76	1,404,758.54	291,351.40
<b>Grenada</b>	Grenada	468,427.00	158,822.00	2,552,562.00	495,313.00
<b>County Total</b>		468,427.00	158,822.00	2,552,562.00	495,313.00
<b>County Avg</b>		468,427.00	158,822.00	2,552,562.00	495,313.00
<b>Holmes</b>	Cruger	3,696.64	19,105.16	34,982.41	12,180.61
	Durant	59,645.00	11,646.00	389,925.00	318,634.00
	Goodman	15,005.00	49,466.00		
	Lexington	71,295.00	346,568.00	509,622.00	91,759.00
	Pickens	37,364.00	99,605.00	181,015.00	44,046.00
	Tchula	29,054.04	117,433.84	182,361.29	35,873.41
	West	5,028.00	17,274.00	31,101.00	8,799.00
<b>County Total</b>		221,087.68	661,098.00	1,329,006.70	511,292.02
<b>County Average</b>		31,583.95	94,442.57	221,501.12	85,215.34
<b>Humphreys</b>	Belzoni	198,853.00	468,627.00	879,398.00	211,918.00
	Isola	7,860.00	20,000.00	40,000.00	
	Louise	7,860.37	31,510.72	65,781.86	26,410.77
<b>County Total</b>		214,573.37	520,137.72	985,179.86	238,328.77
<b>County Average</b>		71,524.46	173,379.24	328,393.29	119,164.39
<b>Issaquena</b>	Mayersville	N/A			
<b>County Total</b>		N/A			

(continued)

..

**Table 5 (continued). Mississippi municipal revenues, by county, 1986.**

County	City	Ad Valorem Tax Revenues (1)	Intergovern- mental Revenues (2)	Total Revenue (3)	Column (3)- Column (1) + Column (2)
<b>Leflore</b>	Greenwood	1,265,771.00	2,998,819.00	6,194,846.00	1,930,256.00
	Itta Bena	12,000.00	229,053.00	364,066.00	135,013.00
	Morgan City	2,000.00	5,233.74	6,996.99	1,763.25
	Schlater	5,000.00	11,022.46	13,872.49	2,850.03
	Sidon	7,000.00	14,057.15	17,291.74	3,234.59
<b>County Total</b>		1,291,771.00	3,258,185.35	6,597,073.22	2,073,116.87
<b>County Average</b>		258,354.20	651,637.07	1,319,414.64	414,623.37
<b>Panola</b>	Batesville	233,934.00	1,063,189.00	1,667,993.00	370,870.00
	Como				
	Courtland	4,604.00	9,652.00	23,180.00	8,924.00
	Crenshaw	22,303.00	49,939.00	116,890.00	44,648.00
	Crowder	15,392.00	33,749.00	75,375.00	26,234.00
<b>Panola</b>	Pope	1,716.00	5,014.00	11,388.00	4,658.00
	Sardis	122,957.90	327,968.82	598,454.81	147,528.09
<b>County Total</b>		400,906.90	1,489,511.82	2,493,280.81	602,862.09
<b>County Average</b>		66,817.82	248,251.97	415,546.80	100,477.02
<b>Quitman</b>	Crenshaw				
	Crowder				
	Falcon				
	Lambert	24,346.53	101,614.10		
	Marks	125,475.76	225,359.47	457,785.34	106,950.11
	Sledge	34,394.00	55,982.00	113,524.00	23,148.00
<b>County Total</b>		184,216.29	382,955.57	571,309.34	130,098.11
<b>County Average</b>		61,405.43	127,651.86	285,654.67	65,049.06
<b>Sharkey</b>	Anguilla	42,312.02	67,585.35	132,440.22	22,542.85
	Cary	2,281.85	30,755.29	46,292.55	13,255.41
	Rolling Fork	132,969.00	302,807.00	527,289.00	91,513.00
<b>County Total</b>		177,562.87	401,147.64	706,021.77	127,311.26

--

(continued)

**Table 5 (continued). Mississippi municipal revenues, by county, 1986.**

County	City	Ad Valorem Tax Revenues (1)	Intergovern- mental Revenues (2)	Total Revenue (3)	Column (3)- Column (1) + Column (2)
<b>Sharkey County Average</b>		59,187.62	133,715.88	235,340.59	42,437.09
<b>Sunflower</b>	Doddsville	3,344.69	9,403.15	16,031.73	3,283.89
	Drew	181,291.35	283,470.93	580,481.11	115,718.83
	Indianola	462,676.10	1,220,405.10	2,274,842.78	591,761.58
	Inverness				
	Moorhead	80,690.00	120,392.00	349,478.00	148,396.00
<b>Sunflower</b>	Ruleville	184,349.95	305,445.52	679,190.03	189,394.56
	Sunflower	39,057.00	46,236.00	231,778.00	146,485.00
<b>County Total</b>		951,509.09	1,985,352.70	4,131,801.65	1,195,039.86
<b>County Average</b>		158,568.18	330,892.12	688,633.61	199,173.31
<b>Tallahatchie</b>	Charleston	87,262.00	320,534.00	584,981.00	177,185.00
	Glendora				
	Sumner	35,533.49	55,754.25	137,865.69	46,577.95
	Tutwiler	25,891.60	38,691.02	160,691.27	96,108.65
	Webb	23,004.00	87,789.00	152,544.00	41,761.00
<b>County Total</b>		171,691.09	502,768.27	1,036,091.96	361,632.60
<b>County Average</b>		42,922.77	125,692.07	259,022.99	90,408.15
<b>Tate</b>	Coldwater	34,348.17	130,216.04	197,561.97	32,997.76
	Senatobia	140,697.93	940,591.37	1,416,875.06	335,585.76
<b>County Total</b>		175,046.10	1,070,807.41	1,614,437.03	368,583.52
<b>County Average</b>		87,523.0500	535,403.7050	807,218.5150	184,291.7600
<b>Tunica</b>	Tunica	113,192.00	233,913.00	458,413.00	11,308.00
<b>County Total</b>		113,192.00	233,913.00	458,413.00	11,308.00
<b>County Average</b>		113,192.0000	233,913.0000	458,413.0000	11,308.0000
<b>Warren</b>	Vicksburg	1,835,365.00	4,281,740.00	7,445,034.00	1,327,929.00
<b>County Total</b>		1,835,365.00	4,281,740.00	7,445,034.00	1,327,929.00
<b>County Average</b>		1,835,365.0000	4,281,740.0000	7,445,034.0000	1,327,929.0000

(continued)

**Table 5 (continued). Mississippi municipal revenues, by county, 1986.**

County	City	Ad Valorem Tax Revenues (1)	Intergovern- mental Revenues (2)	Total Revenue (3)	Column (3) - Column (1) + Column (2)
<b>Washington</b>	Arcola	7,115.00	35,460.00	80,823.00	38,248.00
	Greenville	1,860,661.57	5,228,848.89	8,542,804.47	1,453,294.01
	Hollandale	230,000.00	283,500.00	677,000.00	370,500.00
	Leland	301,381.44	418,400.75	1,052,915.04	333,132.85
	Metcalfe				
<b>County Total</b>		2,399,158.01	5,966,209.64	10,353,542.51	2,195,174.86
<b>County Average</b>		599,789.5025	1,491,552.4100	2,588,385.6275	548,793.7150
<b>Yazoo</b>	Bentonina	6,754.79	15,993.72		
	Eden	44.98	2,355.73	2,661.92	261.21
	Satartia		6,319.00	10,300.00	3,981.00
	Yazoo City	723,741.00	1,740,010.00	3,041,629.00	577,878.00
<b>County Total</b>		730,540.77	1,764,678.45	3,054,590.92	582,120.21
<b>County Average</b>		243,513.5900	441,169.6125	1,018,196.9733	194,040.0700
<b>Delta Total</b>		15,394,541.17	29,736,550.28	59,679,675.07	14,774,624.56
<b>Delta Average</b>		202,559.7522	386,188.9647	806,482.0955	223,857.9479
<b>Non-Delta Total</b>		69,463,611.27	137,050,292.17	26,226,482.99	57,705,274.61
<b>Non-Delta Average</b>		406,219.9489	753,023.5834	1,465,165.8268	327,870.8785
<b>State Total</b>		77,451,763.44	156,761,686.45	299,713,427.06	72,479,899.17
<b>State Average</b>		333,843.8079	632,103.5744	1,238,485.2358	299,503.7156
<b>Comparison Figures</b>					
<b>Delta Total</b>		15,394,541.17	29,736,550.28	59,679,675.07	14,774,624.56
<b>Non-Delta Total</b>		69,463,611.27	137,050,292.17	262,264,682.99	57,705,274.61
<b>State Total</b>		77,451,763.44	156,761,686.45	299,713,427.06	72,479,899.17
<b>Delta Average</b>		202,559.7522	386,188.9647	806,482.0955	223,857.9479
<b>Non-Delta Average</b>		406,219.9489	753,023.5834	1,465,165.8268	327,870.8785
<b>State Average</b>		333,843.8079	632,103.5744	1,238,485.2358	299,503.7156

**Table 6. Municipal revenues, 1986 (proportionate relationships of categories).**

	Percent Ad Valorem To Total Revenue	Percent Intergovern- mental To Total Revenue	Percent Other To Total Revenue
Delta Counties			
Bolivar Averages	34.2400	37.8741	24.2542
Carroll Averages	17.7728	40.6085	41.6187
Coahoma Averages	19.0537	37.9510	43.7542
DeSoto Averages	50.8515	21.9126	27.2359
Grenada Averages	18.3512	62.2442	19.4045
Holmes Averages	15.4323	50.0948	34.4729
Humphreys Averages	18.0705	50.3971	32.1235
Issaquena Averages			
Leflore Averages	25.7674	69.3746	26.5389
Panola Averages	18.1670	48.6182	33.2148
Quitman Averages	28.8530	49.2706	21.8765
Sharkey Averages	20.6982	58.2983	21.0035
Sunflower Averages	23.2526	43.4174	33.3300
Tallahatchie Averages	17.9707	44.2147	37.8145
Tate Averages	13.6581	66.1482	20.1937
Tunica Averages	24.6921	51.0267	2.4668
Warren Averages	24.6522	57.5114	17.8364
Washington Averages	23.2951	46.6736	37.6752
Yazoo Averages	12.7421	69.0178	22.4874
<b>Non-Delta Average</b>	<b>21.3682</b>	<b>51.2783</b>	<b>29.2508</b>
<b>Delta Average</b>	<b>24.5906</b>	<b>46.8285</b>	<b>30.0975</b>

**Table 7. Constructions authorized by permit, 1986.**

County	Value of Construction Authorized by Permit (\$1,000)	New Private House Authorized by Permit	Value Nonresident Construction Auth. by Permit (\$1,000)	Value Nonresident Construction Auth. Percent Industrial
<u>CORE DELTA COUNTIES</u>				
Bolivar	5324	48	2116	26
Coahoma	6227	23	4445	47
Humphreys	1419	4	161	0
Issaquena	0	0	0	0
Leflore	7968	62	3131	134
Quitman	850	6	166	0
Sharkey	191	1	115	61
Sunflower	5025	114	643	0
Tallahatchie	638	14	0	0
Tunica	489	8	108	0
Washington	28891	147	7458	93
<u>FRINGE DELTA COUNTIES</u>				
Carroll	0	0	0	0
DeSoto	85191	970	32470	222
Holmes	1496	51	410	0
Panola	3094	50	721	0
Tate	5763	126	421	0
Warren	10940	96	3654	0
Yazoo	1820	34	663	226
<b>AVERAGE (core Delta Counties)</b>	5184	39	1668	33
<b>AVERAGE (fringe Delta Counties)</b>	15472	190	5477	64
<b>AVERAGE (non-Delta Counties)</b>	23151	228	7987	138
<b>AVERAGE (all counties)</b>	20122	200	6938	118



**Table 8. Local government expenditures, taxes, and revenues.**

County	Taxes 1981-82	Taxes Per Capita 1981-83	Property Taxes Per Capita	General Revenue 1981-82
<u>CORE DELTA COUNTIES</u>	(millions of dollars)	(\$)	(\$)	(millions of dollars)
Bolivar	8.1	180	174	44.3
Coahoma	6.5	180	175	43.6
Humphreys	1.6	112	108	9.7
Issaquena	.4	157	156	1.8
Leflore	7.3	173	170	44.5
Quitman	1.9	156	150	9.6
Sharkey	1.0	120	115	7.2
Sunflower	4.9	135	129	31.2
Tallahatchie	1.8	107	103	12.8
Tunica	1.5	151	148	8.2
Washington	14.6	200	191	73.4
<u>FRINGE DELTA COUNTIES</u>				
Carroll	1.0	110	108	5.8
DeSoto	6.6	118	110	30.2
Holmes	2.7	115	112	23.1
Panola	3.8	131	127	22.0
Tate	2.8	137	134	21.7
Warren	11.2	215	208	34.7
Yazoo	3.6	133	131	18.3
<b>AVERAGE (core Delta Counties)</b>	4.5	152	147	26.0
<b>AVERAGE (fringe Delta Counties)</b>	4.5	137	133	22.3
<b>AVERAGE (non-Delta Counties)</b>	12.0	141	135	65.7
<b>AVERAGE (all counties)</b>	10.4	142	136	56.8

**Table 9. Local government expenditures, 1981-82 (\$ millions).**

County	Total Expenditures	Direct General Expenditures Per Capita 1981-82	Percent On Police Protection	Percent On Education	Percent On Health Hospitals	Percent On Highways
<u>CORE DELTA COUNTIES</u>						
Bolivar	42.5	94.3	3.4	43.1	15.6	7.3
Coahoma	53.2	147.4	2.2	35.8	25.4	6.0
Humphreys	9.8	69.6	3.8	55.1	10.4	15.1
Issaquena	1.3	53.4	3.7	0.0	13.4	49.6
Leflore	43.5	103.9	3.1	39.1	25.6	8.3
Quitman	9.2	75.6	2.8	61.8	1.5	13.5
Sharkey	7.4	90.1	3.8	58.0	3.2	19.8
Sunflower	31.2	86.4	3.8	55.0	15.8	13.1
Tallahatchie	12.6	76.3	3.2	54.0	18.9	13.0
Tunica	8.7	90.9	3.3	51.7	10.8	21.8
Washington	71.6	98.1	4.6	35.8	19.5	7.9
<u>FRINGE DELTA COUNTIES</u>						
Carroll	5.4	57.0	3.3	44.9	1.8	38.3
DeSoto	29.9	53.8	3.6	60.1	.9	12.5
Holmes	24.2	104.6	2.1	51.8	17.1	15.4
Panola	24.5	85.5	3.3	42.1	28.1	8.9
Tate	21.8	106.5	2.0	77.2	1.0	11.8
Warren	33.3	64.1	5.3	55.4	1.3	10.1
Yazoo	19.3	70.6	4.2	54.3	2.3	14.6
<b>AVERAGE (core Delta Counties)</b>	26.5	89.6	3.4	44.5	14.6	15.9
<b>AVERAGE (fringe Delta counties)</b>	22.6	77.4	3.4	55.1	7.5	15.9
<b>AVERAGE (non-Delta counties)</b>	62.1	84.8	2.9	46.6	19.8	13.4
<b>AVERAGE (all counties)</b>	54.0	84.8	3.0	47.0	18.1	13.9

## *Chapter*

# **14**

### ***Delta Economy: Physical Infrastructure***

*by*

***Stephen Lemay\****

The process of developing a sophisticated economy, with the ensuing benefits that accrue to the people who dwell within it, begins with infrastructure. That the Delta counties lack much of that critical infrastructure is transparent. Much, in this sense, can be gained from a glance at a road map of the region. But to describe that lack of infrastructure and spell out its significance to the social and economic well-being of a region is another matter. Infrastructure is significant in an economy, but it is also difficult to separate its economic effects from those of other major areas of development—education, for example. One factor that may give infrastructure some precedence over education is that a highly educated person without a job to go to will simply leave the area. As Mississippi begins to do a better job of educating its citizens, it must also provide them with work that is commensurate with that education. Otherwise, the state and local money spent on education becomes a supplement to the tax base in those areas that do provide jobs for those workers. In economic development, the starting place must be infrastructure.

The perspective taken in this chapter is that of the corporation looking at the Delta as a potential location for one of its plants or offices. The fundamental aspect of infrastructure is described in the broad category of transportation. Each of the counties is discussed in some detail as far as the potential for short- and long-term developments is concerned.

#### **Infrastructure Defined**

The first matter is to define infrastructure. From the standpoint of transportation, which represents 20 percent of the nation's gross national product, infrastructure means highways, railways, bridges, waterways, pipelines, airways, and all of the port and terminal facilities related to each of these. Beyond transportation, infrastructure also includes water systems, sewer systems, electrical power, and communications systems, such as telephone and telegraph lines. All of these have an enormous impact on the economic and social development of a region; all must also be funded, either through the tax base or through private sources. To

\*Associate Professor of Marketing and Director of the undergraduate program in transportation, Mississippi State University.

include all of these factors, infrastructure may be defined as the fundamental physical installations and facilities necessary to economic and social development in a region.

Based upon this definition, the matter is to determine the relative importance of these substructures. Access to indoor plumbing, for example, has implications for social and economic development. Most citizens of the United States view running water and a functioning sewage tank system as essential for hygiene and health and take them for granted. The economic impact of such systems may not be as obvious or direct; but trying to convince a corporate executive to locate a manufacturing facility in an area where indoor plumbing is less common than the norm is difficult at best. He or she may take into consideration that the top executives of the firm may send him or her down to run the plant. But even these development considerations must yield to the consideration of highway systems.

Why highway systems? First, 4.9 percent of the U.S. gross national product (GNP) is spent on the movement of freight by trucks.<sup>1</sup> In a very real sense, if it got there, a truck brought it. As a nation, the United States spends 20 times as much on truck transportation as on water transportation, 9 times as much on truck as on rail, 20 times as much on truck as on pipelines, and 30 times as much on truck as on air freight transportation.<sup>2</sup> Trucks provide the most flexible mode of freight transportation, with door-to-door delivery that is speed-competitive with air freight in a radius up to 500 miles in some areas. They also are the means for reducing the inventory-carrying costs for most goods, particularly since federal deregulation of the industry. But to operate trucks, there must be highways.

Not only is there a freight transportation issue related to the highway system, but also a whole series of passenger transportation issues that encompass social and economic concerns. Adequate highway systems ease social visits between friends, trips to the grocery store, and trips to necessary medical treatment for the elderly, handicapped, or destitute. With the closure of the state's charity hospitals, the state Medicaid system is examining ways to move the disadvantaged to medical care facilities far from their homes, particularly to Jackson. In those counties with no hospitals or major clinics, considerable concern exists over how to get pregnant women to routine obstetrical care and to hospitals for childbirth. Underlying all of this is the need for a sound, well-designed highway system. Highways continue to be recognized as the most critical part of infrastructure.<sup>3</sup>

As much money is spent annually on highway construction and maintenance (\$20 billion) as on rail, water supply, wastewater, transit, aviation, and water resources construction combined.<sup>4</sup> It goes beyond the American love affair with the automobile to the need, in a developed economy, for swift, efficient transportation of goods and people. A region in the United States that lacks good highways is neither an attractive market nor an economical site for locating manufacturing or distribution facilities. The mechanics of this process are discussed in a later section that deals with the infrastructure-related difficulties in attracting and keeping industry in the Delta counties.

Highways are given considerable priority in this chapter. Taking an economic approach to the infrastructure problem, the highways are critical to attracting the industry that will eventually provide the tax base through both property and income taxes to pay for improvements in other aspects of infrastructure, and in the education system—another critical

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Delawey, "Deregulatory Effects on Logistics Costs in the United States," 1988 Update, 25: Proceedings of the 1988 Council of Logistics Management Annual Conference, Boston, MA: October 12-14, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> William R. Barnes, "Infrastructure Similarity of Priorities: Analysis Gives Insight into Official's Perceptions," (Nation's Cities Weekly, October 1984), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Sheldon M. Edner, "Setting Priorities, Finding Dollars, and Building Economies: Forecasting Highway Improvement Needs as an Art Form," *Public Administration Review* 46 (1986): 468-471.

variable in the selection of plant site.<sup>5</sup> The development that may follow a better transportation system can provide the tax base for the development of infrastructure in other areas, or even provide the direct emphasis for its installation.

### **The Status of Delta County Infrastructure**

Infrastructure development is difficult to consider independently of total economic development. In the United States, it is clear that population, highway density, rail density, pipeline networks, and industrial development overlay one another in this country. The most economically successful areas of the United States, such as Massachusetts and California, have the most highly developed transportation systems, as well as highly developed infrastructures in the other areas that fit the definition. In a sense, the broad questions become: Why aren't the Mississippi Delta counties like the counties in California and Massachusetts? Why is it difficult for the Delta counties to attract industry in the same way that some of these prosperous areas attract it? And, what has infrastructure to do with it?

An additional question is: Where is the Delta region on the development scale? To suggest that it is far behind the states just mentioned is naive and overly simplistic. But consider this: Most developed nations began their industrial development around the textile industry.<sup>6</sup> In the less developed counties of the Delta, such as Tunica and Issaquena, 15 percent or more of total employment is in the textile industry. By contrast, in the more developed counties of the Delta, such as Washington County, textiles represent 3 percent of total employment. Still more dramatic is the contrast with Shasta County, California, in which 31 times as many people work as in Tunica County, but in which only 80 percent as many people work in the textile industry. A similar comparison with Hampshire County, Massachusetts, reveals that fewer people work in textiles there than in Tunica, Mississippi—never mind that it is a smaller percentage, because it is a smaller number. Yet, 37,000 people are employed in Hampshire County, while 1,092 work in Tunica. The diversity of the economy is that much greater in California and Massachusetts.

Textiles and agricultural products, which are the core of the Delta counties' economy, are relatively low value products relative to volume. Consequently, businesses can afford to let them move to market slowly. They move on barges, trains, and backhaul trucks at relatively low rates, because the inventory-carrying costs associated with them are small compared to the transportation costs. They are not subject to much damage through handling alone, nor are they particularly subject to shrinkage losses as might be the case with manufactured products. The investment or opportunity cost that they represent is low compared to the volume of each shipment. Simply put, it takes several hundred bushels of wheat to equal the dollar value of one personal computer. The net result of these factors is that the infrastructure associated with agricultural products and raw textiles need not be that efficient. In effect, the infrastructure that exists in the Delta counties is adequate, or nearly so, for servicing the industries that are already located there.

But those industries do not enhance the economy of the region; they sustain it, but do not cause it to grow in the way that might bring about a better way of life for all of the people who live in the region. Those businesses that require higher levels of job skills not only require an educated work force; but, because they produce inventory that has a very high value, also demand an efficient infrastructure, one that will support the timely movement of goods in just-

---

<sup>5</sup> Oleg Zinam, "Quality of Life, Quality of the Individual, Technology, and Economic Development," The American Journal of Economics and Sociology 48 (1989): 55-69.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Clark, "Why Isn't the Whole World Developed? Lessons from the Cotton Mills," The Journal of Economic History 47 (1987): 141-174.

in-time inventory systems and increasingly lean marketing channels. The infrastructure in the Delta counties will not, at this time, support a high level of this kind of manufacture.

New levels of infrastructure must be funded, and at considerable expense. One mile of new highway in Mississippi costs \$1.25 million dollars, assuming the highway is two lanes. Four-lane highways costs \$2.65 million per mile.<sup>7</sup> A mile of railroad track costs \$1.1 million. Large terminal facilities in all modes of transportation are multimillion-dollar projects. If the infrastructure of a region is to support higher value, higher income manufacture, and a wider variety of social and cultural institutions, the money must be found somewhere.

One difficulty faced by the area is that of an eroding tax base. When communities with an immobile work force and a mobile capital do not redistribute income, business income is not taxed, thus eroding the tax base. Affluent residents, taxed to subsidize businesses, tend to leave areas where the tax rates rise too high, even when the purpose of the higher rate is to subsidize and attract businesses that will increase the average income for everyone in the region.<sup>8</sup> That the Delta counties' work force is immobile is evidenced by an unemployment rate that was more than double the national unemployment rate in 1987 (Table 1, page 249). In Sharkey County, the unemployment rate reached 30.2 percent, nearly five times the national rate.

That the higher income workers who might provide the tax base essential to industrial development and a higher standard of living are mobile is evidenced by the average income in the Delta counties. It falls to Issaquena County to hold down the "honor" of the lowest average weekly salary of any county in the lowest paid state in the union. Only Washington among the Delta counties comes within 90 percent of the statewide average (Table 2, page 250). It may seem trivial that incomes are low in an area where the cost of living is low, but where the construction and installation of infrastructure are concerned, the raw materials and labor generally demand national prices. More people in Tunica County received food stamps (1,305) than were employed (1,092) in 1987.<sup>9</sup> The taxes paid off income will not begin to sustain highway projects independently of substantial outside assistance. This would amount to a cross-subsidy from the more prosperous counties in the state and in the nation to support any and all forms of infrastructure growth in the region.

Unemployment rates at these sustained levels imply an immobile work force. Not only that, but the average income levels in the region also imply that the higher income groups, which are the sources of the taxes that provide for infrastructure financing, are mobile. Those with the job skills to earn higher salaries simply leave an area where such skills are no longer in demand and find jobs elsewhere. Their contributions to the tax base are then lost.

Based upon the available evidence, it may be necessary to provide incentives to bring in highly skilled, highly paid workers to provide the necessary tax base to give incentives to still more industry, thus, over time improving the lot of all of a region's residents. The difficulty here is determining what that incentive should be. If what you want from these higher income groups is a tax base, then money is not the appropriate incentive to use to attract them (that defeats the purpose of the development program). With a weak educational system, a poorly prepared labor force, and an infrastructure that ranges from nonexistent to "in poor repair," the Delta counties must arrive at creative, innovative solutions to their economic problems. While this discussion focuses on infrastructure, especially transportation infrastructure, it must be understood that such infrastructure does not alone influence economic development. It interacts powerfully with education and with the quality of the work force.

---

<sup>7</sup> Mississippi Department of Transportation, Annual Report, 1986.

<sup>8</sup> A. Gerber and C. Hewitt, "Tax Competition and Redistribution," Journal of Urban Economics 21 (1987): 83-104.

<sup>9</sup> Mississippi Statistical Abstract, 1989. (Mississippi State University: Division of Research, College of Business and Industry).

### **Transportation Infrastructure and the Inventory/Production Decision**

The cost of carrying one item in manufacturing inventory can range as high as 43 percent of the cost of manufacture, perhaps more.<sup>10</sup> If a firm carries an average of 1,000 items in its inventory, each valued at \$10, then the inventory-carrying cost for a year would be  $.43(10)(1000)$ , or \$4,300. To arrive at the average figure for inventory, the firm must consider all of the units in its possession at any time. That includes goods stored in its warehouses and distribution centers, goods currently in transit to customers on trucks or other vehicles, raw materials and component parts, and goods in process regardless of their location. Consider that the firm could have its money in stocks or bonds instead of the widgets that it manufactures. The income from the stocks is lost if the money is tied up in inventory. Thus, inventory should be viewed as an investment that should produce a return.

If it ordinarily takes 30 days to take a product from raw materials to final delivery, and the firm finds ways to reduce that time from 30 days to 27 days, then inventory-carrying costs may be reduced accordingly. Reduce delivery time to the customer by 3 days, and the average inventory may be reduced by 10 percent in this example, or from \$4,300 to  $.43(10)(900)$ , or \$3,870. These numbers are small simply to provide an example. A manufacturing plant that generates \$50 million in annual revenues could easily have inventory at an average value of \$12 million, so that the magnitude of the difference inventory-carrying costs from a 10 percent change might reach \$500,000 per year.

### **Infrastructure Effects On Inventory Costs**

The effect of a poor infrastructure on inventory-carrying costs is fairly straightforward. If the infrastructure is poor or poorly maintained, then the time that it takes to move goods to market will increase, or the variability of the time it takes to move the goods will increase. Either situation, or, more likely, both will increase the cost of carrying inventory, because the market channel will have to carry more inventory for the purpose of buffering the production process and serving the market. Distribution systems are designed for reliability. If a manufacturer tells a wholesaler that two truckloads will arrive on Thursday, the wholesaler will have room in a warehouse on Thursday, but perhaps not Wednesday or Friday. Should the goods arrive late, the wholesaler may lose sales or customers. To prevent this, the wholesaler must carry more inventory—just in case. Some trucking firms provide 97 percent on-time delivery; others provide 85 percent on-time delivery. Because they are more reliable, the high service firm gets paid more and hauls more valuable goods. The same is true of infrastructure. If the nature of the infrastructure that connects a firm to its customers allows it to carry less inventory and to move its goods readily to market, then it will be more profitable and successful in the market. When the infrastructure can provide an "inventory bargain" to a broad base of firms, then it tends to attract more businesses that manufacture more valuable products.

### **Infrastructure Effects on Transportation Costs**

Poor infrastructure also contributes to loss and damage of goods in transit, higher insurance rates, and higher operating costs for the transportation provider. The trucking firm must buy more tires, more shocks, and perhaps incur more workers' compensation claims for back problems with their drivers. A railroad operating over poorly maintained track will experience more minor derailments, slower operating speeds, and more customer service failures. It may also have to use more circuitous routes and charge higher rates to its

---

<sup>10</sup> James Stock and Douglas Lambert, "Strategic Logistics Management."

customers, who can lose a cost advantage in the marketplace. The net result is a less competitive price or a less competitive product in the marketplace.

Where infrastructure is poor and development low, traffic imbalances also affect transportation costs. To serve a less developed area, a firm may have to send its vehicles more empty, nonrevenue miles in the process of picking up or delivering freight. With empty equipment already sitting in an area, a firm must charge a higher rate to send in still more equipment. By the same token, if there is much traffic coming out of an area but little going in, the firm must dispatch equipment that might be put to better use, from the firm's perspective, without a revenue load. This simply means higher rates and less service for an area.

### **Location and Infrastructure**

Basic location theory suggests that businesses will locate near the source of raw materials or near the major markets, depending largely on the relative costs of transporting raw materials and finished goods. The concept of nearness, however, is not "as the crow flies" geographically. Rather, it means access in terms of time. It is easier and quicker to travel 200 miles over four-lane interstates than to cover the same distance over two-lane gravel roads. Ready access to the sources of raw materials or to the major markets can be a major argument for situating a manufacturing plant or a corporate office.

The Delta counties cannot make the strongest possible cases for location on this basis at this time. While there is theoretical one-day transportation to about 50 percent of the U. S. population, the road system presently limits that access when it is measured in terms of time and cost. More to the point, there are other areas, not that far away, that can claim one-day transportation to 75 percent of the population—the region around Nashville, Tennessee. This fundamental notion of access to markets is the primary reason for the siting of the large automotive plants in that area. These advantages can be overcome if the infrastructure is brought up to sufficiently high levels, along with the work force.

### **Summary**

The transportation infrastructure of a region is the starting point from which business firms design their distribution systems. These systems affect the cost of doing business to an enormous degree, constituting as much as 40 percent of the selling price of a product.<sup>11</sup> It also provides social interaction and access to a greater variety of social and health services from a broader base of providers. It can be a means of overcoming geographic disadvantages if it is sufficiently well developed.

The Delta counties are currently deficient in transportation infrastructure. This deficiency prevents the region from overcoming some mild difficulties that relate to the population distribution and geography of the United States. The details of the transportation infrastructure in the region are discussed in the sections that follow.

### **Delta County Highways**

Displayed in Table 3 (page 251) are the miles of highway and miles of state-maintained highway for each of the counties in the Delta region. The most notable fact is that there are no interstate highways in the core Delta counties at all. The lack of significant four-lane roads has a crippling effect on development. Even the four-lane highways that serve the Greenville port area are discontinuous according to the most recently published maps, which contain the kind of information that a site selection committee for a large corporation might examine in

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



the beginning of the decision-making process.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the road into the port area is four-laned, but not divided, in one 10 mile section. All major facilities for air, water, rail, and even pipeline transportation require highways for servicing for access to labor, for access to raw materials, and access to markets.

### **A Measure of Highways Infrastructure Density**

In this study, a simple measure of infrastructure development was used in order to show the basic relationship between infrastructure and economic well-being. This measure was the ratio of highway miles to square miles of area in each county. While the distinction is often made between state-maintained and county-maintained highways, this measure was consistent with the results for the total mile ratio for counties in the State of Mississippi.

Table 4 (page 252) shows the highway infrastructure density (HID) measures for the Delta region. For total highway density, the measures range from a low of .66 in Issaquena County to a high 1.77 in Washington County. The ratio of state-maintained highways to square miles of area ranged from .15 in Sharkey, Humphreys, and Tunica Counties to .22 in Washington County. For the Delta region, the total HID was 1.45 and the state-maintained HID was .18.

A basis for comparison, the HID calculations were made for selected, developed Mississippi counties and for the state as a whole (Table 5, page 253). The calculations shown in these tables do not exclude lakes, state parks, and other areas that might really be excluded from significant amounts of highway construction; but even with those inclusions, the figures are substantially higher than those in the Delta region. Notably, the State of Mississippi HID figures are not higher. With the Delta region at 1.45 and the state at 1.50, the difference is clearly not substantial. There are some basic explanations for this. The region represents a substantial percentage of the area of the state—13.3 percent. This is enough to have a significant impact on the statewide calculations. But this also suggests that there are other areas of the state with similar infrastructure problems.

One difficulty associated with this measure is that it does not address the problem of highway and bridge repairs. While this is a particularly important issue, the region has its share of potholes and aging structures, but, because it has fewer facilities, their repairs are not as great a concern. Much more economic impact will come from the development of new highways and connectors than will come from the repair of current facilities, except in the Washington and Bolivar County areas where other transportation modes are already substantially more developed.

### **Infrastructure Density and Economic Well-being**

In Table 6 (pages 253-254), the measures of infrastructure density, the unemployment rate, and the average weekly salary are shown for each of the Delta counties. It should be noted that the three factors move along in a similar pattern. Table 7 (page 254) shows the results of a Spearman's Correlation test that was performed on the ranking of HID and the average weekly salaries in the Delta counties. Its results show that there is a significant correlation between the ranks of the average weekly salary and the HID variables at a significance level of .05. This paired comparison does not imply a causal direction, but it clearly shows association.

The same calculation was made for the relationship between HID and the unemployment rate in the Delta counties (Table 8, page 255). No significant statistical relationship was found.

---

<sup>12</sup> Rand McNally Road Atlas of the United States, 1988, Rand McNally and Co.

The stronger relationship exists between the infrastructure and salaries, largely because infrastructure appears to allow the introduction of nonagricultural businesses that pay higher wages. This does not seem to affect the unemployment rate in an immobile work force.<sup>13</sup> The unemployment rates may be largely attributed to the immobility of a significant portion of the work force in the Delta, although there does not appear to be a correlation between the two in the sample shown. The fact that these rates are so high fits in with the lack of infrastructure; but intervening variables, such as the problems with education in the area, combine to hide any relationship that might exist. Well-trained workers can simply leave to find jobs elsewhere. Those who lack training and basic preparation cannot. The lack of statistical significance in the correlation between the HID and the unemployment rate comes from the fact that poorly developed infrastructure does not permit the location of manufacturing plants that produce higher value goods, which in turn produce higher salaries.<sup>14</sup>

The causation in the relationship between salaries and the HID lies in the history of the economic development of most regions of the world. Just as civilization and colonization took place on the waterways in the past, so economic development takes place along the highways, railways, airways, and waterways of the present. Infrastructure precedes development to a great extent, although it can also be part of development.<sup>15</sup>

Washington County can once again serve as an example in the context of the Delta counties. The presence of the port of Greenville would probably have even greater impact if the county also had a higher density of highways, especially leading directly from the port toward significant industrial centers. A four-lane road, preferably a limited-access highway, directly to Memphis, a four-lane road to Nashville through Corinth, a four-lane road to New Orleans, and a four-lane link to Interstate 20 in Louisiana would aid development in the region. The current connector to Interstate 55 by way of Highway 82 is not adequate; it adds 20 percent to the cost of reaching Nashville and 30 percent to the cost of reaching Memphis by land, based upon mileage alone.

The relationship holds true for other counties as well as for those in the Delta. The Hinds/Rankin County statistics demonstrate this point perhaps most strongly. With two major interstate highways intersecting in the Jackson region, the area can support a variety of industries and a large number of distribution and transportation facilities—like the Wal-Mart distribution center and the Levi's distribution center in the outlying areas, as well as break-bulk terminals for Consolidated Freightways and Yellow Freight systems, the largest and second largest less-than-truckload carriers in the nation. All of these facilities mean jobs. Each must also be considered a part of the infrastructure of the region. Because the highways and railways are there, the other parts of the infrastructure follow, with beneficial results for the people who live there.

One of the features of facilities like the distribution centers is that not all of the funds for their construction come from the tax base. The firms that operate these facilities pay for most of their construction; although frequently there are tax incentives offered to these businesses for locating in an area. Freight terminals, like those belonging to Yellow Freight and Consolidated Freight, also make a significant contribution to the tax base through the salaries they pay. Truck drivers for these companies earned an average salary of \$55,000 in 1987, more than three times the average wage in the State of Mississippi and five times the salaries paid to the workers in Quitman, Tunica, Issaquena, Sharkey, Tallahatchie, and

---

<sup>13</sup> Sheldon M. Edner, "Setting Priorities, Finding Dollars, and Building Economies: Forecasting Highway Improvement Needs as an Art Form."

<sup>14</sup> Oleg Zinam, "Quality of Life, Quality of Individual, Technology and Economic Development," 55-69.

<sup>15</sup> Brian S. Moskal, "Infrastructure: Rebuilding the U.S.A.," *Industry Week*, March 7, 1983.

Humphreys Counties. A break-bulk terminal may employ from 300 to 500 people, many of them well-paid union workers and managers. But in order to attract large facilities like these, there must be ready access to interstate highways. This is precisely what is lacking in most of the Delta region.

To bring the Delta region up to the same infrastructure level as the more developed areas of the state would require bringing the infrastructure density up to 2.2, a ratio that would cost \$4.75 billion for an additional 3,445 miles of highway, at least 10 percent of it in interstates and other four-lane roads.

### **Airports**

The Delta counties have only two airports that offer commercial service, one in Greenville and the other in Greenwood. Issaquena and Sharkey Counties have no airports at all, while Tunica, Quitman, and Tallahatchie Counties have unattended airports. The remaining counties have airports that serve noncommercial flights during daylight hours only.<sup>16</sup>

The importance of the air transportation service is minimal at this time, although these counties might make ideal locations for transfer-point airports for commercial airline service, largely because of their relative lack of population and lack of economic development. In the traditional sense, however, the airport is vital primarily to those areas where the economic base is developed to the point where a recognizable percentage of employment comes from upper level management and business services (accounting, consulting), not simply "dirty hands" manufacturing. These are the people who travel on business and who are the heaviest users of critical infrastructure—communications and air transportation. At this time, the Delta counties need highway development much more than they need airports.

The possible exception to this is the construction of a wayport. This is an airport primarily for the interchange of passengers and should be located in an area that is not a major origin and destination. That means that the population would be sparse, the area relatively clear of aviation obstructions, and sufficient land is available for the construction of terminal facilities and runways that will serve large commercial jets. The Delta region seems to meet all of these criteria. However, the area must also be able to provide the basic water, sewage, power, and communications services that such a large operation would demand. Also, for supplying the airfield with fuel and other supplies, the requirement becomes, once again, good roads.

A wayport would provide a large number of unskilled jobs in fields such as food services and baggage handling, but would also create some skilled jobs for mechanics and technicians. In a sense, the installation of such a facility in the infrastructure of the Delta counties could have significant impact on the regional economy and assist in the growth of the tax base.

### **Water Transportation**

The port facilities at Greenville do have a substantial impact on Washington County's economy and social development. With rail support from the Columbus and Greenville Railroad and the Illinois Central Railroad as principal carriers, Greenville is the second largest Mississippi-based port on the Mississippi River, behind Vicksburg. But the principal competition for the port comes not from Natchez, Yazoo City, or Vicksburg, but from Memphis, which handles five times the traffic that Greenville does. The Memphis port is supported by substantial highways and multiple railways headed in all directions. Although the Delta counties are, by definition, located on the major inland waterway in the United States, the traffic in and out of the area is limited to agricultural products, chemical fertilizers, petroleum

---

<sup>16</sup> Mississippi Statistical Abstract, 1989.

products, and sand and gravel. The lack of heavy manufacture that might require water transportation precludes this development, although the advantages are there for the same kinds of operations that the steel manufacturing operations have on the Great Lakes.

The further development of the port on the Mississippi River in the Delta region seems an attractive idea at first blush. But ports require a great deal of additional infrastructure that goes beyond harbor and channel maintenance. Railyards and tracks, highways, and warehouse or other storage facilities are essential to an effective port. Also, there must be some industry to use the port facility for inbound raw materials, outbound products, or both. The steel industry does offer some potential here, particularly if the mini-mills based on direct reduction processes are considered. A coal-based direct reduction mill can be made economically viable at a 50,000-ton capacity annually. But there still has to be an outlet for its manufactured product, by water, rail, or highway. Providing high quality steel and steel products to the rapidly developing automobile industry in Tennessee could be a potential outlet for such goods. The limitation becomes, once again, the lack of a highway system, and the lack of a rail system that provides reasonably direct service to the points in question.

### **Rail Transportation**

The railroads serve a limited number of points in the Delta region, with one major yard at Greenwood in Leflore County. The yard serves as an interchange point between the Illinois Central Railroad and the Columbus and Greenville Railroad. The Great River Railroad connects Rosedale to Greenville, with 32 miles of track. The Columbus and Greenville Railroad connects Greenwood and Greenville. The remaining trackage in the region belongs to the Illinois Central Railroad.

Service is provided to and from Lula, Jonestown, Rosedale, Leland, Hollandale, Clarksdale, Greenville, and Greenwood. All of the service is for freight, although Amtrack does pass through the area with a stop at Winona, which is located at Interstate 55 and Highway 82.

Rail connections for the region are good going to the east toward Columbus, and north toward Memphis. However, service toward the major population centers of the nation is weak by rail, just as it is by highway. There is not a good connector going toward the northeast; neither is there a good connector heading toward Texas. Reasonable connections exist with New Orleans, but the primary reason for going there would be the port. The port of Greenville now serves the same purposes well enough.

**Table 1. Unemployment rates in the Mississippi Delta counties, the Delta region, and the State of Mississippi.**

<b>County</b>	<b>Unemployment Rate</b>
Core Delta Counties	
Bolivar	12.5
Coahoma	15.1
Humphreys	15.5
Issaquena	19.2
Leflore	13.7
Quitman	18.2
Sharkey	30.2
Sunflower	12.3
Tallahatchie	13.7
Tunica	18.3
Washington	14.7
Fringe Delta Counties	
Carroll	11.4
DeSoto	6.0
Holmes	18.7
Panola	12.7
Tate	9.5
Warren	12.7
Yazoo	12.1
Delta Region	14.3
Mississippi	10.2

**Source:** Mississippi Statistical Abstract, 1989, (Mississippi State University, Division of Research, College of Business and Industry).

**Table 2. Average weekly salaries in the Delta counties and in the State of Mississippi.**

<b>County</b>	<b>Average Weekly Salary \$</b>
Core Delta Counties	
Bolivar	272
Coahoma	267
Humphreys	225
Issaquena	192
Leflore	265
Quitman	213
Sharkey	219
Sunflower	264
Tallahatchie	197
Tunica	215
Washington	286
Fringe Delta Counties	
Carroll	221
DeSoto	315
Holmes	225
Panola	268
Tate	266
Warren	300
Yazoo	293
Mississippi	301

**Source:** Mississippi Statistical Abstract, 1989, (Mississippi State University, Division of Research, College of Business and Industry).

**Table 3. Highway mileage in the Mississippi Delta: total, state-maintained, and square miles of area, by county.**

<b>County</b>	<b>Total Highway Miles</b>	<b>State-Maintained Highway Miles</b>	<b>Area of County in Square Miles</b>
Core Delta Counties			
Bolivar	1440	182	892
Coahoma	889	104	559
Humphreys	578	66	430
Issaquena	268	68	406
Leflore	925	114	605
Quitman	697	71	406
Sharkey	500	65	435
Sunflower	1136	139	706
Tallahatchie	794	104	651
Tunica	600	68	460
Washington	1294	158	733
Delta Region	9121	1139	6283
Fringe Delta Counties			
Carroll	774	122	634
DeSoto	945	119	483
Holmes	1029	159	759
Panola	1152	168	694
Tate	604	81	406
Warren	744	107	596
Yazoo	1091	174	933

**Source:** Rand McNally Road Atlas of the United States, 1988.

**Table 4. Highway infrastructure density in the Delta: total miles and state-maintained miles.**

<b>County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>State-Maintained</b>
Core Delta Counties		
Bolivar	1.61	.20
Coahoma	1.59	.19
Humphreys	1.34	.15
Issaquena	.66	.17
Leflore	1.53	.19
Quitman	1.72	.17
Sharkey	1.15	.15
Sunflower	1.60	.20
Tallahatchie	1.22	.16
Tunica	1.30	.15
Washington	1.77	.22
Fringe Delta Counties		
Carroll	1.22	.19
DeSoto	1.96	.25
Holmes	1.36	.21
Panola	1.66	.24
Tate	1.49	.20
Warren	1.25	.18
Yazoo	1.17	.19
Delta Region	1.45	.18

**Source:** Highway Infrastructure Density Calculated as Highway Miles/Square Miles of Area.



**Table 5. Infrastructure density and average weekly salary in selected, developed Mississippi counties.**

	Infrastructure Density		Average Weekly Salary
	Total	State Maintained	\$
Alcorn	1.98	.22	309
DeSoto	1.95	.25	315
Forrest	2.10	.24	302
Hinds	2.50	.29	351
Jackson	1.88	.21	390
Lee	2.40	.30	319
Lowndes	1.85	.25	317
Pike	2.33	.33	265
Rankin	1.67	.30	316
State of Mississippi	1.50	.23	301

**Source:** Mississippi Statistical Abstract, 1989 (Mississippi State University: Division of Research, College of Business and Industry).

**Table 6. Unemployment, average weekly salary, and infrastructure density within the Mississippi Delta region.**

County	Unemployment		Average Weekly Salary		Infrastructure Density	
	%	Rank	Amt.	Rank	HID	Rank
Core Delta Counties						
Bolivar	12.5	2	272	2	1.61	3
Coahoma	15.1	6	267	3	1.59	5
Humphreys	15.5	7	225	6	1.34	7
Issaquena	19.2	10	192	11	.66	11
Leflore	13.7	3.5	265	4	1.53	6
Quitman	18.2	8	133	9	1.72	2
Sharkey	30.2	11	219	7	1.15	10
Sunflower	12.3	1	264	5	1.60	4
Tallahatchie	13.7	3.5	197	10	1.22	9

(continued)

**Table 6 (continued). Unemployment, average weekly salary, and infrastructure density within the Mississippi Delta region.**

County	Unemployment		Average Weekly Salary		Infrastructure Density	
	%	Rank	Amt.	Rank	HID	Rank
Core Delta Counties						
Tunica	18.3	9	215	8	1.30	8
Washington	14.7	5	286	1	1.77	1
<b>Total</b>	14.3		237		1.45	
Fringe Delta Counties						
Carroll	11.4		221		1.22	
DeSoto	6.0		315		1.96	
Holmes	18.7		225		1.36	
Panola	12.7		268		1.66	
Tate	9.5		266		1.49	
Warren	12.7		300		1.25	
Yazoo	12.1		293		1.17	
<b>TOTAL</b>	10.5		270		1.4	

**Table 7. Spearman's correlation calculated for infrastructure density (HID) and average weekly salary in the Mississippi Delta region.**

HO = There is no significant correlation between these variables.

H1 = There is a significant correlation between these variables.

Value for significance, less than 84  
(.05, n=11)

Calculated value = 72

The relationship is significant at the .05 level

**Table 8. Spearman's correlation calculated for infrastructure density (HID) and unemployment rate in core Delta counties.**

---

HO = There is no significant correlation between these variables.

H1 = There is a significant correlation between these variables.

Value for significance, less than 104  
(n=11)

Value for Delta counties = 110.5

Not significant at .10 level

---

## **Chapter**

# **15**

### ***Delta Economy: The Agricultural Base***

**by  
Al Myles and Lynn Reinschmidt\***

The Delta of Mississippi is a unique agricultural region, rich in natural resources and with an equally rich history regarding its geological, cultural, and agricultural development. The intent of this chapter is to give an overview of the Delta's agricultural economy and make comparisons to the rest of the state. This chapter will not present nor elaborate upon the rich history of the Delta, except to describe the agricultural economy of the Delta as it exists today. Other documents have been devoted to the geological development, agricultural settlement patterns, cultural practices and customs indigenous to the Delta, institutions that have evolved to meet problems and issues confronting the Delta, and other topics unique to the Delta. A few of the more noteworthy readings addressing these issues include Harrison's *Alluvial Empire, Levee Districts and Levee Building in Mississippi*, and *Flood Control in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley*.<sup>1</sup> Harrison presents an excellent detailed account of the geological development of the Delta and the effects of flooding on the agricultural development of the region. The complex social, political, and financial means by which the Delta has developed a unique set of institutions to deal with its problems are also presented in detail. A bulletin by McLendon, entitled *The Development of Mississippi Agriculture: A Survey*, discusses Mississippi agriculture in general, but it gives the reader an excellent overview of agriculture's historical development dating back to the late 1600's.<sup>2</sup> Two documents developed for the Delta Council also provide informative overviews of the Delta and the Delta economy.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Robert W. Harrison, *Levee Districts and Levee Building in Mississippi*, Delta Fund in Cooperation with Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, (Little Rock, AR: 1951); Harrison, *Flood Control in the Alluvial Mississippi Valley*, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Delta Council (Stoneville, MS, undated).

<sup>2</sup>James H. McLendon, *The Development of Mississippi Agriculture*, Historical Series No. 2, (State College, MS: The Social Science Research Center, October 1951).

<sup>3</sup>William M. Cash and R. Daryl Lewis, *The Delta Council: Fifty Years of Service to the Mississippi Delta* (Stoneville, MS: The Delta Council, 1986); Robert Baker Highsaw, *The Delta Looks Forward: An Inventory of Natural and Human Resources* (Stoneville, MS: The Delta Council, 1949).

\*Respectively, Community Development Specialist with the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, and Professor of Agricultural Economics, Mississippi State University.

The remainder of the chapter is organized in the following manner. First, a survey of the Delta's natural-resource base is presented. Second, characteristics relating to the Delta's agricultural economy, including farm structure, production patterns, and acreage devoted to major crops, are presented. The third section examines how the agricultural economy interfaces with the general economy within the Delta and the state. The final section is a summary.

### **The Delta Defined**

The Delta, as referred to throughout this chapter, includes the 18 counties in northwest Mississippi that comprise the Delta Council. This definition of the Delta extends beyond the geophysical boundaries of the Mississippi Alluvial Plain, which includes all or parts of 11 counties forming a crescent-shaped area along the Mississippi River. Given the distinctive differences in the agricultural-resource base, topography, and agricultural activity of the 11 counties formed by the alluvial flood plain, a distinction between that region and the remaining seven Delta Council counties that border the geologically defined Delta is made. The 11-county area is referred to as the "core" Delta, and the remaining seven counties bordering the eastern boundary are referred to as the "fringe" Delta.

### **Resource Base**

The 18-county Delta Council area is made up of three distinct geophysical districts, which do not conform to county political boundaries, crossing the region in north to south bands.<sup>4</sup> From west to east these include the Mississippi Alluvial Plain, the Bluff Hills, and parts of the North Central Hills. The Mississippi Alluvial Plain, a region virtually synonymous with the core Delta, consists of nearly level to gently sloping broad flood plains and low terraces. The Bluff Hills constitute a narrow belt, 15 to 25 miles in width, bordering the eastern edge of the Mississippi Alluvial Plain. The Bluff Hills are characterized by steep slopes, narrow ridges, and narrow intervening valleys.<sup>5</sup> The easternmost geophysical band, the North Central Hills, is a large upland belt of sand and clay materials that has been cut into hills and valleys by stream erosion.

These geophysical districts can be further classified into land resource area (LRA) groupings based on a combination of factors, including soil patterns, topography, type of agriculture, and other selected characteristics.<sup>6</sup> Two major LRA's are indigenous to the Delta. They are the Southern Mississippi Valley Alluvium (LRA 131) and the Southern Mississippi Valley Silty Uplands (LRA 134). LRA 131 includes all of the 11 core Delta counties, with the exception of the eastern quarter of Tallahatchie County and portions of several fringe Delta counties as well. LRA 134 makes up the major share of that portion of the Delta referred to here as the fringe Delta.

LRA 131 is comprised of fertile soils developed by the rich alluvium of the Mississippi River and its tributaries.<sup>7</sup> Its level topography is conducive to large-scale mechanized agriculture. LRA 131 or the core Delta is one of the largest contiguous agricultural areas in the United States. Its soils are suited to a wide range of crops and are some of the most productive found anywhere in the world.

---

<sup>4</sup>Soil Conservation Service, Economic Research Service, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (Jackson, MS: June 1975).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 2-7.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 2-9.

<sup>7</sup>D.E. Pettry, "Soil Resource Areas of Mississippi," (Mississippi State, MS: Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station: May 1977), Information Sheet 1278.

\*Respectively, Community Development Specialist with the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, and Professor of Agricultural Economics, Mississippi State University.

LRA 134 is the predominant land resource area constituting the fringe Delta and is commonly referred to as the Brown Loam Area. The loess soils found in LRA 134 have a high silt content and are very erosive on sloping cultivated areas. Where topography permits, the high natural fertility of these soils is suitable to a wide range of crops.<sup>8</sup>

### **Land Use**

The 1982 total land area of 7,022,200 acres for the 18-county Delta region accounted for 23 percent of the state's total acreage.<sup>9</sup> Of this total, the core Delta comprised 4,102,300 acres and the fringe Delta made up the remaining 2,919,900 acres.

Consistent with the differences in soil characteristics and capabilities, a comparison of 1982 land use patterns for LRA's 131 and 134, with the state as a whole, revealed markedly different patterns of land utilization.<sup>10</sup> The 1982 National Resources Inventory (NRI) data, a comprehensive inventory of the nation's soil resource base, indicated that LRA 131 had a total of 4,544,500 acres of nonfederal land. (Note, this figure is larger than the core Delta acreage, which is based upon county units rather than the geophysical boundaries of LRA 131.) Of this total, 77 percent was in cropland, 21 percent in forest, 1 percent in pastureland, and 1 percent in minor uses (see Table 1, page 267). When comparing the land use distribution of the core Delta with the state, the core Delta had a considerably higher proportion of its acreage in cropland (77 percent versus 26 percent). Land use in LRA 134 was more consistent with the state as a whole. These figures reflect the highly crop-intensive nature of agriculture in the core Delta relative to the fringe and the state as a whole.

### **Agriculture Structure**

Since the early 1900's, Mississippi agriculture has undergone significant changes in structure, enterprises, and the geographical distribution of production. It will continue to change in the future. Using data on selected characteristics from census reports dating back to 1880, the following sections illustrate how the Delta's agricultural economy has evolved and how it relates to the agriculture economy of the state. The study of aggregate statistics often fails to adequately describe the economic, technological, social, political, and demographic forces that explain past events.<sup>11</sup> These factors acting in unison produce the environment described by statistics that are the net effects of these forces.

### **Land in Farms**

Despite the fact that land has become a relatively less important component of the bundle of resources a farm operator manages, it still remains the basic ingredient for agricultural production and the distinguishing characteristic that sets farming apart from nonfarm

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Soil Conservation Service, *Mississippi Nonfederal Land Resources: Summary of National Resources Inventory*, (Jackson, MS: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1982).

<sup>10</sup>Soil Conservation Service, *Mississippi Data: National Resources Inventory*; SCS, "Mississippi MLRA National Resources Inventory Special Data Diskettes" (provided by Jeff Goebel, SCS); SCS, *Mississippi Nonfederal Land Resources: Summary of 1982 National Resources Inventory*, (Jackson, MS: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1982).

<sup>11</sup>James H. Brook and Charles Pugh, *Forces Affecting the Structure of Southern Agriculture*, (Raleigh, NC: Department of Economics, North Carolina University, 1968).

businesses.<sup>12</sup> The amounts of land in agricultural production in the Delta have fluctuated somewhat between and among farm enterprises.

Over the period 1900-1987, total land in farms in Mississippi declined 42 percent, compared to 5 percent in the Delta. During this same period, acreage in the core Delta rose 15 percent, while acreage in the fringe Delta decreased 42 percent (see Table 2, pages 267-268). While these statistics do indicate a fairly erratic cycle in farmland use in Mississippi, they also are a little misleading. For example, land in farms in the core Delta experienced a low of 2,325 million acres in 1925 and peaked at 3,748 million acres in 1964. A reversal of land use trends was found in the fringe Delta when compared to the core Delta. During 1974-1987, land use in the fringe Delta was significantly lower than the high of 2,671 million acres in 1925.

An overall examination of trends in farmland use in Mississippi suggests they parallel those of the core Delta and fringe Delta areas. Land in farms peaked in 1954 at 20,706 million acres and reached a low of 10,733 million acres in 1987. Over this period, total land use in Mississippi averaged 12,492 million acres, indicating that land use during this period was essentially equal to the 1982 level of 12,427.6 million acres.

### **Farm Size**

The structural characteristics of individual farms reflect the size and substitution effects of technological, economic, and political forces.<sup>13</sup> Other forces impacting the structure of farms include social and population changes. Farm size is a measure often used to evaluate farm structure and the changes that occur in structure for whatever reason.

During the 1900-1925 period, the average farm size in Mississippi (Table 2) decreased from 83 to 62 acres. This phenomenon held true for the Delta and the Delta subregions; but the decrease in the core Delta (80 to 33 acres) was considerably more pronounced. An understanding of farm definition for census purposes, which has changed over time, is important in interpreting these figures. Over this period of time, sharecropping was a prevalent practice as the Delta's land base was being cleared for agricultural purposes. Hence, the increase in farm numbers and the subsequent decrease in farm size can be partially attributed to this phenomenon. Since 1925, the average farm size has increased for every agricultural census year, without exception. From 1925 until 1954, farms in the fringe Delta tended to be larger than those in the core Delta, a situation that has reversed itself in later years.

The trend toward increasing farm size that started in Mississippi around 1925 has resulted in an average farm size for the State of Mississippi of 315 acres in 1987. Starting in 1964, farm size in the core Delta surpassed the average for the fringe Delta and the overall for the state. A number of factors—including a decline of sharecropping as it evolved in earlier years; increased reliance upon chemical fertilizers, insecticides, and herbicides; and the mechanization of agriculture—have contributed to these changes in farm structure. This trend has continued up to 1987, when the average size for the core Delta, 984 acres, was over three times the average for the state.

### **Number of Farms**

The number of farms in Mississippi steadily increased from 1880 to 1940, with an overall state increase of almost 190,000 farms (Table 2). In the Delta, however, farm numbers started

---

<sup>12</sup>John G. Stovall, *Changing Resource Requirements on Farms in the South* (Washington, DC: Southern Field Group, Farm Production Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1968).

<sup>13</sup>Brooks and Pugh, *Forces Affecting the Structure of Southern Agriculture*.

to decline after 1925. This decrease for the Delta was attributed to the reduced farm numbers in the fringe Delta where attrition occurred as market forces demanded greater output from farm assets. In the core Delta, farm numbers continued to increase until 1940.

A similar review of farm numbers over the 1954-1987 period revealed that Mississippi lost almost 182,000 farms, compared to 60,557 for the Delta. Interestingly, the survival rate among farms in Mississippi was 1 out of 6, compared to 1 out of 14 for the Delta. One out of 10 farms in the core Delta survived, while 1 out of 7 farms in the fringe Delta survived. The greater decline in farm numbers for the Delta is partially attributable to the mechanization process that displaced the sharecropper system and the increases in economies of scale associated with Delta agriculture.

Without special programs to change these trends or to stabilize them, the decline in farm numbers is likely to continue. In recent years, the rate of decrease has subsided. Evidence of this can be found in looking at state farm numbers after 1954. From 1954 to 1974, about 162,000 farms ceased to operate, compared to 19,556 during 1974-1987. A similar comparison during the period 1982-1987, when only 8,341 farms ceased to operate, reveals that the decline in farm numbers in Mississippi has stabilized. Even though efficiency experts point out that the rate of decline in farm numbers has mitigated, further reductions in farm numbers, given the smaller total number existing, can have significant impacts upon the structure of agriculture in the state.

### **Tenure Arrangements**

The so-called family farm has historically been a major form of farm tenure in the United States. Mississippi is no exception. However, in recent years, the family farm has experienced significant losses in number, with the rate of loss likely to continue into the foreseeable future.

While there is not a universally accepted definition of the family farm, one common definition describes a family farm as a unit in which the size is determined by family-provided operator labor and management. Defined as such, the family farm is virtually gone.<sup>14</sup> New developments in herbicides, pesticides, plant genetics, and farm machinery have made it almost impossible for the family farm to take full advantage of new technology, given the small acreage involved. As a result, the family farm has faded, while a new farm era, represented by large commercial farms often involving thousands of acres, has emerged.

Information relating to farm tenure arrangements for Mississippi and the Mississippi Delta, 1950-1987, is provided in Table 3 (page 269). The number of tenant operations declined by 126,918 (98 percent) from 1950 to 1987. As late as 1950, one out of every two farms in Mississippi was classified as tenant-operated. By 1987, only 1 out of 11 farms was classified as such. The incidence of tenant farms in 1950 was essentially the same in the Delta as it was in other areas of the state.

Part owners, while smaller in number, exhibited similar trends in farm numbers as did tenants. For example, in 1950 there were 17,676 partly owned farms in Mississippi, compared to 8,949 such farms in 1987, representing a 49.4 percent reduction. A comparison of the numbers of part owners to all farms in Mississippi and the Delta revealed 1 out of 14 farms in Mississippi and 1 out of 23 farms in the Delta were considered partly owned in 1950. In 1987, the proportion of partly owned farms to all farms was 1 out of 4 farms in Mississippi, compared to 1 out of 8 farms in the Delta, indicating that the incidence of part ownership decreased dramatically in Mississippi and particularly in the Delta.

---

<sup>14</sup>Mervin G. Smith, *Fundamental Adjustments Needed in U.S. Agriculture*, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1960).



Like part owners and tenant operators, the number of full owners declined as well. In 1950, 1 out of 3 farms in Mississippi and 1 out of 7 farms in the Delta were fully owned. By 1987, the proportion of full owners in Mississippi had dropped to 1 in 2, compared to the same ratio of farms in the Delta. Since 1950, the number of full-owner farms in Mississippi has declined 79 percent, compared to 80 percent for the Delta.

While the Delta continues to be one of the most fertile and stable agricultural regions of the state, changes in the Delta's agriculture industry have been significant. Statistics indicate that ownership of only part of the land operated is a feasible alternative to full-owner operations for those with limited capital. Given current economic conditions, the decline in the number of full-owner farms is likely to continue into the immediate future.

### **Farm Type**

Mississippi agriculture relies upon a fairly diversified set of enterprises for its economic survival. This is especially true of the Delta. Recent developments of alternative enterprises (i.e., catfish) and the further development of traditional enterprises (particularly rice and wheat) have enabled the Mississippi farmer to stabilize farm income. Over time, the types of crops grown and the areas in which specific enterprises have been produced within the state have changed.

For example, the number of corn farms in Mississippi declined by 98 percent, from a high of 183,713 in 1950 to 4,020 in 1987 (Table 4, page 270). Corn farms accounted for 73 percent of all the farms in the state in 1950, compared to about 9 percent in 1987. Over this same period, corn farms in the Delta declined 99 percent, from 50,366 in 1950 to 498 in 1987. These changes are, to a large extent, a by-product of mechanization in that corn is no longer needed to sustain an animal-dominated agricultural system.

Changes in cotton farms also were erratic. During this same period, the number of cotton farms in Mississippi and the Delta declined 98 percent and 97 percent, respectively. These figures are reflective of the decline in sharecropping. With the introduction of soybeans as a cash grain crop in the 1940's, the number of soybean farms in the state has increased dramatically. Soybean farm numbers increased 50 percent, from 4,314 in 1950 to 6,475 in 1987. For the Delta as a whole, soybean farms increased by only 12 percent over the same period.

While corn and cotton farms were declining, rice, soybean, and wheat farms were experiencing significant growth. For example, the number of rice farms in Mississippi and the Delta increased 214 percent and 213 percent, respectively, during 1954-1987. The core and fringe Delta areas experienced growth in rice farms of 216 percent and 140 percent, respectively. Wheat farms in Mississippi and the Delta also grew dramatically during this period, with growth rates of 429 percent and 232 percent, respectively.

These findings suggest that farm specialization by enterprise type is occurring in Mississippi agriculture, primarily in the Delta, and that continued diversification of the state's agriculture base is likely to occur due to limited product markets and low product prices. This opinion is supported by three observations from earlier reviews.

First, average farm size in Mississippi and the Delta increased from 1925-1987. Secondly, the number of farms in Mississippi and the Delta has declined over time with the exclusion of the 1925-1940 period, during which the sharecropping system flourished. Thirdly, a smaller number of farms is now producing a larger quantity of the farm output in Mississippi. These trends are discussed in more detail in the section entitled "Farm Production."

### **Cropland**

The amount of land in crop cultivation has changed little over the period 1925-1987 (Table 2). In fact, total cropland acreage declined only .5 percent during this period. The Delta

accounted for 52 percent of all the acreage devoted to crops in 1987. The core Delta alone accounted for 38 percent of the state's total cropland.

Since 1925, land devoted to crop production in the Delta increased 40 percent: 58 percent in the core Delta and 7 percent in the fringe Delta. The largest share of the increases in cropland occurred in the Delta region. While many changes have occurred, total cropland devoted to cotton, rice, soybeans, and wheat has increased considerably over the last 50 years. Of the five crops used in this study, only corn declined in acreage. Obviously, the decline in corn acreage was essentially offset by the overall increase in cropland devoted to the remaining crops.

### **Forestland**

Forestry is a major industry in Mississippi in terms of dollar sales and land use. Statewide, the percentage of the land area devoted to forestry has remained constant at approximately 55 percent since 1957 (see Table 5, page 271). The Delta accounts for approximately 23 percent of the total state land area; but in 1987 it had only 11.4 percent of the state's forestland. Reflecting the intensive row-crop nature of the core Delta, forestland use only accounted for 16.5 percent of the total in 1987. This figure was down from 28.1 percent in 1957, indicating that significant land clearing has occurred over the past 30 years. In the "fringe," however, 43 percent of the land area was devoted to forestry in 1957, and that figure still held in 1987. These figures denote the sharp contrasts existing in the 18 Delta counties with regard to land use.

### **Farm Production**

Particularly useful are variations in annual production figures by crop and which specific crops potentially could provide the most stable income and market for the state as a whole.<sup>15</sup> Farm production of corn, cotton, rice, soybeans, and wheat in Mississippi showed considerable variation from 1950-1987 (see Table 6, pages 272-273). Corn was much more erratic than any of the other commodities. Cotton was the least erratic. Corn production in Mississippi declined from almost 38 million bushels in 1950 to over 9 million bushels in 1987. A comparison of production in the Delta showed that corn declined from just over 9 million bushels in 1950 to almost 1.6 million bushels in 1987.

Gains made by the remaining enterprises were significant. Rice production increased by over 19 million bushels and wheat production by almost 9.6 million bushels from 1954 to 1987. About 99 percent of the rice and over 70 percent of the wheat produced in Mississippi come from the Delta. About 98 percent of the Delta's rice and 81 percent of its wheat are produced in the core area (see Table 6).

Cotton production in Mississippi increased only 10.5 percent over the period 1950-1987, while cotton production in the Delta increased over 34 percent during this same period. Of this total, 73 percent occurred in the core Delta and 27 percent in the fringe Delta.

Even though the number of cotton farms has declined considerably since 1950, cotton production has steadily increased. This suggests that cotton provided a more stable market for the state's agriculture industry than did the other commodities. Cotton is expected to continue to be the most stable product for the agriculture industry in the immediate future.

Soybean is another major cash crop in Mississippi and the Delta. During 1950-1987, soybean production rose 38.5 million bushels. Over 26.5 million bushels were produced in the Delta alone. Of this total, over 21.7 million bushels were produced in the core Delta. Soybean

---

<sup>15</sup>Albert E. Myles and Albert J. Allen, *Rail Transportation in the Grain Traffic Market: Overview*, (Mississippi State, MS: Department of Agricultural Economics, Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, Mississippi State University, 1986).

acreage and production increased dramatically from the early 1950's to the late 1970's and early 1980's, but both production and acreage have declined significantly in the latter part of the 1980's. However, soybean is still a major crop in Mississippi and the Delta.

### **Catfish Production**

A new industry, farm-raised catfish, began to emerge in the Delta during the 1970's and has since become a nationally recognized success story. Since 1977, the number of acres devoted to catfish production in Mississippi has increased from 17,000 to almost 92,000 in 1988 (see Table 7, page 274). Over 96 percent of the acreage devoted to catfish farming is found in the Delta. The phenomenal 430 percent increase, in just over a decade, made Mississippi the leading catfish producer in the nation, producing more than 265 million pounds of fish in 1988.<sup>16</sup>

The acreage best suited to catfish farming is the so-called "buckshot" soils of the Delta, which, ironically, are less desirable for row-crop production. Thus, the catfish industry has allowed Delta producers to better utilize an existing soil resource base. Given the abundant supply of this land resource, the future growth of this industry is limited only by demand.

### **Crop Sales**

Although significant gains have been made in the dollar value of other commodities, field crops still remain a major source of farm income in Mississippi, accounting for about 49 percent of the value of farm products sold in 1987 (Table 2). As a result of market prices and production levels, the value of crops sold from farms in Mississippi and the Delta peaked in 1982 at \$1.102 billion and \$776 million, respectively.

From 1940 to 1987, the value of crops sold from farms in Mississippi averaged almost \$585 million. Similarly, the value of crops sold from farms in the Delta averaged over \$441 million. The value of products sold from farms in the core and fringe Delta regions averaged \$332 million and \$80 million, respectively, during this period.

In 1940, crop sales in the Delta accounted for 54 percent of all sales in the state. Today, they account for only 37 percent of all crop sales in Mississippi. The core Delta region accounted for the largest share of crop sales in the entire Delta region, or about 82 percent in 1940 and about 78 percent in 1987. Although the share of crop sales in the core Delta region has declined from what it was in 1940, it still remains as the most stable region of our agriculture industry. The large percentage of crops sold from farms in that region supports the widely held belief that the Delta is indeed the area that has significant influence on the agricultural economic well-being of the state.

### **Livestock Sales**

Crop sales have been and continue to be a major source of farm income in Mississippi. However, livestock sales have shown the most rapid rate of increase and now account for the largest share of farm income in Mississippi.

In 1940, livestock sales in Mississippi accounted for 15 percent of farm sales, compared to 85 percent for crop sales. By 1987, livestock sales in Mississippi had increased to 51 percent, whereas, crop sales had fallen to 49 percent. Over the period 1940-1987, livestock sales increased 56-fold, while crop sales increased only about 9-fold.

A majority of the livestock production in the state occurs outside the Delta. In 1940, only 23 percent of livestock sales occurred in the Delta, compared to 77 percent outside the region.

---

<sup>16</sup>Economic Research Service, *Agriculture: 1989*, (U.S. Department of Agriculture, March 1989).

By 1987, only 19 percent occurred in the Delta, while 81 percent occurred outside the region. The relative proportion of livestock sales within the Delta declined over 17 percent.

On a regional basis, about 35 percent of livestock sales in the Delta occurred in the core Delta in 1940. By 1987, this share had risen to 77 percent. The large change in crop and livestock shares suggests that changes in the enterprise mix of Mississippi farms or types of farms are occurring and that future growth in farm income will likely come from the sale of livestock products. While sales (85 percent in 1940 versus 49 percent in 1987) from traditional row crops are still important to Mississippi agriculture, their dominant role in today's agriculture is declining. For the Delta, however, where the land resource base is best suited to crop production, crops will likely continue to be the dominant source of agricultural income.

### **Economic Structure**

The relationship of agriculture to the rest of the Delta economy can be shown by examining the contributions made by industry sectors to earned income and the proportion of employment in the various sectors. This section examines each to determine the role of agriculture in the overall economy.

### **Economic Sectors**

One means of evaluating the economic structure of the Delta economy is to divide the economy into two general components, goods producing and services producing, and determine changes in the relative magnitudes of each over time. Table 9 (pages 276-278) presents earnings by industry for the goods-producing and services-producing sectors and their component parts for four time periods—1975, 1978, 1982, and 1986—for the Delta delineations.

### **Goods-Producing Sectors**

Overall, the distribution of earned income attributed to the goods-producing sectors has remained relatively stable over the 1975-1986 period (Table 9). In 1986, 36.8 percent of Mississippi's earned income came from the goods-producing sectors of manufacturing, farming, agricultural services-forestry and fisheries, construction, and mining. While the share for this sector reached a high of 41.9 percent in 1978, it has shown a relatively small decrease over the entire period evaluated. A comparison of the entire Delta with the state figures shows that, as a whole, the share of earnings attributable to goods-producing sectors was very similar. There were, however, notable differences in the distribution of those earnings across the various sectors. For example, earnings by the farm sector were a considerably larger component of the Delta's economy in 1986 (4.4 percent versus 2.9 percent), while manufacturing, mining, and construction sectors were of less importance to the Delta, relative to the rest of the state.

Differences within the Delta were more significant. As shown in Table 9, the goods-producing sectors represented 39.2 percent of the fringe Delta's economy, while only 31.9 percent of the core economy depended upon these sectors in 1986. The relatively greater dependence of the fringe Delta upon the goods-producing sectors held over all time periods evaluated. Within this component, the core had a heavier dependence upon the farm and agricultural services-forestry and fisheries sectors, while the fringe was significantly more concentrated in manufacturing. The dependency of the fringe Delta upon manufacturing is not surprising given the differences in agricultural structure pointed out earlier.

### **Services-Producing Sectors**

Much has been written of the emerging services-producing sectors of the U.S. economy. Nationwide, the rural economy has been particularly hard hit by the transition to the so-called "services economy." Brown and Deavers state that industrial restructuring has altered the

economic basis of life in most rural communities, thereby affecting the economic well-being of rural residents.<sup>17</sup> Statewide, over the 1975 to 1986 period, Mississippi has shown a slight increase in the percentage share of earnings attributable to the services sectors (60.4 percent in 1975 compared to 63.2 percent in 1986). The Delta's 1986 share of services earnings of 63.8 percent was consistent with the state's proportion; but, as was true with the goods-producing sectors, there were some notable differences. In particular, the Delta's economy was more heavily dependent upon the wholesale and retail trade sectors, but less dependent upon finance, insurance, and real estate. Since the latter of these sectors is typically centered in metropolitan areas, the lack of a major metropolitan area in the Delta would partially explain this difference.

The earnings of the core Delta counties from services, 68.1 percent in 1986, exceeded that sector's contribution in both the fringe Delta and the state as a whole. Given the rural nature of these counties, this finding was unexpected. The major difference within the Delta subregions occurred in the personal and business services, where the core Delta had an edge over the fringe. This pattern was consistent over all time periods.

The earnings statistics for Mississippi and the Delta regions do not reflect significant changes in the relative shares between the services-producing and goods-producing sectors. This phenomenon has several implications. First, the fact that the goods-producing component has held fairly constant over time may mean that the state and the Delta regions have managed to retain industries that contribute to this sector. If this is true, these areas may be able to receive additional gains if the service sectors grow in the future, without losses in the goods-producing sectors. Another scenario may be that the adjustments alluded to by Brown and Deavers may just now be occurring, which would imply these regions will suffer additional hardships in the near future if they are unable to capture gains in the services sectors.

### **Employment**

Another relatively simple measure of the Delta's contribution to the state's economy can be determined by evaluating gross employment numbers. For this purpose, broad census employment categories for 1950 to 1980 were examined. The census presents county-level data for total, agriculture, and manufacturing employment. Employment figures for these three categories are presented in Table 10 (page 278) by region of the state.

Total state employment has steadily grown from 720,851 in 1950 to 937,211 in 1980, but this growth is not evenly distributed. For example, the Delta has experienced a 14 percent decline in employment since 1950. Moreover, the Delta's percentage share of state employment dropped from 27.8 percent in 1950 to 18.3 percent in 1980. However, while the core Delta employment dropped by 31 percent, the fringe employment actually increased by 20 percent. Even so, employment growth in the fringe Delta has not kept pace with the rest of the state.

Two specific categories of employment, agricultural and manufacturing, were selected to reflect additional characteristics of the regions' economies. Table 10 shows a tremendous decline in agricultural employment since 1950. These figures reflect data presented earlier. However, a word of caution is appropriate in interpreting these agricultural employment figures. They apply only to production agriculture and do not count the input supply, processing, retailing, and other activities directly related to and dependent upon agriculture. Even though the agricultural employment numbers have decreased over time, the percentage share of the state's total agricultural employment accounted for by the Delta has been reasonably consistent over time and has actually increased. These figures, in turn, support the

---

<sup>17</sup>David L. Brown and Kenneth L. Deavers, "Economic Dimensions of Rural America," (Paper presented at Rural Development Policy Workshop, Birmingham, AL: October 3-5, 1988).

\*Respectively, Community Development Specialist with the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, and Professor of Agricultural Economics, Mississippi State University.

earlier findings that the Delta's contribution to the state's agricultural economy is significant and growing over time.

Another category of employment deserving special attention is manufacturing. While total employment and agriculture employment have declined in the Delta as a whole, manufacturing employment has grown in absolute and relative terms. In fact, the Delta's share of total manufacturing employment increased from 10.4 percent in 1950 to 15.7 percent in 1980. Both the core and fringe counties have registered significant increases in manufacturing employment since 1950.

### **Summary**

Many changes have occurred in the structure of the Mississippi Delta's agricultural economy over the past 100 years. This chapter has attempted to examine briefly some of the trends of the recent past regarding farm size, number of farms, farm tenure, and other agriculturally related data.

The core Delta is a highly developed agricultural producing area with approximately three-quarters of its land area devoted to cropland. In contrast, the remainder of the state, including the fringe Delta, has only a quarter of its land resource base in crops.

Since 1940, the number of farms in the Delta has declined from 105,037 to 6,561. Even taking into consideration the definitional changes of what constitutes a farm, this decline reflects the magnitude of the structural changes that have occurred in the Mississippi Delta. The mechanization of agriculture, with respect to cotton in particular, displaced large numbers of farm laborers and sharecroppers once needed to make this fertile agricultural region productive. While cotton is still the dominant Delta cash crop, soybeans, catfish, and wheat are widespread throughout the Delta. Catfish, a relative new industry to the Delta, has grown from a few thousand acres in the early 1970's to over 90,000 acres by the end of the 1980's.

The Delta's economy, in contrast to the rest of the state, is more dependent upon earnings from the farm sector. Reflective of mechanization in the agricultural sector and slow growth in the manufactured goods and services sectors, the Delta's overall employment has dropped by approximately 15 percent since 1950. This has occurred even though manufacturing employment has grown both in absolute and relative terms over the last 40 years.

What the future holds for the Delta's economy will most assuredly be heavily dependent upon this region's agricultural economy. But if the Delta is to provide job opportunities for the general population, an economy less dependent upon production agriculture is needed.

**Table 1. Major land uses for Land Resource Area 131, Land Resource Area 134, and Mississippi, 1982.**

Land Use	State	LRA 131 <sup>^</sup>	LRA 134 <sup>^^</sup>
--Percent--			
Crops	26.0	77.0	21.0
Forest	53.4	21.0	57.0
Pastureland	13.9	1.0	21.0
Other <sup>^^^</sup>	6.7	1.0	2.0

Source: Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1982 a, b, c.

<sup>^</sup>Land Resource Area (LRA) 131 constitutes an area closely analogous to the "core" Delta.

<sup>^^</sup>LRA 134 includes county areas outside of the "fringe" Delta region. Because soil characteristics and existing data on cropping patterns are relatively homogenous in this area, these percentages should be reflective of land use patterns in the "fringe" Delta.

<sup>^^^</sup>"Other" includes urban and other uses designated by SCS as minor land uses.

**Table 2. Farm characteristics of Mississippi and Mississippi Delta, selected years.**

Selected Variables	Year									
	1880	1900	1925	1940	1945	1954	1964	1974	1982	1987
Farms (number) <sup>^</sup>										
State	101,772	220,803	257,338	291,092	263,528	215,915	109,141	53,620	42,415	34,074
Delta	18,472	64,847	111,994	105,037	92,991	67,078	22,171	9,564	7,623	6,561
Core	4,064	34,305	69,905	71,098	63,642	44,539	11,132	4,481	3,647	3,213
Fringe	14,408	31,542	42,089	33,939	29,349	22,539	11,039	5,083	3,976	3,348
Land in Farms (000's acres)										
State	--	18,238.3	16,057.9	19,153.9	19,606.5	20,706.3	17,746.3	14,316.5	12,427.6	10,733.3
Delta	--	4,899.3	4,996.1	5,729.8	5,684.7	6,246.1	6,141.2	5,403.5	4,915.4	4,635.7
Core	--	2,748.1	2,325.3	3,379.9	3,201.8	3,672.4	3,748.2	3,565.7	3,263.1	3,160.7
Fringe	--	2,151.1	2,670.8	2,350.0	2,482.9	2,573.6	2,392.9	1,837.9	1,652.3	1,475.0

(continued)

**Table 2 (continued). Farm characteristics of Mississippi and Mississippi Delta, selected years.**

Selected Variables	Year									
	1880	1900	1925	1940	1945	1954	1964	1974	1982	1987
<b>Farm Size (acres)^</b>										
State		83	62	66	74	96	169	267	293	315
Delta	--	75	45	55	61	93	277	565	645	707
Core	--	80	33	47	50	82	337	795	895	984
Fringe	--	68	63	69	85	114	217	362	416	441
<b>Cropland (000's acres)</b>										
State	5,216.9	--	6,708.9	10,702.7	8,284.7	7,792.4	6,565.3	8,039.6	7,745.1	6,747.6
Delta	1,644.9	--	2,491.7	3,458.3	3,141.2	3,235.8	3,182.3	3,788.6	3,686.8	3,493.6
Core	428.6	--	1,635.4	2,148.9	2,151.7	2,297.7	2,367.3	2,788.5	2,685.9	2,577.7
Fringe	1,216.4	--	856.2	1,309.3	989.5	938.2	814.9	999.9	1,000.9	915.9
<b>Crop Sales (000's \$)</b>										
State	--	--	--	97,128	235,725	--	476,508	681,866	1,102,099	913,913
Delta	--	--	--	61,178	133,819	--	333,093	478,740	776,199	684,006
Core	--	--	--	50,016	105,174	--	270,206	412,710	619,126	531,850
Fringe	--	--	--	11,162	28,646	--	62,886	66,030	157,073	152,156
<b>Livestock Sales (000's \$)</b>										
State	--	--	--	17,024	44,903	--	247,345	491,608	756,221	948,989
Delta	--	--	--	3,829	7,668	--	27,235	36,914	79,853	182,231
Core	--	--	--	1,333	2,232	--	10,855	11,427	52,617	139,537
Fringe	--	--	--	2,496	5,435	--	16,380	25,487	27,236	42,694
<b>Value of Land &amp; Bldgs. (\$/acre)</b>										
State	--	8	26	25	33	73	150	379	894	697
Delta	--	18	22	44	61	105	214	432	1,019	741
Core	--	22	23	59	79	130	253	459	1,092	755
Fringe	--	11	20	23	34	66	154	391	904	720

^Data among census years are not directly comparable due to changes in the farm definition. No effort is made here to provide definitions for each census.

Source: Statistics for 1880 came from the Tenth Census, Part 1; values for 1900 came from the Twelfth Census of the U.S., Volume 5, Part 1; all others are from Censuses of Agriculture, selected years.



**Table 3. Farm by tenure in Mississippi and Mississippi Delta, selected years.**

Tenure and Area Delineation	YEAR							
	1950	1959	1964	1969	1974	1978	1982	1987
<b>Full Owners</b>								
State	103,053	74,547	64,557	52,489	38,683	28,324	27,831	22,012
Delta	13,461	9,602	7,414	7,116	5,609	3,582	3,477	2,755
Core	6,612	4,401	2,955	2,727	1,810	1,243	1,180	866
Fringe	6,849	5,201	4,459	4,389	3,259	2,339	2,297	1,889
<b>Part Owners</b>								
State	17,676	18,191	18,542	13,508	11,113	12,207	11,371	8,949
Delta	3,629	4,043	4,232	3,795	2,909	3,043	2,795	2,144
Core	1,815	2,093	2,075	2,153	1,679	1,697	1,549	1,142
Fringe	1,814	1,950	2,157	1,642	1,230	1,346	1,246	1,002
<b>Tenants</b>								
State	130,031	44,651	25,314	6,580	3,824	3,700	3,212	3,113
Delta	66,043	19,183	10,332	2,389	1,586	1,648	1,351	1,662
Core	48,266	11,976	5,960	1,380	992	1,087	918	1,205
Fringe	17,777	7,207	4,372	1,009	594	561	433	457

Source: Censuses of Agriculture, Selected Years.

*Agricultural Base*

**Table 4. Number of farms by major crops in Mississippi and Mississippi Delta, selected years.**

Crop and Area Delineation	YEAR												
	1880	1900	1940	1945	1950	1954	1959	1964	1969	1974	1978	1982	1987
<b>Cotton</b>													
State	--^	186,999	259,529	210,737	190,732	123,466	77,390	50,796	28,584	11,277	4,992	3,170	4,255
Delta	--	--	97,484	86,514	76,094	57,139	27,102	16,882	8,907	5,119	3,219	2,282	2,584
Core	--	--	66,645	61,537	54,775	40,746	17,001	9,816	5,125	3,355	2,302	1,487	1,743
Fringe	--	--	30,839	24,977	21,319	16,393	10,101	7,066	3,782	1,764	917	795	841
<b>Corn</b>													
State	--	196,489	261,019	218,470	183,713	144,638	92,308	57,146	23,537	14,160	10,489	5,510	4,020
Delta	--	--	182,617	125,894	50,366	39,429	18,547	8,562	2,718	1,267	771	78	498
Core	--	--	117,592	69,809	30,967	24,203	8,779	2,580	546	192	152	375	116
Fringe	--	--	65,025	56,085	19,359	15,226	9,768	5,982	2,172	1,075	619	453	382
<b>Soybeans</b>													
State	--	--	3,417	3,476	4,314	7,186	15,101	8,690	12,580	11,161	13,818	11,131	6,475
Delta	--	--	870	1,293	2,806	6,048	7,766	6,207	6,413	4,304	4,911	4,296	3,152
Core	--	--	559	924	2,237	5,175	6,360	5,087	4,748	2,964	3,284	2,929	2,341
Fringe	--	--	311	369	569	873	1,406	1,120	1,665	1,340	1,627	1,367	811
<b>Rice</b>													
State	--	1,777	--	--	256	288	218	214	--	--	579	714	803
Delta	--	--	--	--	255	288	211	206	--	--	571	702	798
Core	--	--	--	--	245	278	202	198	--	--	553	684	774
Fringe	--	--	--	--	10	10	9	8	--	--	18	18	24
<b>Wheat</b>													
State	--	1,580	79	1,041	376		1,292	1,882	1,029	1,047	593	4,297	1,991
Delta	--	--	69	952	336		1,148	1,698	784	662	349	1,958	1,116
Core	--	--	63	863	320		1,048	1,559	680	560	255	1,471	900
Fringe	--	--	6	89	16		10	139	104	102	94	487	216

^Data not available.

Source: Census of Agriculture, Selected Years.

**Table 5. Forestland in Mississippi, Delta, Core Delta, and Fringe Delta: 1957, 1967, 1977, and 1987.**

Geographical Area	Total Land Area <sup>^</sup>	Forestland			
		Year			
		1957 <sup>^^</sup>	1967 <sup>^^^</sup>	1977 <sup>^^^^</sup>	1987 <sup>^^^^^</sup>
<b>State</b>					
Acres (000's)	30,521.2	17,190.6	16,891.9	16,504.3	16,990.7
Percent Forest	--	56.3	55.3	54.1	55.7
<b>Delta</b>					
Acres (000's)	7,022.2	2,406.3	2,020.9	2,004.6	1,935.6
% of State's Forestland	--	14.0	12.0	12.2	11.4
% of Core Land Area	--	58.7	49.3	48.9	47.2
<b>Core</b>					
Acres (000's)	4,102.3	1,150.9	851.5	789.2	678.6
% of State's Forestland	--	6.7	5.0	4.8	4.0
% of Core Land Area	--	28.1	20.7	19.2	16.5
<b>Fringe</b>					
Acres (000's)	2,919.9	1,255.4	1,169.4	1,215.4	1,257.0
% of State's Forestland	--	7.3	6.9	7.4	7.4
% of Fringe Land Area	--	43.0	40.5	41.6	43.0

<sup>^</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, Mississippi Data: National Resources Inventory, 1982.

<sup>^^</sup> Southern Forest Experiment Station, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Mississippi Forests, 1958.

<sup>^^^</sup> Southern Forest Experiment Station, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Statistics for Mississippi Counties, 1969.

<sup>^^^^</sup> Southern Forest Experiment Station, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Statistics for Mississippi Counties, 1978.

<sup>^^^^^</sup> Southern Forest Experiment Station, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Forest Statistics for Mississippi Counties, 1987.

**Table 6. Production of major crops in Mississippi Delta, selected years.**

Crop and Area Delimitation	YEAR												
	1880	1900	1940	1945	1950	1954	1959	1964	1969	1974	1978	1982	1987
<b>Cotton (1000 bales)</b>													
State	963.1	1,237.7	1,533.1	1,861.7	1,496.9	1,547.6	1,560.6	2,181.8	1,383.1	1,587.1	1,338.4	1,641.9	1,654.7
Delta	397.8	525.4	1,000.3	1,100.1	1,012.3	958.0	1,142.4	1,567.4	2,040.6	1,270.1	1,152.7	1,359.0	1,360.2
Core	197.4	319.9	820.6	878.4	865.4	745.2	933.3	1,259.2	1,850.8	1,009.8	898.8	993.6	990.9
Fringe	200.3	205.5	179.7	221.7	146.9	212.8	209.1	308.2	189.8	260.3	253.8	365.4	369.2
<b>Corn (1000 bushels)</b>													
State	21,340.8	38,789.9	36,034.8	38,631.3	37,933.7	25,164.8	32,497.2	21,917.5	7,943.0	5,170.8	4,935.7	4,757.7	9,369.1
Delta	5,087.0	11,266.5	15,692.3	9,274.2	9,092.1	513.8	7,773.9	3,006.9	1,014.5	486.8	553.9	529.4	1,581.1
Core	2,024.8	6,110.9	11,110.4	5,187.7	5,607.0	2,786.4	3,637.7	809.9	208.6	108.2	60.9	20.2	322.6
Fringe	3,062.1	5,155.5	4,581.9	4,086.5	3,485.1	2,348.4	4,136.2	2,197.1	805.9	378.7	493.0	509.2	1,258.5
<b>Soybeans (1000 bushels)</b>													
State	...	...	264.9	724.4	2,825.5	5,039.7	21,037.9	22,785.5	48,247.2	40,921.8	73,505.5	81,944.4	41,329.5
Delta	...	...	208.5	640.0	2,585.4	4,786.0	19,705.9	20,355.5	35,286.0	24,288.6	41,574.0	47,126.6	26,450.0
Core	...	...	190.1	478.1	2,067.8	3,968.0	17,513.7	17,243.5	27,725.3	18,424.4	30,909.2	37,743.5	21,692.7
Fringe	...	...	184.2	161.9	527.6	818.0	2,192.3	3,112.0	7,560.7	5,864.2	10,664.7	93,834.1	4,757.3

(continued)

**Table 6 (continued). Production of major crops in Mississippi Delta, selected years.**

Crop and Area Delimitation	YEAR												
	1880	1900	1940	1945	1950	1954	1959	1964	1969	1974	1978	1982	1987
<b>Rice (cwt.)</b>													
State	17,189.5	7,392.2	...	...	...	1,940,030	1,205,712	1,922,851	...	5,196,434	9,161,237	10,106,176	10,466,632
Delta	104.6	64.0	...	...	...	1,939,870	1,205,712	1,922,851	...	4,935,798	8,991,689	10,027,001	10,424,412
Core	7.0	28.8	...	...	...	1,869,972	1,141,071	1,839,554	...	4,885,578	8,617,900	9,696,779	10,191,486
Fringe	95.6	35.2	...	...	...	69,899	64,641	83,297	...	50,220	373,789	330,222	232,926
<b>Wheat (1000 bushels)</b>													
State	218.9	37.3	38.9	390.4	109.1	...	784.3	3990.0	1978.1	2630.7	1853.6	29185.7	9674.7
Delta	27.1	2.2	38.6	381.1	103.9	...	740.1	3875.3	1749.8	2024.5	1502.5	19373.7	6810.8
Core	1.5	.1	38.1	368.6	97.5	...	638.5	3484.6	1530.9	1763.4	1098.2	15495.6	5513.9
Fringe	25.6	2.1	.5	13.1	6.4	...	101.7	390.1	218.9	261.1	404.3	3878.1	1296.9

...Data not available.

Source: Statistics for 1880 came from the Tenth Census, Part 1; values for 1900 came from the Twelfth Census of the U.S., Vol. 5, Part 1; all others are from Census of Agriculture, selected years.

**Table 7. Mississippi water acres in farm-raised catfish production<sup>^</sup>.**

YEAR	ACRES
1977	17,151
1978	NR <sup>^^</sup>
1979	24,712
1980	40,369
1981	55,937
1982	62,289
1983	65,381
1984	64,822
1985	73,578
1986	85,139
1987	90,575
1988	91,179

Source: Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, "For Fish Farmers," selected issues.

<sup>^</sup>Data on agriculture acreage are not available by county; but it is estimated that 96 percent of the catfish farming industry is located in 14 Delta counties.

<sup>^^</sup>Data were not collected in 1978.

**Table 8. Acreage of major crops in Mississippi and Mississippi Delta, selected years.**

Crop and Area Delineation	YEAR							
	1900	1940	1945	1954	1964	1974	1982	1987
	--(acres)--							
<b>Cotton</b>								
State	2,897,920	2,449,285	2,292,749	1,948,329	1,447,831	1,695,728	978,496	1,028,249
Delta	1,015,163	1,221,203	1,236,274	1,107,854	931,418	1,333,492	723,143	630,814
Core	537,659	931,311	953,865	869,893	740,292	1,092,495	510,316	426,769
Fringe	477,504	289,892	282,409	237,961	191,126	240,997	212,827	204,045
<b>Corn</b>								
State	2,276,313	2,449,285	2,292,749	1,948,329	1,447,831	1,695,728	978,496	1,028,249
Delta	543,304	1,798,552	1,268,530	582,006	171,588	44,391	22,342	18,077
Core	228,152	580,329	370,900	156,822	27,245	2,396	503	3,005
Fringe	315,152	1,218,223	897,630	425,184	144,343	41,995	21,839	15,072
<b>Soybeans</b>								
State	--	281,595	197,949	504,962	1,231,977	2,075,772	3,459,091	2,006,263
Delta	--	196,257	145,613	482,411	1,102,287	1,261,821	1,947,552	1,275,115
Core	--	178,361	121,639	410,140	953,199	972,643	1,516,858	1,031,822
Fringe	--	17,896	23,974	72,271	149,088	289,178	430,694	243,293
<b>Rice</b>								
State	2,095	--	--	73,604	50,597	122,082	240,303	195,505
Delta	13	--	--	73,584	50,597	116,109	235,101	195,047
Core	4	--	--	71,357	48,616	114,975	228,509	188,882
Fringe	9	--	--	2,227	1,981	1,134	6,592	6,165
<b>Wheat</b>								
State	6,447	1,293	17,267	--	138,778	104,818	809,015	283,477
Delta	312	1,266	16,366	--	129,631	79,133	488,440	191,041
Core	14	1,223	15,802	--	120,415	68,854	383,551	154,173
Fringe	298	43	534	--	9,216	10,279	104,889	36,868

Source: Statistics for 1900 came from the Twelfth Census of the U.S., Volume 5, Part 1, Agriculture; all others are from Censuses of Agriculture, selected years.

^Soybean production for grain.

**Table 9. Economic structure of Mississippi and Mississippi Delta, 1975, 1978, 1982, and 1986.**

Earnings by Industry	State		Delta		Core		Fringe	
	(\$1,000)	(percent)	(\$1,000)	(percent)	(\$1,000)	(percent)	(\$1,000)	(percent)
<b>Goods Producing<sup>^</sup></b>								
1986	6,189,075	36.8	940,816	36.2	475,128	31.9	465,688	39.2
1982	5,325,385	38.7	851,831	38.7	460,240	36.4	391,591	41.9
1978	4,376,095	41.9	729,057	41.9	408,281	39.8	320,776	45.0
1975	2,837,786	39.6	428,077	36.2	225,723	32.6	202,354	41.3
<b>Manufacturing</b>								
1986	4,478,227	26.7	668,882	25.7	304,845	20.5	364,037	30.6
1982	3,498,911	25.4	501,347	22.8	234,126	18.5	267,221	28.6
1978	2,835,720	27.1	387,550	22.3	194,969	19.0	192,581	27.0
1975	1,891,600	26.4	252,301	21.4	124,526	18.0	127,775	26.1
<b>Farm</b>								
1986	483,293	2.9	113,199	4.4	88,059	5.9	25,140	2.1
1982	505,204	3.7	218,494	9.9	154,501	12.2	63,993	6.8
1978	673,018	6.4	252,249	14.5	164,432	16.0	87,817	12.3
1975	398,933	5.6	105,957	9.0	67,760	9.8	38,197	7.8
<b>Agricultural services, forestry, and fisheries</b>								
1986	103,122	0.6	28,645	1.1	21,141	1.4	7,504	0.6
1982	74,248	0.5	32,379	1.5	25,336	2.0	7,043	0.8
1978	47,297	0.5	9,103	0.5	6,016	0.6	3,087	0.4
1975	31,602	0.4	3,803	0.3	2,295	0.3	1,508	0.3
<b>Construction</b>								
1986	919,589	5.5	117,006	4.5	58,325	3.9	58,681	4.9
1982	867,378	6.3	80,952	3.7	39,943	3.2	41,009	4.4
1978	672,755	6.4	75,544	4.3	42,864	4.2	32,680	4.6
1975	420,858	5.9	62,367	5.3	31,142	4.5	31,225	6.4
<b>Mining</b>								
1986	204,844	1.2	13,084	0.5	2,758	0.2	10,326	0.9
1982	379,644	2.8	18,659	0.9	6,334	0.5	12,325	1.3

(continued)



**Table 9 (continued). Economic structure of Mississippi and Mississippi Delta, 1975, 1978, 1982, and 1986.**

Earnings by Industry	State		Delta		Core		Fringe	
	(\$1,000)	(percent)	(\$1,000)	(percent)	(\$1,000)	(percent)	(\$1,000)	(percent)
Mining								
1978	147,305	1.4	4,611	0.3	--	--	4,611	0.7
1975	94,793	1.3	3,649	0.3	--	--	3,649	0.8
Services Producing								
1986	10,607,129	63.2	1,661,072	63.8	1,012,514	68.1	722,710	60.8
1982	8,454,675	61.4	1,346,776	61.3	802,999	63.6	543,777	58.1
1978	6,080,161	58.2	1,009,827	58.1	617,143	60.2	392,684	58.7
1975	4,329,469	60.4	753,473	63.8	466,244	67.4	287,229	58.7
Wholesale and retail trade								
1986	1,974,761	11.8	396,708	15.3	264,210	17.8	206,650	17.4
1982	2,087,404	15.2	370,753	16.9	220,793	17.5	149,960	16.0
1978	1,633,667	15.6	285,179	16.4	175,627	17.1	109,552	15.4
1975	1,154,699	16.1	218,071	18.5	142,480	20.6	75,591	15.4
Government								
1986	3,548,281	21.1	551,554	21.2	306,867	20.6	244,687	20.6
1982	2,784,955	20.2	439,088	20.0	248,416	19.7	190,672	20.4
1978	1,967,636	18.8	324,646	18.7	181,014	17.7	143,642	20.1
1975	1,501,340	21.0	249,134	21.1	139,809	20.2	109,325	22.3
Personal and business services								
1986	3,059,367	18.2	462,807	17.8	282,698	19.0	180,109	15.2
1982	1,983,786	14.4	321,717	14.6	192,882	15.3	128,835	13.8
1978	1,323,863	12.7	226,978	13.1	141,263	13.8	85,715	12.0
1975	919,484	12.8	161,148	13.6	97,007	14.0	64,141	13.1
Transportation, communication, public utilities								
1986	1,175,002	7.0	166,135	6.4	102,214	6.9	63,921	5.4
1982	1,015,135	7.4	151,117	6.9	97,105	7.7	54,012	5.8
1978	701,174	6.7	118,330	6.8	80,229	7.8	38,101	5.3
1975	464,079	6.5	88,185	7.5	59,699	8.6	28,486	5.8

(continued)

**Table 9 (continued). Economic structure of Mississippi and Mississippi Delta, 1975, 1978, 1982, and 1986.**

Earnings by Industry	State		Delta		Core		Fringe	
	(\$1,000)	(percent)	(\$1,000)	(percent)	(\$1,000)	(percent)	(\$1,000)	(percent)
Finance, insurance, and real estate								
1986	849,718	5.1	83,868	3.2	56,525	3.8	27,343	2.3
1982	583,395	4.2	64,101	2.9	43,803	3.5	20,298	2.2
1978	453,821	4.3	54,684	3.2	39,010	3.8	15,674	2.2
1975	289,867	4.0	36,935	3.1	27,249	3.9	9,686	2.0

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce. Local Area Personal Income, selected years.

^Percentages for goods-producing and services-producing sectors sum to 100, except for rounding errors.

**Table 10. Employment in Mississippi and Mississippi Delta by category, 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980.**

Employment	State		Core		Fringe		Delta	
	Number	% of State	Number	% of State	Number	% of State	Number	% of State
<b>Total Employment</b>								
1950	720,851	135,216	18.8	64,909	9.0	200,125	27.8	
1960	681,439	109,231	16.0	55,699	8.2	164,930	24.2	
1970	721,938	89,065	12.3	58,254	8.1	147,319	20.4	
1980	937,211	93,432	9.9	77,958	8.3	171,390	18.3	
<b>Ag. Employment</b>								
1950	299,886	76,870	25.6	32,805	10.9	109,765	36.6	
1960	142,860	44,312	31.0	17,468	12.2	61,780	43.3	
1970	53,741	15,526	28.9	6,633	12.3	22,159	41.2	
1980	41,595	12,067	29.0	4,882	11.7	16,949	40.8	
<b>Manufacturing Employment</b>								
1950	90,410	4,937	5.5	4,432	4.9	9,369	10.4	
1960	130,804	10,165	7.8	7,398	5.7	17,563	13.4	
1970	185,869	14,658	7.9	13,898	7.5	28,556	15.4	
1980	226,095	17,278	7.6	18,100	8.0	35,378	15.7	

Source: Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, Censuses of Population, 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980.

## **Chapter**

# **16**

### ***The Poverty Hurdle:***

#### ***Poverty as an Impediment to Development in the Mississippi Delta***

***by T. David Mason\****

Pervasive poverty and its correlates are part and parcel of most Americans' image of the Mississippi Delta. Chronic unemployment and underemployment, alarming rates of illiteracy, infant mortality, teenage pregnancy, a countryside dotted with tenant shacks with no indoor plumbing, and other social pathologies and institutional deficiencies define a reality that, for many residents, is lacking not only in the material amenities of a decent standard of living, but, more importantly, is all but devoid of much hope or opportunity for a more prosperous future.

However, what is ignored all too often in scholarly analyses, government studies, popular press reports, and community programs focused on the cycle of poverty in the Mississippi Delta region is that poverty is both a *cause* as well as a *consequence* of economic and social underdevelopment, not just in the Delta but throughout rural America. Persons who live in poverty are persons who do not have much cash income to spend in the local economy. Nor do they have the surplus income that, through savings, contributes to the creation of a pool of local capital for investments that bring economic growth and development. As a consequence, the vitality of the entire local economy—the number of enterprises, the size of their workforces and their payrolls, the sales volume of retail stores, and, generally, the total volume of economic activity—is severely retarded by the existence of a disproportionate number of impoverished citizens.

Persons living below poverty are also persons who are a net drain on the tax base of local community, consuming resources in the form of social welfare programs but contributing little to that resource base in the form of taxes paid. A population with little money to spend does not generate large volumes of sales tax revenue for local governments. The substandard housing that the impoverished of the Delta must live in does not swell the coffers of local government with property tax revenues. As a consequence, the capacity of local government to invest in needed infrastructure projects or to enhance the quality of the community's educational system is severely constrained. Consequently, the region remains unattractive to potential investors from outside the region. The stagnation of poverty continues as new enterprises bypass the Delta and locate elsewhere. The cycle of poverty persists: low levels

\*Associate Professor of Political Science, Mississippi State University.

of income mean that the rate and volume of savings will be low; low savings rates mean that the local supply of capital will be relatively small and, therefore, investment will be sluggish; low levels of investment retard gains in worker productivity, which guarantees that wages will remain low, and the cycle begins again. In these and other ways, poverty represents a consequence of the current low level of economic development and is also a burden on the prospects for future growth and development in the region.

Any endeavor to resolve the conditions of poverty and the social problems that accompany it must start with the recognition that poverty is embedded in those structural conditions of the economy, the social system, and the governmental capacities of the region that render the Delta less attractive as a locale for economic activity and, thus, impede the ability of local leaders to attack the causes and consequences of poverty. The purpose of this chapter is not simply to document the extent and dimensions of poverty in the Mississippi Delta region. Rather, it is the author's intent to examine poverty in the Delta as a cause as well as a consequence of economic underdevelopment. It is my argument that the economy of the Delta can be invigorated and its development catalyzed only if ways are found to break the cycle of poverty that plagues so many families in the region. Poverty is a burden not only to its obvious victims but also to those who otherwise would constitute the middle and upper classes of the Mississippi Delta. It is not a problem just for those who are poor; it is a problem for all residents of the Delta. The opportunities and economic security of the Delta's business community are constrained by the pervasiveness of poverty among their clientele. The ability of local government officials to remain in office and realize a decent living for themselves through public service is constrained by the pervasiveness of poverty among their tax-paying constituents. In short, it is in the self-interest of all segments of the Delta society to seek the alleviation, if not the eradication, of poverty in the region.

### **The National Context of Poverty in the Delta**

Any analysis of poverty in the Mississippi Delta must begin with a recognition that the conditions that give rise to poverty and that result from it are not unique to this region. The syndrome of poverty in the Delta region of Mississippi is endemic to many rural areas throughout the United States, and it is the distinctiveness of the syndrome of *rural* poverty that makes its eradication so problematic.

Across the globe, rural poverty goes hand-in-hand with highly concentrated land ownership and large-scale, highly mechanized agricultural production. Popular perceptions of poverty in the United States have come to be dominated by the images of the inner city ghetto, often to the exclusion of the reality of the grinding poverty of rural America, especially in the South. Regardless of perceptions, poverty in rural areas has always been more pervasive and continues to be so today. Despite the fact that, nationally, the poverty rate declined dramatically during the 1960's and remained relatively low during the 1970's,<sup>1</sup> poverty remains especially intractable in rural areas throughout the nation and especially in the South, where most of the high-poverty rural counties are located.<sup>2</sup> In 1983 there were 13.5

---

<sup>1</sup>In 1959, the poverty rate in nonmetropolitan counties was 33.2 percent, compared to 15.3 percent for metropolitan counties. By 1980, the rates had dropped to 15.4 percent for nonmetropolitan counties and 11.9 percent for metropolitan counties. See Morrissey, Elizabeth S. (1985). *Characteristics of Poverty in Nonmetro Counties*. Economic Research Service, USDA, Washington, DC: Rural Development Research Report No. 52., p. 1. See also Davis, Thomas F. (1979). *Persistent Low-Income Counties in Nonmetro America*. RDRR-12 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic, Statistics, Cooperative Service; Getz, Virginia K. and Robert A. Hoppe (1983). "The Characteristics of the Nonmetro Poor," *Social Development Issues*. 7 (Spring): 29-44.

<sup>2</sup>Morrissey, Elizabeth S. (1985). *Characteristics of Poverty in Nonmetro Counties*. Economic Research Service, USDA, Washington, DC: Rural Development Research Report No. 52, p. 1.

million poor living in nonmetropolitan areas, as compared to 12.9 million poor in the urban areas.<sup>3</sup> Given the greater concentration of U.S. population in urban areas, it should not be surprising, then, that the rural poverty rate exceeded that of metropolitan America: 18.3 percent versus 13.8 percent.<sup>4</sup> According to U.S. Bureau of the Census statistics, in 1987, one in every six rural Americans was poor, and the poverty rate for rural America came within two percentage points of the inner-city poverty rate (16.9 percent for rural people versus 18.6 percent for inner city residents).<sup>5</sup>

The reasons for the pervasiveness and persistence of rural poverty are numerous. First of all, rural counties, especially in the South, contain unusually high concentrations of those demographic groups that, for various reasons, are most poverty-prone. For instance, nationally, poverty rates tend to be higher among nonwhite households, among female-headed households, and among the work-disabled populations. According to 1980 census figures, high-poverty rural counties contained much larger concentrations of each of these demographic groups than did either low-poverty rural counties or metropolitan counties. In 1970, 59 percent of rural farm blacks and 30 percent of rural nonfarm blacks in the South lived in poverty; the figures for comparable segments of the white population in the South were 21 percent and 11 percent, respectively.<sup>6</sup> In 1980, female-headed families were twice as prevalent in high-poverty rural counties as in low-poverty rural counties.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the concentration of work-disabled individuals was substantially higher in high-poverty rural counties than in low-poverty rural counties (12.6 percent versus 7 percent). Persons in high-poverty counties also had the lowest levels of educational attainment: only 40.9 percent of the adult population over 25 had completed high school, as compared to 69.1 percent for low-poverty rural counties.<sup>8</sup>

Not only is the concentration of high-poverty, demographic groups greater in high-poverty rural counties, but the rate of poverty within these groups also tends to be greater in high-poverty rural counties than it is in those rural counties with relatively low poverty rates. For instance, the proportion of black households living below the poverty level was 53.9 percent for high-poverty rural counties and only 20.2 percent for low-poverty rural counties (Morrissey 1985:5-6). The poverty rate among the elderly was over three times higher in the high-poverty counties: 41.3 percent compared to 11 percent for low-poverty rural counties.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, the geographic dispersion of population in rural counties impedes the delivery and raises the cost of delivery of programs and services intended to alleviate poverty. Nonmetropolitan counties with high rates of poverty had a higher percentage (67.7 percent) of their population living in rural areas than did those nonmetropolitan counties with low rates of poverty (51.9 percent). High-poverty counties also tended to have a lower population

---

<sup>3</sup>Deavers, Kenneth L.; Robert A. Hoppe; and Peggy J. Ross (1989). "Public Policy and Rural Poverty: A View from the 1980's", *Policy Studies Journal* 15: 291.

<sup>4</sup>Deavers et al. (1986), p. 291.

<sup>5</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Poverty in the United States: 1987," *Current Population Reports*, Series P-60, No. 163. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989); see also Ross, Peggy J. and Elizabeth S. Morrissey (1989). "Rural People in Poverty: Persistent Versus Temporary Poor." Paper presented to the National Rural Studies Committee Meeting (Greenville, MS).

<sup>6</sup>Walker, James L., *Economic Development and Black Employment in the Nonmetropolitan South*. (Austin, TX: Board of Regents of the University of Texas System, 1977), p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>Morrissey, Elizabeth S., *Characteristics of Poverty in Nonmetro Counties*. Economic Research Service, USDA. (Washington, DC: Rural Development Research Report No. 52, 1985), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

density (16.2 persons per square mile) than did low-poverty rural counties (32.1 persons per square mile).<sup>10</sup> When the impoverished of a community are dispersed across rural areas, it is more difficult for them to get to the offices (usually located in a municipality) that provide programs and services intended to alleviate the consequences of poverty and assist people in escaping the trap of poverty. Likewise, those programs will themselves be less cost effective because more offices (absorbing more funds in overhead expenses) will be required to deliver services to the same number of people scattered widely across rural areas.

In addition, many of the federal antipoverty programs are not designed to address the particular problems of the rural poverty population. Many federal antipoverty programs require states to supplement federal payments. This is the case with Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Medicaid especially. Yet, states with large shares of rural poor typically are poor states lacking the tax base with which to supplement payments from federal programs.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the amount of benefits that a qualifying person living in a rural state receives is typically less than that which he or she would receive if he or she lived in a more urbanized state. For instance, the maximum AFDC benefits available for a three-person family in Mississippi amounted to only 15 percent of the poverty threshold; whereas, the median for all states was 47.5 percent.<sup>12</sup>

While rural poverty is a nationwide problem, what makes rural poverty in the South unique is the increasingly significant racial component: despite the fact that a majority of the rural poor is white, rural poverty in the South is decidedly more prevalent among the black population. One study notes that 93 percent of the rural black population resides in the South.<sup>13</sup> And although only 16.7 percent of all black families live in the nonmetro South, 22.2 percent of the impoverished black families live in the rural South. In 1980, 44 percent of rural blacks were persistently poor.<sup>14</sup> Black families in the rural South are about three times as likely as whites to be below the poverty level.<sup>15</sup> Rural blacks in the South are more likely than whites or their urban black counterparts to have low levels of education, little formal job training, little work experience, and health problems of the type that inhibit their abilities to enter or compete in the job market.<sup>16</sup>

Among black families, poverty has become increasingly concentrated in female-headed families: in 1980, 55 percent of the female-headed families were living below the poverty level, and almost 43 percent of these families reported incomes that were less than 75 percent of the poverty threshold. Ghelfi emphasizes the gravity of the situation facing the latter group: for them, it would take a 33-percent increase in household income *just to reach the poverty threshold*.<sup>17</sup> Black female heads of families living in poverty are single parents who are

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>11</sup>Deavers et al. (1986), p. 292.

<sup>12</sup>Shapiro, Isaac and Greenstein, Robert, *Holes in the Safety Nets: Poverty Programs and Policies in the States* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1988), p. 7.

<sup>13</sup>Ghelfi, Linda M., *Poverty Among Black Families in the Nonmetro South*. Economic Research Service, USDA (Washington, DC: Rural Development Research Report No. 62, 1986), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>Ross, Peggy J. and Elizabeth S. Morrissey, "Two Types of Rural Poor Need Different Kinds of Help," *Rural Development Perspectives*. 4 (October, 1987) pp. 7-10.

<sup>15</sup>Ghelfi, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>On these generalizations, Ghelfi cites Rungeling, B.; L.H. Smith; V.M. Briggs, Jr.; and J.F. Adams, *Employment, Income, and Welfare in the Rural South*, (New York: Praeger, 1977); Marshall, R. and V.L. Christian, Jr., *Employment of Blacks in the South: A Perspective on the 1960s*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1978); and Fratoe, F., *Education Among Nonmetro Blacks*. RDRR-21. (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economics, Statistics, Cooperative Service, 1980).

<sup>17</sup>Ghelfi, p. 6.

relatively young—12 percent are under 25—and on average have completed less than 10 years of school. Given these characteristics, it should not be surprising that 57 percent of the poor female heads of families are not active in the labor force.<sup>18</sup>

The disproportionate incidence of poverty among blacks in the rural South can be attributed to a lack of human capital, the weakness of the local labor market, and various forms of discrimination. Overt discrimination in the job market operates as a “color tax” in markets for jobs, houses, credit, and other valued commodities. The effect is that blacks are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed, and compensated at a wage rate below that which a white with comparable endowments of human capital could command.<sup>19</sup> As a consequence, black employment tends to be concentrated in the relatively low wage service sector of the economy, with relatively small numbers of them attaining employment in technical, sales, and administrative support positions.<sup>20</sup>

Discrimination in the provision of education occurred historically through the maintenance of a dual school system in the South. Although the system of “separate but equal” public school systems was eliminated in 1970, the result was “white flight” to private academies in many counties in the rural South, including those in the Mississippi Delta. Whites whose children attend private academies are unwilling to support tax increases or bond issues to improve the public school system.<sup>21</sup> Those local dollars that are invested in education are divided between a predominantly black public school system and an all-white private school system. The result is an educational system that provides blacks (and whites, for that matter) with relatively low returns on their time and other resources invested in schooling, because neither school system can achieve the economies of scale in the production of human capital that are possible with the consolidation of limited education dollars in a single system. As a consequence, the black population in the rural South is relatively poorly endowed with human capital, making those communities less attractive as potential sites for new enterprises.<sup>22</sup>

The legacy of the South’s historical dependence on agriculture has not provided the region with a sound foundation upon which to expand and diversify its local economies. Beginning with a relatively small endowment of manufacturing employment, many counties in the rural South were by-passed in the Southern industrial boom of the 1950’s and 1960’s. Studies have found that part of the reason for this was that, during the 1960’s and even today, corporate management tended to by-pass, especially, those Southern rural areas that contained large concentrations of blacks.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10, 13.

<sup>19</sup>For a theoretical treatise on the economics of discrimination, see Becker, Gary S., *The Economics of Discrimination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

<sup>20</sup>Ghelfi, pp. 18-23.

<sup>21</sup>By law in Mississippi, a 60-percent vote is required to pass a local bond issue. This requirement of an extraordinary majority is generally regarded as an impediment to funding capital improvements in public schools, especially in those districts where substantial portions of the white population send their children to private academies.

<sup>22</sup>Recent analyses of the level and sources of funding in Mississippi public schools, and the consequences of the inequities and inadequacies of such funding patterns, can be found in Howell, Frank M., *Financial Disparity and the Delivery of Education During Reform: A Model of School District Performance in Mississippi*, (Mississippi State, MS: Social Science Research Center Social Research Report Series 89-3, Mississippi State University, 1989); and Howell, Frank M. and J. Gipson Wells, *Rich Schools, Poor Schools: School District and Public Opinion Data on Equity Funding in Mississippi Public Schools*, (Mississippi State, MS: Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University, 1987).

<sup>23</sup>Ghelfi, p. 4; Till, T.E., “Industrialization and Poverty in Southern Nonmetropolitan Labor Markets,” *Growth and Change* 5 (January, 1974), pp. 18-24.

What industries were located in the rural South tended to be those that were relatively labor intensive, requiring a low-skill work force. It is precisely these industries that, over the course of the past 20 years, have begun closing their doors and moving their production facilities offshore where even lower wage rates are available. Manufacturers that once moved to the South to escape high-wage, unionized areas in the North began by-passing the South in the 1970's to seek even more favorable wage, tax, and regulatory conditions in the Third World.<sup>24</sup> From a starting point that was characterized by a relatively small share of employment in manufacturing, the rural counties of the South have seen this sector of their economy fail to sustain the growth in the quantity and quality of manufacturing jobs that was anticipated three decades ago.<sup>25</sup> No longer is the promise of low taxes, low wages, and an unregulated business environment a magnet for industrial investment. As a result, despite the economic boom in Southern metropolitan areas, rural counties in the South are experiencing plant closings and rising unemployment.<sup>26</sup>

The ability of many rural communities in the South to break out of the cycle of poverty may be constrained by the structural characteristics of the existing economic base.<sup>27</sup> The economy in these counties tends to be heavily dominated by agriculture and lacking in much sectoral diversity. This profile is characteristic of the Mississippi Delta region. The sort of agriculture that characterizes high-poverty rural counties is large-scale, capital and land-intensive agri-business engaged in the production of export crops. The average farm size in high-poverty rural counties was 1,072 acres, almost twice the average farm size of low-poverty rural counties. High-poverty counties also had a larger percentage of farms under 50 acres as well; 22.7 percent as compared to 18.1 percent for the low-poverty rural counties.<sup>28</sup> Most of the production of large-scale farms is for sale in markets far beyond the boundaries of the local community. Thus, neither farm production nor sales of farm products generate a high volume of economic activity locally.<sup>29</sup>

Because this type of agriculture is capital- and land-intensive, it provides relatively few employment opportunities. Those that it does provide tend to be low-wage positions that, in many cases, are seasonal. The lack of occupational alternatives to agriculture is revealed by the fact that in high-poverty rural counties, the share of total earnings that came from manufacturing was only slightly more than half its share in low-poverty counties (16.6 percent versus 31.9 percent). Typically, there are fewer off-farm employment opportunities and lower off-farm incomes. The local economy tends to be much more volatile and sensitive to price

---

<sup>24</sup>Lyson, Thomas A., "Economic Development in the Rural South: An Uneven Past—An Uncertain Future," in Lionel J. Beaulieu, ed., *The Rural South in Crisis: Challenges for the Future* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), p. 266.

<sup>25</sup>Rosenfeld, Stuart A., "The Tale of Two Souths," in Lionel J. Beaulieu, ed., *The Rural South in Crisis: Challenges for the Future*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 51-2.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup>For historical treatment of this legacy, see Billings, Dwight B., "The Rural South in Crisis: A Historical Perspective," in Lionel J. Beaulieu, ed., *The Rural South in Crisis: Challenges for the Future*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988).

<sup>28</sup>Morrissey (1985) p. 8.

<sup>29</sup>It should be noted that, while this profile fits the Mississippi Delta region, it is not typical of the rural South. By contrast, David Harrington points out that smaller farms that are less sensitive to the exigencies of world markets are more typical of the South and that, as a consequence, the farm economy of most of the South did not suffer the dislocations that characterized the Midwest grain growing region. Also, the economies of most rural counties in the South are not dominated by agriculture. Again, the Mississippi Delta region is an exception to this rule, as other chapters in this volume document. See Harrington, David H., "The Status of Southern Agriculture," in Lionel J. Beaulieu, ed., *The Rural South in Crisis: Challenges for the Future*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988).



swings in the world market for export crops produced by these farms.<sup>30</sup> Hence, counties with largely agricultural economies often have relatively large numbers of working poor as well as persistently unemployed poor people. In the absence of occupational alternatives to agriculture, these counties have, in recent decades, experienced declining populations as a result of high rates of out-migration of people searching for employment (see Morrissey 1986:24).

Counties with large farm economies tend to be rather sparsely populated, and what population is there tends to be geographically dispersed. Hence, there are relatively few taxpayers contributing to the coffers of local government or customers buying goods and services from local businesses. The level of local economic activity, then, tends to be lower than it would be in an industrially based county with a more urbanized population of the same size. The relatively sluggish level of economic activity in farm counties combines with the low stock of taxable property to create a situation in which local government's capacity to undertake infrastructure projects or enhance educational capacity is severely constrained by the size of the tax base typical of a farm community. Farmland is generally taxed at a lower rate than other forms of land; and in a farm-dominated community, land-intensive agriculture tends to crowd out other uses for land that would bring greater revenue flows to local government. In addition, the more land that is devoted to cultivation, the less land there is that will be developed through the construction of other taxable real property. Hence, as Wiseman's chapter in this volume demonstrates, agriculture constitutes the major source of property tax revenues for local governments in farm communities, and the relative lack of other forms of taxable property leaves local government in these areas at a distinct developmental disadvantage.

In summary, the incidence of poverty in the Mississippi Delta should not be surprising, because the syndrome of rural poverty pervades much of the nation and especially the South. This syndrome of rural poverty should lead us to expect that poverty in the Delta will be especially intractable because of the demographic composition of the impoverished population that one finds in rural America and the structural characteristics of the rural economy and social system that constrain the ability of those living in poverty to escape its grip. With these thoughts in mind, we now turn to an analysis of the extent and the character of poverty in the Delta. Our hope is that by describing the dimensions and nature of the poverty hurdle in the Delta, we can gain some insight into what kinds of programs will and will not be effective in alleviating the kind of poverty one finds in the Mississippi Delta.

### **The Incidence of Poverty in the Delta**

Evidence on the extent and concentration of poverty in the Delta is indeed striking. Table 1 (page 294) presents some basic indicators of the incidence of poverty.<sup>31</sup> First, slightly over one-third (33.5 percent) of the people in the Delta are living in poverty. This figure is fully 47 percent higher than the corresponding proportion (22.8 percent) for the remaining counties in the State, many of which are themselves burdened with a poverty rate that is twice that

---

<sup>30</sup>Harrington, p. 40.

<sup>31</sup>The official poverty threshold for a family of four was \$8,414 in 1980, the last year for which data on all the variables used in this study are available. The threshold had risen to \$11,611 by 1987. This threshold is calculated by taking the cost of the least expensive of four nutritionally adequate food plans designed by the Department of Agriculture and multiplying this figure by three (on the assumption that a poor family spends approximately one-third of its income on food). For a discussion of the derivation of the poverty threshold, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Poverty in the United States: 1987," *Current Population Reports*. Series P-60, No. 163. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), p. 156.

of the nation as a whole.<sup>32</sup> In the “core” Delta counties, the poverty rate is an even more alarming 38.7 percent, a rate that is almost twice the average for non-Delta counties.<sup>33</sup>

What is especially alarming is the consistency of the high concentration of poverty in the Delta counties, especially the “core” Delta counties. Nine Delta counties (Bolivar, Coahoma, Holmes, Humphreys, Quitman, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, and Tunica) have 40 percent or more of their populations living in poverty, and five others (Issaquena, Leflore, Panola, Washington, and Yazoo) have over a third of their populations in poverty. The least impoverished of the “core” Delta counties are Washington and Leflore, where still fully one-third of the population lives below the poverty level. Only in Warren (18.38 percent) and DeSoto (15.48 percent) is the incidence of poverty less than one in five persons, and these two counties are in many respects atypical of the Delta region.<sup>34</sup>

The figures on the proportion of families living below poverty are equally disturbing. The average for the Delta (25.9 percent) is 30 percent higher than the average for the remaining counties in the state (17.9 percent). In the 11 “core” Delta counties, 30 percent of all families live in poverty. In 15 of the 18 Delta counties, at least one-fourth of all families live below poverty. Almost half of the families in Tunica County (44.83 percent) live below poverty, and in eight others (Bolivar, Coahoma, Humphreys, Quitman, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, and Holmes) at least 30 percent of the families are similarly deprived. Even in the three least impoverished counties, we see that one in five families is impoverished in Tate County, while about one in eight families in DeSoto and Warren Counties (the least impoverished) are so deprived.

The official poverty threshold, upon which the above figures are based, is often held to underestimate the true incidence of poverty. Many people have incomes that would place them above the official poverty level, but they still live in what the average citizen of this nation would consider to be a condition of abject poverty. Thus, analysts have devised alternative measures of the poverty threshold in order to gain a more reliable estimate of the real incidence of poverty. One of these is to add to the official poverty rate those families living at no more than 125 percent of the official poverty level. When families whose incomes are over the official poverty level but less than 125 percent of it are added in with those below the official level, we are presented with what many consider to be a more complete picture of the incidence of poverty.

The findings using this measure of poverty are even more disturbing. Here, we see that, on average, more than one-third of the families in Delta counties live below poverty and almost 40 percent (38.9 percent) of the families in the 11 “core” Delta counties live below the 125 percent threshold. Only in Warren and DeSoto Counties is the incidence of poverty less

---

<sup>32</sup>The poverty rate for the nation as a whole was 11.7 percent in 1979, whereas Table 1 reports that the rate for non-Delta counties in Mississippi was almost twice as high (22.8 percent). For a listing of the national poverty rates by year, see U.S. Bureau of the Census (1989). “Poverty in the United States: 1987,” *Current Population Reports*, Series P-60, No. 163. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), p. 7.

<sup>33</sup>“Core” Delta counties are those which are entirely in the alluvial flood plain of the Mississippi River, while “fringe” Delta counties are those that lie partially in the flood plain. For the derivation of these definitions, see Crecink, John C. and Steptoe, Roosevelt, *Human Resources in the Rural Mississippi Delta—With Emphasis on the Poor*, Economic Research Service Agricultural Economics Report No. 170 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1970). For a discussion of the social and economic distinctiveness of “core” versus “fringe” Delta counties, see Reinschmidt, Lynn and Green Bernal, *Structure and Change in Socioeconomic Conditions: The Mississippi Delta* (mimeo, 1989).

<sup>34</sup>DeSoto County is the northernmost county in the Delta and is more nearly a suburban community of metropolitan Memphis than it is a part of the Mississippi Delta. Similarly, Warren County is located at the southern tip of the Delta and its county seat, Vicksburg, is a rather prosperous river port with some measure of industrial development as well as a large Army Corps of Engineers operation. Vicksburg is linked by an interstate highway to the capitol city of Jackson, which is only an hour’s drive away. By contrast, over half of the population (52.9 percent) of Tunica County lives in poverty.

than one family in five (18.49 percent and 16.42 percent, respectively). In 9 of the 18 Delta counties, 40 percent or more of the families have incomes below 125 percent of the official poverty rate; and in all but three of the remaining counties, over one-third of the families live below the 125 percent threshold. In Tunica County, over half of the families are below 125 percent of the official poverty threshold (54.73 percent), and in Sharkey (48.38 percent), Holmes (47.79 percent), Humphreys (45.57 percent), and Tallahatchie (44.93 percent), the rates are approaching one-half. These figures on the concentration of poverty in the Delta certainly paint a picture of a region whose current state and future prospects are handicapped by a debilitating burden of poverty.

Obviously, then, any analysis of the developmental prospects of the Mississippi Delta region must begin with the realization that the weight of the burden of poverty on the economy of the region is truly enormous. When somewhere between one in three and one in every two of the citizens of the region, and between one in four and one in three families, live below the officially designated poverty level (a level that is itself a rather conservative estimate of the poverty threshold), any efforts to stimulate economic growth and development are struggling against an enormous weight of inertia that results from such a large concentration of individuals and families existing perilously close to the margins of economic subsistence. Between one-third and one-half of the individuals and between one-fourth and one-third of the families in all but two of the counties in this region simply do not have the economic wherewithal to contribute to economic dynamism in a community; nor does such a large concentration of poor families and individuals present an attractive environment to potential investors from within or from outside the region.

Given the size of the poverty burden on the economy of the Delta, one must wonder whether economic development strategies for the region can safely assume that economic growth alone will take care of the poverty problem. Perhaps, on the contrary, the developmental impediment that results from such a large proportion of the population living in poverty is so onerous that any economic development strategy, no matter how innovative it may be, will be unable to overcome the inertia of this burden. In other words, rather than viewing economic growth as the answer to poverty, one could argue that the partial alleviation of poverty in the Delta may be a *prerequisite* to the successful implementation of economic development initiatives.

### **Demographic Profile of the Impoverished**

If we are to attack the problem of poverty in the Delta, we must identify those demographic groups in which poverty is especially concentrated. A number of studies have examined the distinction between the "temporary" poor and the "persistent" poor.<sup>35</sup> The former group is composed of people who have experienced some temporary setback, such as the loss of their jobs, that has interrupted what is otherwise a lifetime of work at wages that place them above the poverty threshold. The latter group consists of those who, for various reasons, have lived below the poverty threshold for an extended period of time and have had little, if any, success in breaking out of that condition. The differing life experiences and life conditions of these two groups imply that policies that address the problems of the temporary poor are necessarily different from those with which governments must address the problems of the persistently poor. For instance, the problems of many of the temporary poor can be alleviated simply by economic expansion; whereas, economic growth will not necessarily relieve the poverty of the persistently poor.

---

<sup>35</sup>See Deavers, Hoppe, and Ross, 1986; also Moen, Jon R., "Poverty in the South," *Economic Review* (January/February 1989), pp. 36-46.

Studies have documented the concentration of persistent poverty among particular demographic subgroups of the rural population. Those groups that are especially prone to persistent poverty are blacks, people living in female-headed households, and the elderly. Table 2 (page 295) presents evidence on the extent of poverty among these demographic groups in the Delta.

First of all, Table 2 depicts an alarming pervasiveness of poverty among blacks in the Delta. Of the total black population in the 18 Delta counties, over half (53.1 percent) of them live below the official poverty threshold; for the remaining counties in Mississippi, 40 percent of all blacks live in poverty. The proportion for the “core” Delta counties (54.1 percent) is over 25 percent greater than the national average for blacks living in nonmetropolitan counties (42 percent).<sup>36</sup> What is especially disturbing is the lack of exceptions to the rule of high rates of poverty among blacks. In no Delta county can we find significantly less than 40 percent of the black population below poverty (the figure for Warren County is 39.9 percent), and in only 4 of the 18 counties (Warren, Washington, Tate, and Carroll) do we find less than half of the black population living in poverty. On the other hand, fully two-thirds (66.77 percent) of the blacks in Tunica County live in poverty, and in four other Delta counties (Yazoo, Quitman, Holmes, and Humphreys), 60 percent or more of the black population exist below the poverty level.

However, poverty in the Delta is not just a racial problem. We also see in Table 2 that there has been a substantial “feminization of poverty” underway in the region. Over half (51.3 percent) of the female-headed families in the Delta live below the poverty level, and 1 in every 10 families (10.2 percent) in the Delta is a female-headed family living in poverty. For the rest of the state, the figures are far from encouraging, but they are substantially lower than in the Delta. Forty-one percent of the female-headed families elsewhere in the state live below poverty, and about 1 in 14 families (6.6 percent) is a female-headed family below the poverty level.

As with other indicators, the concentration of poverty among female-headed families is consistently high across the Delta. In every Delta county, at least one-third of the female-headed families live below the poverty level, and in 12 of the 18 Delta counties, at least half of them live in poverty. In Humphreys County, almost three-fourths (71.5 percent) of the female-headed families are poverty stricken, and in Bolivar and Holmes, over 60 percent are impoverished. What is especially disturbing about the “core” Delta counties is that, with one exception (Issaquena County), between 10 and 15 percent of all families in these counties are impoverished, female-headed families. The concentration of this form of poverty is especially severe in Bolivar, Humphreys, and Holmes Counties, where one in every six families is a female-headed family living below the official poverty threshold. These figures for the “core” Delta counties contrast rather sharply even with the other counties in Mississippi, where an average 7 percent of all families are of this type. It should be noted that the incidence of this form of poverty is especially high throughout Mississippi, in comparison to the rest of the nation. Nationally, 34.6 percent of female-headed families live in poverty.<sup>37</sup>

These are profound and disturbing figures—for what they suggest about gender equity, and because we can expect this form of poverty to be especially difficult to remedy. Families with only one parent are far less able to avail themselves of jobs, job training, and other programs intended to provide people with the capacity to escape poverty. And, even if a single mother can take advantage of a job opportunity, the net payoff to the family will be less

---

<sup>36</sup>Elo, Irma T. and Beale, Calvin L., *Natural Resources and Rural Poverty: An Overview* (Washington, DC: National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy, 1983), pp. 2-4.

<sup>37</sup>Elo and Beale, pp. 2-5.

because of the costs of child care and other services that a single parent must obtain in order to work. Child-care services are typically less readily available in rural areas, and the types of jobs that are available for single mothers are generally low-skilled and low-wage positions that would not pay enough to lift the family above the poverty threshold. Thus, to the extent that poverty becomes concentrated in female-headed families, it will be more difficult to alleviate because of the added barriers single parents face to enter the work force. Economic growth in and of itself is unlikely to have much effect on this segment of the population because of these added costs of entering the job market.

Table 2 also depicts the extent of poverty among the young and the elderly in the Delta. Poverty in these groups is likewise especially difficult to remedy because they are either too young or too old to work and, therefore, they are dependent upon the efforts of someone else to relieve their conditions of poverty. Especially disturbing are the figures on poverty among children. Almost half (43.2 percent) of all children in the Delta live in poverty, with the concentration in the 11 “core” Delta counties being especially high (49.8 percent). The figure for the other counties in the state, though hardly encouraging, is considerably lower at 28.8 percent. In 8 of the 18 Delta counties (Bolivar, Coahoma, Holmes, Humphreys, Quitman, Sharkey, Tallahatchie, and Tunica), over half of the children are impoverished, and in Tunica County, almost two-thirds (64 percent) of the children are impoverished. In no Delta county do we find less than one in five children living in poverty, and in only one (DeSoto) is the proportion significantly less than one in four.

Poverty among the elderly is, perhaps surprisingly, not substantially higher in the Delta than in other parts of the state. Still, the figures are far from encouraging, especially in light of the fact that, with the Supplemental Security Income program, poverty among the elderly has been on the decline nationally in recent years and has remained at a record low of 12 percent from 1984 to 1987.<sup>38</sup> Poverty rates among the elderly are consistently high across the Delta, with only DeSoto (30.9 percent) and Warren (28.9 percent) Counties having less than one-third of their elderly living below poverty. In 12 of the Delta counties, 40 percent or more of the elderly are impoverished. In no Delta county is the proportion of impoverished elderly people over one half; but in 10 of the 18 counties over 40 percent of the elderly live in poverty and at least one-quarter of the elderly are impoverished in every Delta county. On average, well over a third of the elderly live in poverty, both in the Delta and elsewhere in the state. It is perhaps indicative of the seriousness of the problem to note that in the county with the smallest portion of its elderly living in poverty (Warren County), that proportion is still more than one in four people who are over 65 years old (27.3 percent).

The figures on poverty among children and the elderly in the Delta indicate an especially grim future for the region. What makes poverty among children and the elderly especially intractable is that these age groups are “dependent” populations, in the sense that they consume but they do not produce. Children are too young to work and the elderly are too old to contribute to the productivity of the economy. Consequently, it is largely beyond the capacity of these two groups to do anything themselves to relieve their conditions of poverty. And the efforts of those upon whom the elderly and impoverished children are dependent to break out of the cycle of poverty are similarly constrained by the fact they have to lift themselves and their dependents out of poverty.

The high rate of poverty among children is especially troubling for the long-term developmental prospects of the Delta. Poverty tends to perpetuate itself across generations. Impoverished children grow up in a household that lacks the capacity to provide them with the opportunities or the incentives to improve their lots in life as adults. Impoverished children

---

<sup>38</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census (1989), p. 2.

generally do poorly in school and often drop out before completing high school. They are more inclined to engage in a number of other behavior patterns that, all in all, tend to perpetuate the poverty of their youth in their adult lives. When we find that one-half of the children in the Delta are living in poverty, we can anticipate that, unless extraordinarily innovative antipoverty intervention measures are devised in the near future, the burden of poverty will continue to sap the economic vitality of the Delta into the next century as half of the current youth population in the region find themselves condemned to an adulthood of poverty.

If governments are to formulate policies to alleviate rural poverty in the Delta, they need to have an awareness of the demographic composition of the impoverished population. If, for instance, alleviation of poverty among children requires a different programmatic approach than the alleviation of poverty among white working-age males, then it would be useful to know what share of the impoverished population consists of children and what share consists of white males of working age. Table 3 (page 296) approaches the question of the demographics of poverty from this perspective. There are more than 160,000 people in the Delta, out of a total population of about one-half million, living below the poverty threshold. In Table 3, we present a demographic profile of that subpopulation. In other words, Table 3 presents figures on the proportion of the poverty population that is black, elderly, and less than 18 years of age and the proportion of the impoverished families that are female-headed families. To the extent that the rather sizable poverty population in the Delta is made up of people from these groups, poverty will be more difficult to alleviate because, as we discussed earlier and a number of studies have documented, these groups face a variety of noneconomic barriers to their efforts to escape the poverty trap.

Table 3 demonstrates that the poverty population in the Delta is dramatically different from the poverty population elsewhere in the state. Most striking is the ethnic composition of the impoverished: 83.9 percent of those who live in poverty in the Delta are black; in the remaining counties of the state, on average between one-half and two-thirds of those living in poverty are black (61.3 percent over all non-Delta counties). In five Delta counties (Bolivar, Coahoma, Holmes, Humphreys, and Tunica), over 90 percent of the poor are black, and in three others (Leflore, Sunflower, and Yazoo) the proportion is greater than 85 percent. Only in DeSoto County (57.9 percent) are less than two-thirds of the poor black, and in only three other counties (Carroll, Panola, and Tate) do blacks make up less than three-fourths of the poverty population. Thus, it cannot be denied that poverty in the Delta is rather uniformly a black phenomenon.

Obviously, then, any policy intended to alleviate poverty in the region must be based on an awareness of the high concentration of poverty among this particular ethnic group. In the face of these figures, it would be difficult, to say the least, to deny that discrimination in labor markets exists in the Delta. It is certainly not coincidence that between three-fourths and nine-tenths of the poor in Delta counties are black. Poverty and race are inextricably connected in the Delta, and it will be difficult to alleviate the economic problem of poverty without addressing the social problems of racial conflict and overt discrimination. Racial hostility is also intimately connected to the general economic underdevelopment of the region because, ultimately, racial discrimination is economically inefficient. It results in the underutilization of human capital and, consequently, depresses aggregate economic productivity.<sup>39</sup> When somewhere between 60 and 75 percent of the population in each Delta county is subject to various forms of market discrimination, one should not be surprised to find that the economy of the region suffers from chronic underdevelopment. Economic growth and development in the Delta will always be suboptimal so long as racial discrimination is allowed

---

<sup>39</sup>Becker, *op. cit.*

to distort the markets for human capital, credit, housing, and other goods and services. In this respect, an economic development strategy that attacks the problems of discrimination is not only desirable for the purpose of serving basic values of human justice but is also essential to the optimum utilization of human and material resources in the Delta. If optimum levels of economic growth and development are a priority among the white community, then it is in their economic interest to eliminate the sort of market discrimination that retards and distorts such growth and development.

A second feature of the poverty population in the Delta (and throughout the rest of the state, for that matter) that is apparent from Table 3 is that the poor are disproportionately young: on average, almost half of the poor people in the Delta (48.2 percent) are children, while 40.7 percent of the poor people in the other counties are children. The proportion of the poor who are children is surprisingly uniform across the Delta counties, especially the "core" Delta counties. In no Delta county is the proportion greater than 50 percent, but in no "core" Delta county is it less than 46 percent. In fact, in only one Delta county (Carroll, where 37.5 percent of the poor are children) are less than 40 percent of the poor below the age of 18. By contrast, a relatively small proportion of the Delta's poverty population (13.6 percent) is elderly; whereas, in the remainder of the state, people over 65 actually make up a slightly larger proportion (16.6 percent) of the poverty population. As was the case with children, the elderly proportion of the poverty population is remarkably consistent across the Delta counties, with the elderly making up no less than 11 percent of the poor in any one county and no more than 14 percent in any of the "core" Delta counties. Only in Carroll (20 percent), Panola (16.5 percent), and Warren (16.7 percent) do the elderly comprise more than 14 percent of the impoverished population.

What we can conclude from the findings on children is that, in addition to the finding that poverty in the Delta is almost uniformly a black phenomenon, we can also say that it is a dependency problem and, in large measure, a youth problem. The special significance of these findings on the age composition of the poverty population is that they bode ill for the region's future. When an average of 60 percent of the poor are either less than 18 years old or over 65 years old, it becomes apparent that poverty in the Delta will not be solved simply by economic growth and job creation, because 60 percent of the poverty population in the Delta are people who are either too young or too old to lift themselves out of poverty through their own efforts. Put another way, only 40 percent of the poor people in the Delta are even of an age that would qualify them for a job that might lift them out of poverty, and most, if not all, of the other 60 percent (the children and the elderly) will have to be carried out of poverty on the backs of the 40 percent who are the working age, adult heads of households. Since about half of the poor people are children living in poor households, it will be difficult to raise those households out of poverty by providing jobs to the head of the household, because the job would have to pay enough to raise not just the job-holder but the entire family out of poverty. Furthermore, the incidence of poverty among children is especially disturbing for the region's prospects, because out-migration patterns tend to increase the concentration of unproductive people in a particular age cohort. Those who leave the region upon reaching adulthood are typically the better educated, more productive members of that age cohort. The result is that the proportion of the population carrying the burdens of a childhood in poverty tends to increase as that age cohort progresses through its adult years.

The burden of raising impoverished households out of poverty is highlighted when one considers the large share of poor families that are female-headed families. Of the families living below poverty in the Delta, 40.4 percent are female-headed families. The concentration of poverty in female-headed families is especially acute in the 11 "core" Delta counties, where on average 42.1 percent of the impoverished families are female-headed, as compared to 37.2 percent in the "fringe" Delta counties and 36.9 percent in the non-Delta counties of Mississippi.

In Bolivar, Humphreys, Washington, and Warren Counties, the proportion approaches one-half, and only in Issaquena, Tunica, and Carroll are less than 30 percent of the impoverished families female-headed families. In all but these latter three, at least one-third of the families in poverty are female-headed families and in all but one Delta county (Carroll with 23.3 percent), at least one in four poor families is headed by a single female.

Of all families in the Delta, 10.5 percent are female-headed families living in poverty; whereas, only 6.6 percent of all families in the non-Delta counties are female-headed families below poverty. Within the Delta, the concentration of impoverished female-headed families is clearly greatest in the "core" Delta counties, where, overall, one out of every eight families (12.7 percent) is an impoverished household headed by a single female (the proportion for the "fringe" Delta counties is 7.7 percent, which is more in line with the other counties in the state). In all but one of the "core" Delta counties, more than 10 percent of the families are female-headed poor families, and in Bolivar and Humphreys Counties the proportion is about one in six families.

As we discussed earlier, it is difficult for a female-headed household to escape from the poverty trap, because for the mother to go to work requires that she earn enough income (over and above that which is required to support the family) to cover the costs of child care while she is at work. Child-care services are less readily available in rural counties, and at present the jobs that are most widely available are relatively low skill, low wage positions that, in all likelihood, would not be sufficient to cover the costs of child care and lift the entire household out of poverty.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

It is apparent from the evidence on poverty in the Mississippi Delta that poverty is not only pervasive, it is also concentrated in particular demographic groups that make its eradication difficult to effect. Because poverty is so heavily concentrated among the black population, its eradication will require the elimination of discrimination in markets for employment, housing, credit, and other goods and services. Policies and programs are far easier to change than attitudes. Because the poverty population is in large part a dependent population of children and elderly persons, a majority of the poor cannot alleviate their poverty through their own efforts but instead must depend on the achievement of the head of the household upon whom they are dependent for their well-being. And because poverty is concentrated in families that are female-headed, many poor families cannot readily avail themselves of job opportunities that would lift the family out of poverty, because all of the household responsibilities fall on the lone adult female, and these responsibilities impede their abilities to enter the job market. Even if she could enter the job market, the fact that one adult must support one or more people of dependent age means that something substantially more lucrative than a minimum wage job would be required to lift the family income above poverty and pay for the child care and other costs that the family head would have to bear in order to enter the work force.

Because the poverty population is largely black and concentrated in single-parent, female-headed families, poverty in the Delta is not only pervasive but likely to remain persistent and relatively immune to the simple remedy of economic growth. The size (in both absolute and relative terms) and unique demographic composition of the poverty population in the Delta creates an enormous inertial force retarding growth in the local economy. The counties in the Delta are relatively sparsely populated rural counties in the first place, and, as we have seen, about half of their populations live in poverty. When as much as half of the population not only lives below the poverty threshold but is relatively immune to the benefits of economic growth and expansion, economic growth will almost inevitably remain sluggish, because half of the population is unable to contribute to or participate in dynamic economic



growth. The growth of retail enterprises is retarded by the fact that about half of the population has very little, if any, disposable income above and beyond that which is required for bare subsistence. The housing market will tend to be underdeveloped because half of the population lacks the economic wherewithal to afford decent housing. The growth of industrial enterprises will likewise be retarded by the fact that not only is half of the population living in poverty but, as a consequence of their poverty, they are also undereducated and lacking in the sort of skills that are in demand in today's industrial economy. When half of the population lacks the income to contribute to or participate in dynamic economic growth in the region, such growth likely will never occur. In short, the size of the poverty hurdle in the Delta is so large and its effects so pervasive it is unlikely to be alleviated by economic growth, and it will act as a retardant to economic growth in the region. The partial alleviation of poverty is likely to be a precondition to economic growth.

Because of the extent of poverty in the region and its concentration among youth, the elderly, female-headed families, and blacks, we cannot expect it to be alleviated by economic growth alone, because, for various reasons discussed in this chapter, these segments of the population are relatively immune to the benefits of economic growth and expansion. Existing poverty programs seem to have had little success in raising these populations out of poverty and, given their special circumstances, it is imperative that innovative new programs aimed at relieving the immediate effects of poverty and at providing this population with the means to escape from the poverty trap be devised and implemented. Not only will simple growth not relieve their conditions, but economic growth and development will not occur in the Delta so long as half of the population continues to live in abject poverty.

**Table 1. Portrait of the impoverished: persons, families, children below poverty, 1980.**

County	Population	Persons Below Poverty	Percent Persons Below Poverty	Number of Families	Families Below Poverty	Percent Families Below Poverty	Families Below 125 percent of Poverty	Percent of Families Below 125 percent of Poverty
<b>Core Delta Counties</b>								
Bolivar	44,393	17,996	40.54	10,395	3,304	31.78	4,231	40.70
Coahoma	36,172	14,700	40.64	8,530	2,606	30.55	3,388	39.72
Humphreys	13,844	6,186	44.68	3,313	1,162	35.07	1,466	44.25
Issaquena	2,511	918	36.56	593	165	27.82	226	38.11
Leflore	39,319	13,713	34.88	9,532	2,577	27.04	3,310	34.73
Quitman	12,596	5,212	41.38	3,104	958	30.86	1,270	49.91
Sharkey	7,924	3,484	43.97	1,767	653	36.96	867	49.07
Sunflower	32,173	12,688	39.44	7,610	2,281	29.97	2,990	39.29
Tallahatchie	17,095	7,437	43.50	4,179	1,438	34.41	1,827	43.72
Tunica	9,611	5,088	52.94	2,084	933	44.77	1,139	54.65
Washington	71,639	23,761	33.17	17,435	4,580	26.27	5,930	34.01
<b>Fringe Delta Counties</b>								
Carroll	9,690	2,918	30.11	2,536	634	25.00	848	33.44
DeSoto	53,731	8,351	15.54	14,411	1,750	12.14	2,351	16.31
Holmes	22,441	10,525	46.90	5,322	2,081	39.10	2,525	47.44
Panola	27,985	9,608	34.33	7,135	1,966	27.55	2,495	34.97
Tate	18,978	4,903	25.84	4,948	1,027	20.76	1,428	28.86
Warren	50,880	9,491	18.65	13,134	1,827	13.91	2,428	18.49
Yazoo	27,062	9,826	36.31	6,912	1,908	27.60	2,497	36.13
AVERAGE (Core Delta)	26,116	10,108	38.70	8,234	1,878	30.10	2,422	38.90
AVERAGE (Fringe Delta)	30,110	7,946	26.40	9,683	1,599	20.60	2,081	26.40
AVERAGE (Non-Delta)	67,878	15,509	22.80	23,053	3,221	17.90	4,447	24.80
AVERAGE (All Counties) COUNTIES	59,158	14,155	23.90	19,961	2,906	18.70	3,979	25.90

**Table 2. Concentration of poverty-prone groups.**

County	Black Population	Percent Blacks Below Poverty	Female Headed Families	Percent Female Headed Families Below Poverty	Number of Children	Percent Children Below Poverty	Number of Elderly	Percent Elderly Below Poverty
<b>Core Delta Counties</b>								
Bolivar	28,567	56.82	2,586	61.41	17,289	52.27	5,241	42.72
Coahoma	23,631	56.96	2,179	52.23	13,357	52.59	4,758	41.32
Humphreys	9,145	1.56	779	1.50	5,388	56.51	1,782	43.55
Issaquena	1,397	4.83	104	4.23	947	45.30	275	44.00
Leflore	24,553	49.11	2,293	47.36	14,101	45.85	4,892	37.80
Quitman	7,074	9.94	593	52.61	4,743	53.36	1,794	41.19
Sharkey	5,229	5.38	363	58.13	3,043	52.84	935	49.96
Sunflower	21,611	52.20	1,582	55.82	12,229	51.00	4,064	40.63
Tallahatchie	9,823	57.25	839	55.66	6,348	55.26	2,377	39.80
Tunica	7,050	66.77	491	51.93	3,907	63.76	1,250	46.08
Washington	40,216	48.82	4,208	51.24	26,429	42.63	7,774	37.81
<b>Fringe Delta Counties</b>								
Carroll	4,425	47.32	366	40.44	3,083	35.45	1,440	40.49
DeSoto	9,596	50.41	1,593	33.84	19,383	19.88	3,590	30.86
Holmes	16,339	59.56	1,387	1.50	5,388	56.51	1,782	43.55
Panola	13,785	51.09	1,263	50.36	9,839	42.95	3,771	41.95
Tate	7,735	45.00	750	43.73	6,395	31.42	2,225	32.76
Warren	19,301	39.87	2,312	37.33	16,786	24.34	5,481	28.92
Yazoo	14,051	60.76	1,390	57.48	9,381	46.57	3,600	35.31
AVERAGE (Core)	16,209	54.1	1,456	54.3	9,798	49.8	3,195	41.44
AVERAGE (Fringe)	12,176	50.9	1,294	46.0	10,485	33.5	3,359	36.58
AVERAGE (Non-Delta)	23,244	40.9	2,896	41.0	21,958	28.8	7,627	36.56
AVERAGE (All Counties)	21,378	42.7	2,570	42.2	19,379	30.4	6,680	37.21

**Table 3. Concentration of poverty in selected demographic groups.**

County	Persons Below Poverty	Percent Persons Below Poverty Who Are Black	Percent Of Persons Below Poverty Who Are Children	Percent Of Persons Below Poverty Who Are Elderly	Families Below Poverty	Percent Of Families Below Poverty That Are Female Headed
<b>Core Delta Counties</b>						
Bolivar	17,996	90.20	50.22	12.44	3,304	48.06
Coahoma	14,700	91.56	47.79	13.37	2,606	43.67
Humphreys	6,186	91.01	49.22	12.54	1,162	47.93
Issaquena	918	83.44	46.73	13.18	165	27.88
Leflore	13,713	87.94	47.15	13.48	2,577	42.14
Quitman	5,212	81.35	48.56	14.18	958	32.57
Sharkey	3,484	83.12	46.15	10.99	653	32.31
Sunflower	12,688	88.91	49.16	13.01	2,281	38.71
Tallahatchie	7,437	75.62	47.17	12.72	1,438	32.48
Tunica	5,088	92.51	48.96	11.32	933	27.33
Washington	23,761	82.62	47.42	12.37	4,580	47.07
<b>Fringe Delta Counties</b>						
Carroll	2,918	71.76	37.46	19.98	634	23.34
DeSoto	8,351	57.92	46.15	13.27	1,750	30.80
Holmes	10,525	92.46	46.74	14.82	2,081	41.13
Panola	9,608	73.30	43.98	16.47	1,966	32.35
Tate	4,903	71.00	40.97	14.87	1,027	31.94
Warren	9,491	81.09	43.05	16.70	1,827	47.24
Yazoo	9,826	86.88	44.46	12.94	1,908	41.88
AVERAGE (Core Delta)	10,108	86.80	48.20	12.80	1,878	42.10
AVERAGE (Fringe Delta)	7,946	78.10	44.10	15.10	1,599	37.20
AVERAGE (Non-Delta)	15,509	61.30	40.70	16.60	3,221	36.90
AVERAGE (All Counties)	14,155	64.50	41.60	16.20	2,906	37.30

## *Chapter*

# **17**

### ***What Works and What Doesn't? Perceptions of Economic Development Among Delta Leaders***

*by*

***Judith R. Porter\****

As the Delta faces the challenges of the 1990's, local leadership will play a critical role in providing the vision and resources to develop the Delta economically. Leadership in the Delta has expanded beyond the traditional planter group and is diversified by both economic sector and race. Based on intensive interviews with a cross-section of Delta leadership, we investigate perceptions of economic development among Delta leaders representing different economic and social interests. We discuss the paradigms of economic development held by each leadership group and the factors that they feel will affect the actualization of the economic models they propose. This analysis will enable us to understand more clearly potential areas of agreement and disagreement by race and by economic sector.

We define leadership in terms of influence; that is, the ability to get one's wishes carried out or to move other people to act.<sup>1</sup> Leadership may involve agenda-setting, policy-making, or political mobilization and is not restricted to elected political officials but includes economic elites, influential members of community groups, or other opinion leaders. In this study, we focus only on leaders in the political, economic, or community sector who deal directly or indirectly with issues related to economic development. Ministers or leaders of organizations that do not impact on the economic sector are not included in the sample.

---

<sup>1</sup>Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947); Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers* (Chapel Hill: NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1963).

This analysis is based on 34 interviews with Delta leaders. Based upon previous research, various types of leadership were identified.<sup>2</sup> Leaders representing each type were selected by positional and reputational methods; that is, interviewees occupied positions of political or economic prominence or they were identified by several knowledgeable sources.<sup>3</sup> The interviews ranged from one to three hours. Leaders were assured of anonymity and generously shared their thoughts on economically relevant issues.

No attempt to formulate leadership categories is comprehensive or mutually exclusive. However, previous research on the Delta has suggested that there are several subtypes of white leaders: the traditional agrarian leadership; the professional and business leadership; and political leadership.<sup>4</sup> The traditional agrarian leadership consists of planters and individuals representing planter interests. There are also leadership groups of professionals, businessmen, and manufacturers, which, as Grisham suggests, are increasing in influence.<sup>5</sup> Many of the leaders in this group are active in specific local civic issues—for instance, education or civic-improvement groups. The political leaders are elected officials at the local, county, or state level. Most have other occupations, but their major leadership responsibilities are public offices. Interviews were conducted with six traditional agrarian leaders, nine business and professional leaders, and four politicians.

Within the black community, the leaders having a direct impact on economic development are a middle-class professional and business group, a growing cadre of political leaders, and representatives of community-organizing groups outside of electoral politics. Although Grisham categorizes black leaders together, he indicates the need to differentiate among subtypes.<sup>6</sup> Black middle-class professional and business leaders are primarily self-employed or work in the public service sector. They are active in civic groups or in issues like education, as are the comparable white subgroup of leaders. Some of the civic groups in which they are active are oriented toward the black community (100 Black Men, NAACP) and some are interracial (for instance, interracial councils or school boards). There is also an emerging group of elected black political leaders, predominantly local mayors, and county supervisors. They may have middle-class backgrounds or occupations, but they are elected to represent the interests of a wider class constituency. There are, in addition, a growing number of black community organizers whose paid position is economic and/or political organizing in the black community. These leaders are not elected officials but are legitimated by organizations that are not part of the formal political process. Five professional and business leaders, seven political leaders, and three community organizers were interviewed.

These leadership categories overlap. Political leaders may also have a role in the economic sector (a mayor may be a businessman, for instance). We have grouped individuals by the sector they represent as leaders rather than by their personal roles. Also, there may be a variation within any given subtype in attitudes toward particular issues. Within each subtype, for instance, white leadership may range from racially traditional to racially liberal. Black leadership may range from a more traditional, accommodationist stance to a more

---

<sup>2</sup>Tony Dunbar, *Delta Time* (New York: Pantheon, 1990); Daniel C. Thompson, *The Negro Leadership Class* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963); James Q. Wilson, *Negro Politics: The Search for Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1960); Vaughn L. Grisham, "Leadership in the Mississippi Delta," (This Volume, Chapter 11).

<sup>3</sup>Robert Dahl, *Who Governs: Democracy and Power in America* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1967); Hunter, *Community Power Structure*.

<sup>4</sup>Dahl, *Who Governs*; Grisham, "Leadership."

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Grisham, "Leadership."

militant perspective. This division into subtypes of leaders, however, is a useful device for describing differing perceptions of economic development.

All groups of leaders list economic development as the major priority for the Delta in the 1990's. Education is listed second. There are three basic paradigms of economic development that are mentioned in our interviews: the traditional agrarian export model, the industrial model, and the small business model. The agrarian export model stresses large-scale farming, the traditional agricultural strength of the Delta. The growing and exporting of agricultural crops (cotton, rice, soybeans, and milo) are seen as the economic future of the region. A less commonly mentioned possibility within this model is small-scale farming of specialized crops. The industrial model consists of several different subtypes. One subtype is agricultural processing of Delta products like catfish or cotton. Another industrial model is the importation of nonagricultural manufacturing concerns into the region. Two other possibilities of industry are the expansion of nonagricultural industries already located in the Delta and the development of small, home-grown manufacturing. The third major development model emphasizes small, service-oriented retail businesses. Although all groups of leaders suggest that several models are necessary for economic growth, each group tends to favor the particular model that supports their own economic interests.

The agrarian export model, based on large-scale plantation agriculture, is seen as remaining an essential part of the economy by all subgroups of white leaders. The traditional agrarian leadership group, however, is the one most heavily committed to the role of export agriculture as a central aspect of economic growth. Traditional crops like cotton, rice, and soybeans are seen as the most critical factor for the future of the Delta. As one agrarian leader says, "We don't need to do less on agriculture, we need to do more. We need to accentuate the positive; we should try to provide technology related to agriculture and support programs in agricultural research." Alternative crops like vegetables are not seen by the agrarian leaders as likely prospects for the future due to labor and marketing problems and the necessity of a large, risky capital investment.

Although both the white political leadership and the white professional and business leadership see crop export as playing some part in the economy, they feel that the emphasis on agricultural export as a growth strategy should be reduced because employment prospects in agriculture are decreasing. Black leadership is the least supportive of the large farm, crop-export model of growth. It is seen as too mechanized to provide jobs and as little help to economic development within the black community. Black community organizers propose an alternative agricultural model of small, black-owned farms or agricultural co-ops producing crops like vegetables or organic produce for a specialized market. The other two groups of black leadership feel that this strategy is unlikely to prove profitable.

All groups see manufacturing as necessary for Delta development. However, the type of manufacturing stressed differs by leadership category. Agricultural processing, especially of catfish and timber, is seen by all groups of white leaders as essential. Not surprisingly, the traditional agrarian leaders are most supportive of the processing of these goods: "Catfish is a home-grown industry. We take it through to packaging and processing and we've done a fantastic job. There's no competition but saltwater fish." The white business and professional leadership is supportive of agricultural processing of catfish and timber ("any job that pays a minimum wage is decent if you don't have a job"); however, they do not perceive this as a major development priority. They mention problems like mechanization or competition from other states as limitations of relying on the catfish industry.

Although black leadership also stresses the importance of agricultural processing as a growth industry, their concepts of what should be processed and how it should be done differs from those of white leaders. All groups of black leadership are less enthusiastic about the catfish industry than is the white leadership. They feel that the catfish industry will not

greatly benefit blacks. For instance, a black political leader says, "The catfish industry pays low wages. You can work there and still qualify for welfare." Black community organizers are the most negative of any group of black leadership about catfish processing: "Catfish farming is a new plantation. It's dangerous, has no benefits, pays low wages, and the plantation owners are the ones who own it." Black politicians and black middle-class professional leadership, while critical of the industry, are more supportive of catfish processing than are black community organizers, since it at least provides jobs for low-skilled labor.

When processing of cotton, textiles, or vegetables is mentioned, however, racial divisions of opinion shift dramatically. White leaders are uniformly skeptical about the profitability of processing such crops. Difficulties in acquiring a share of the national market, the expense of equipping plants, the lack of cost effectiveness, and the constraints of textile production (like the mixing of types of cotton) all are seen as deterrents to the introduction of this type of agricultural processing industry. One agrarian leader sums up this view: "It's not cost-effective enough to make a guy move a mill from South Carolina to Mississippi, especially when in the last 15 years they've spent close to \$20 billion remodeling and retooling the whole textile industry, and they already have more competition than they need."

Among black leaders, however, textile processing and other agricultural processing is seen as a central thrust of economic development, especially if it is black-controlled. A black community organizer says, "Let the folks who raised the cotton be the producers. They know about processing. They've picked it." Black politicians, although as supportive of textile processing as other groups, are less likely than other groups of black leaders to stress that such processing plants be black-owned.

Another model of industrial development is attracting outside, non-crop-related manufacturing plants to the Delta. Within each group of white politicians and the white business and professional leadership, there are differences in opinion on the likelihood of being able to attract such plants. Yet, they are more optimistic about this model than the traditional agrarian leaders, who are pessimistic about the ability of the Delta to attract outside industry. Planters stress the lack of competitiveness of Delta labor, the threat of unionization, the large black population, the poor quality of public education, and the image problem of the Delta: "We're wasting our time doing this because we have so little to sell. You've got to develop your own economic development rather than trying to con some guy to come in here."

White business and professional leaders are generally the most committed to acquiring outside industry: "We've got to get capital intensive or technical, not labor intensive industry. There'll always be people cutting up catfish or chickens, but we need capital intensive industry." This leadership group is also the most optimistic about the ability to attract outside industry, especially small industries. The good location of the Delta, availability of labor, pro-business climate, and good state training programs in conjunction with junior colleges are cited as attractive features for importation of manufacturing concerns. Larger Delta cities are seen as the only places where industry will be willing to locate, but these "magnet cities" will attract outlying labor. Although this group of leaders sees attracting outside industry as highly important in economic development, many cite the same problems in actualizing this model that the agricultural leaders mention: "Industries don't want to go places where there are a lot of blacks. Industries steer away from heavily black areas because of race prejudice and a perception that blacks are not well-educated and don't have a good work ethic. We won't go from agriculture to high tech; we'll have to go from agriculture to whatever will come in here." This group is more likely than the agricultural leaders to mention problems of national and international competition and segregated schools as deterrents to outside industry.

White political leaders vary in opinion on the feasibility of attracting outside industry. Some politicians are concerned about the effect of tax breaks on local revenues: "We don't have a tax base to give away. To tell outside industry we are so well off that we can do



without their taxes is foolish." In some catfish-dependent counties, politicians see outside industry as creating a labor shortage: "We need all the labor we can get. I'm worried about outside plants coming in because they'd take up available labor."

White planters and politicians are more likely to mention expansion of the present manufacturing base or creation of small, home-grown manufacturing plants as alternative models of industrialization than are the middle-class business and professional leaders, who rely more heavily on attracting outside industry.

Among the black leadership, the majority of all groups see problems in attracting outside industry and feel that it will be unlikely to come to the Delta. The segregated school system, cheaper foreign labor, lack of local white support, and negative stereotypes about the labor force are mentioned as deterrents. Black politicians are the only groups of black leaders expressing any degree of optimism about this strategy. Politicians are more likely than other groups of blacks, however, to feel that white planters discourage outside industry because it will raise wages and that the state is directing industry to white areas: "They keep industry out to keep control over poor people." Small rural black towns are seen as particularly unlikely to attract outside manufacturing; but among black politicians, outside industry is seen as possible for magnet cities.

The creation of small, home-grown industries is subscribed to by all groups of black leadership as a model for development, especially black-owned industries that would create products relevant to agriculture or that would provide support services for existing industries (for instance making boxes to pack catfish). Black political leaders are the most likely to mention federal contracts as the source of such industry, but are less likely than other groups to stress the importance of black ownership.

A third basic model of development is the stimulation of small retail and service businesses. Whites are virtually unanimous in seeing this model as unlikely. All white leadership groups mention problems of capitalization, competitiveness, and the growth of national chain stores as evidence for the lack of feasibility of this paradigm. An agrarian leader says: "It sounds wonderful, but when you can buy a hamburger for half the price in McDonald's that you can in a Mom and Pop store, you're just not going to buy there." A business leader agrees: "There's only so much in a piece of pie. You can only sell so much gas. And then Wal-Mart will come in and close out small business."

Although all white groups are skeptical of the viability of a small-business approach, the agrarian leadership is the least and politicians the most likely to see any validity in this model. Small-town politicians are the most likely of any white leadership group to see some validity in this approach: "Service businesses are the best opportunity for people here. They help communities grow, and so many small businesses don't need so much start-up funds." However, among politicians in larger communities, there is skepticism about the viability of small, retail business as a major factor in development: "Not a day goes by that I don't see a small business foreclosure. Everyone has the dream of being an entrepreneur, but it's a dream. It takes a lifetime of experience and capital to make it work." The business and professional leadership is the only group to suggest new types of service businesses like tourism as a possibility.

Although most white leaders are skeptical of the viability of the small, retail-business approach, the majority of all black leadership groups are strong proponents of this paradigm, especially of black-owned businesses. Black community organizers are the most uniformly supportive of this model. Middle-class professional leadership is also strongly supportive: "We should start small businesses. A guy cuts grass and he has two mowers; well, he can make a good living." However, middle-class professional leaders more frequently mention problems of capitalization and technical assistance than the former group. There is also support for small business development among black politicians: "Small business is the most realistic

route." However, they see more problems than other groups, including the lack of discretionary income among blacks. Black politicians are more likely than other groups of black leaders to mention a variety of service-oriented industries and business like tourism, gambling, or waste dumps as possibilities for economic growth.

Differences in perceptions of economic development are clearly influenced by differences in perception of economic interests. Agrarian leaders are the white leadership group that is most likely to support the importance of an economic model based on agricultural export or current agricultural processing industries like catfish. The white professional and business leadership stresses the importance of outside manufacturing coming to the Delta; this is more true of business than professional leaders, since manufacturing is an area within their expertise. White politicians vary in opinion. Those from more agrarian counties are more positive about agriculturally based models and those from urban areas more likely to lean toward industrial paradigms. Blacks stress black-controlled areas of development, especially retail business, small home-grown manufacturing, and textile-related agricultural processing. All of these are sectors not currently white-controlled and where blacks feel they can exert leadership in the product or sales process. Black leadership is less likely to focus on economic models where the major role of blacks is to provide low-skilled labor without opportunity for control. Black politicians, many of whom are dependent on white votes, are less likely to stress wholly black-controlled enterprises.

All groups of leaders agree that there are three areas that impact on economic development: capital funding, social issues, and leadership. All leaders see the need to fund economic development adequately. Social issues like poverty, race relations, and education affect the quality of the labor force and the ability to attract outside industry because of quality of life. Leadership must work together to maximize economic development potential. There are, however, clear differences between and within race in perception of the nature of these problems.

All leadership groups see some federal funding as necessary for development. Whites, however, are less likely than are blacks to support increased federal funding for development. All white groups stress the importance of federal funding for infrastructure development and for agricultural programs. White politicians are most likely to cite the importance of government programs like federal enterprise zones, job training programs, Community Development Block Grants, and educational funding. Business and professional leaders also mention the importance of this type of federal money but are less likely to see increased federal funding as a solution. Traditional agrarian leaders are least likely to support increased federal funding but cite the importance of such funding for agricultural subsidies, research, and infrastructure. All groups of white leaders feel that the current level of federal expenditures for welfare is too high. While recognizing that local capital is important in economic development, all white leaders feel that a profit must be ensured and risks minimized for capital to remain in the Delta.

Black leaders are almost unanimous in support of increased federal funding as the major impetus for development. Black politicians are the group that most heavily supports federal funding as a source for development and are the ones most knowledgeable about specific sources of funding, such as government loans and contracts and minority set-asides. They are also more likely than other groups to mention state funding sources. The black professional and business leadership stresses federal sources of development capital, a source not mentioned by other leaders. Black community organizers more than other groups emphasize the need to retain local control of federal funds. They are also the only group that sees charitable foundations as a funding source for development.

Social issues like education, poverty, and race are crucial in determining economic growth. Education is universally perceived as a critical priority for the Delta, since a poorly

educated labor force or poor quality of education directly affects economic development. Although all groups stress the importance of literacy and good schools, there is variation between and within race on the nature of educational problems and goals. All groups of white leadership see the major problems of the public schools as lack of safety, discipline, and the caliber of the students. The traditional agrarian leaders are the ones most likely to negatively evaluate the quality of the public schools. The cause of the problem is seen as inadequate motivation, discipline, and skills of the students in public schools. Funding for public schools is considered to be sufficient and not a contributing factor to problems of public education. The need for more vocational education is stressed as a solution, as is greater discipline: "If you get to a certain point and you're not college material, you should be sent to vo-tech education. Some folks are not capable of handling a high school education." Thus, the majority of traditional agrarian leaders see no alternative to private schools for white children.

The white business and professional leadership, while agreeing that there are problems with the caliber of students in the public schools, exhibits more variation in their attitudes toward the quality of public education. They evaluate the public schools in more positive terms. More of these leaders either have or have had their children in the public schools: "The kids in public schools are mastering objectives that kids in private schools aren't. My child's school is majority black. I went to a school fair there and it was great, but my friends said, 'Aren't you afraid of being knifed or shot?'" This group is most likely to see a return of white children to the public schools as critical both to attract outside industry and to improve future interracial communication: "I'm a devout believer in integrated education. As children grow older, you must mix the races for a better future. Public school teaches you how to live with other people." There is less support for private schools than among the traditional agrarian leadership, and there is hope among some of these leaders that the expense of private schools will cause an increase in white public school enrollment. These leaders are more likely to see public schools as underfunded: "How are you going to deal with self-esteem if the bricks are falling off the walls?"

White politicians are also less negative than are agrarian leaders about the quality of the public schools. They less frequently mention the need to increase white enrollment and are less often critical of the private schools than are the professional and business leadership. Public schools are generally seen as adequately funded. The problems of the schools are seen as primarily due to the caliber of students.

Black and white leaders have different perceptions of the source of school problems. Black leaders in every group are much more likely than white leaders to attribute problems in education as due to the quality of the schools rather than to the caliber of the students. All black groups see public education as underfunded and private schools as decreasing funding for public schools by making whites less likely to vote for adequate taxes. All groups of black leaders are supportive of more racially integrated public schools, not so much to increase interracial contact as to increase the funding base. Blacks are more likely than whites to feel that the quality of public education is adequate or good. This is especially true of the black middle-class professionals, the group most likely to be associated with public school administration. Black community organizers are the most likely to stress the importance of introducing black heritage and culture as an important component of public school education, and the least likely to stress the importance of integrated education.

Poverty perpetuates and is perpetuated by lack of economic development. Poverty in the Delta is viewed mainly as black poverty. There are differences between and within race on judgment of the causes of poverty and the quality of work ethic of poor populations. All groups of white leaders are in agreement that attitudes, skills, and motivations are deficient in poverty populations and a work ethic is lacking. Such attitudes are the primary causes of current poverty: "They've got to learn to read and write and to make life meaningful; to keep

a routine of getting up, going to work on time, working 'til they get the job completed. Our labor force here doesn't have those skills (agrarian leader)." Welfare is viewed as an important contributor to the continuation of poverty: "Why work when you can draw a check and live on that? We're creating the wrong incentives. There needs to be some requirement that you can't stay on the dole forever (agrarian leader)." Lack of jobs and a history of racial discrimination are more likely to be mentioned by professional and business leaders than by other groups as among the causes of poverty, and they evaluate the quality of work ethic among the poor as somewhat better. All groups of white leaders perceive attitudes and skills of the poor as a labor force issue that impedes economic development.

Black and white leaderships have differing perceptions of the cause of poverty. All black leaders, in contrast to white leaders, see the black population as having a good work ethic; for instance, "People want to work. They're getting up at 5:00 a.m. to catch a bus for a minimum wage job in the catfish factory. That tells you something." Blacks stress lack of jobs and racial discrimination rather than values and attitudes as the major causes of current poverty, though low skill levels are seen as a perpetuating factor. Black community organizers are the ones who blame lack of welfare rather than welfare itself for the continuation of poverty: "People who don't have jobs often don't apply for food stamps. The atmosphere in the food stamp office is one of denial. People go there who have no food, no place to stay and the office tells them they have to wait a month. That's cruel, and discourages people from getting help they need." Thus, lack of economic development is seen as a cause of poverty for blacks. For white leaders, on the other hand, poverty is seen as an impediment to economic development.

Race relations were mentioned in every interview as a social issue affecting economic development. All groups of white leaders are unanimous in seeing race relations as better than several decades ago, notably the decline in overt expressions of prejudice and better interracial communication. As one leader in the professional/business group said, "I'm encouraged to think that 25 years ago blacks couldn't get a hamburger at a lunch counter and now we have black members of the Chamber of Commerce." The problems that exist are seen by politicians and traditional agrarian leaders as stemming primarily from militant blacks. White business and professional leaders are more likely to mention absence of social contacts as a source of racial problems: "I've never been to a social event that included blacks or been asked over to a black person's house. It's not bad race relations, it's just nonexistent." This group also cites lack of knowledge of each other's goals as a barrier to creating an improved racial atmosphere: "A black asked me, 'What do you white folks want from us?' It made me mad. I said, 'What I'm after is this community surviving.' He said, 'I guess we want the same thing you do. Otherwise all our kids will leave.'" This group is most likely to see remaining problems as caused by both black and white attitudes.

All types of white leadership see job discrimination as minimal and limited to upper-status jobs and see no racial discrimination in bank loans. Economic risk rather than race is cited as the factor influencing economic decisions. A political leader suggests: "There is no racial discrimination, except blacks have fewer skills. Blacks may perceive the employment community discriminating against them, but they haven't viewed it from the other side of the desk." A business leader comments: "All you need for a loan is capital, collateral, and character."

Whites see the problems of the black community as due to lack of skills, motivation, morality, or discipline. All groups cite drugs, crime, and unmarried mothers as major problems. All segments of white leadership feel that these problems and existing racial tensions create a bad image and lack of incentive for industry to locate in the Delta.

Blacks are less sanguine about race relations than are whites. All black groups think race relations need considerable improvement. The negative racial attitudes still held by

whites impede the ability to work together for economic development. Black community organizers are particularly likely to perceive that race relations are worse now than 20 years ago: "It's a cosmetic deal now. Years ago, whites didn't care. They hated blacks and wanted everyone to know it. Now since the Civil Rights Movement, whites have the same feeling but they hate to be looking stupid so they camouflage it. I'd rather they be open about it." Another organizer says, "The more this state changes, the more it stays the same. The Klan still makes decisions but now they wear suits and not white robes."

The black professional/business leadership group and the black political leaders are more positive about race relations and perceive that interracial communication and opportunities for blacks have improved. A professional says: "As a whole, the community works better together than 30 years ago. Then we wouldn't even have sat together to discuss things at a table." However, these groups still feel that race relations need improvement. A professional comments: "Those things that changed are things that had to change, but a lot of basic attitudes are still there among whites." This perception is also common among some political leaders. Lack of adequate interracial communication is also stressed. As a middle-class professional says, "Superficially, communication between blacks and whites has changed dramatically. But if you associate on a public level and go home at night and have no contact it's only superficial." Despite these problems, both the black professional/business leadership and the political leadership feel that there are common goals between blacks and whites: "Everyone realizes that unless everyone gets out, no one gets out."

All groups of black leadership see considerable racial discrimination still existing in both white-collar jobs and in bank loans: "Blacks won't get over \$2,000 in loans unless they sell their mother and grandfather, while whites can get \$50,000. Collateral requirements are different for blacks and whites."

Problems of the black community are perceived by all groups of black leaders as lack of jobs, adequate housing, and capital. Both the professional/business and the political leadership mention problems like drugs, crime, and out-of-wedlock births, but see them as explicitly due to lack of jobs. All groups see lack of political unity in the black community as a serious problem, impeding the ability of blacks to work together to facilitate their economic development goals.

There is general agreement that leadership is one of the most important components of economic development. Most white leaders feel that black and white leadership share common goals to some degree. Yet, there are racial differences in perception of adequacy of leadership and communication among leaders. All sectors of white leadership see interracial leadership problems as due primarily to militant black leaders; although all groups also feel that there is reasonably good communication between at least some groups of black and white leaders. Traditional agrarian leaders are more likely to attribute leadership conflicts to the personal greed of black leadership: "A majority of black politicians are looking at ways to outmaneuver the federal government for money." Black political hostility to whites is also likely to be stressed by this group as a source of problems: "Every little town has its own group of what whites love to call the Mau-Maus. They feel that anything that has to do with white folks has got to be bad." Traditional agrarian leaders view black leaders as attempting to monopolize power: "Some black leaders don't work for the good of the whole community. They ask what share of the pie they're going to get before they carve the pie." The blacks they are most likely to communicate with they designate as "responsible" leaders who are willing to accommodate to white interests: "X feels comfortable with whites and can criticize blacks and see the shortcomings of other blacks."

White professional and business leadership is less likely to see lack of leadership interaction as due to defects in elected black officials. This attitude, however, exists among this group of leaders: "Whites when they talk about the community talk about the community

as a whole; blacks don't have the issues of the whole community at heart like whites do." However, problems are more likely to be seen as lack of leadership, particularly the fact that many of the black and white middle class have left the Delta: "There's a negativism that permeates the leadership community. To the extent you devastate your middle class, real leaders won't come on the scene but will leave the area." Lack of trust between black and white leaders is particularly likely to be cited as a problem by this group: "Blacks don't believe one word that's being said by anyone, including their own. It goes back to their past history of people using them. It's hard to build on a system of distrust. The fact we've done it at all is amazing." This group is more likely to acknowledge the necessity for communicating with a wide range of black leaders. They are also the most likely to perceive that they and black leaders have common goals and to stress the importance of factors facilitating interracial communication.

White politicians are the most likely to feel that interracial communication is good and that common goals exist among black and white leaders. Fragmentation of leadership generated by militant blacks is perceived as a major problem: "Some people just want to fight the status quo and waste valuable time. Some of these self-proclaimed black leaders don't represent anyone."

All groups of black leaders perceive at least some degree of interracial agreement on common goals and improved communication between black and white leadership. All stress the need to work with whites to facilitate economic development. Black politicians are most likely to stress shared goals and the need to work with whites: "The two factions working together projects a positive image for both communities." Another political leader states, "Black/white communication may be antagonistic sometimes but it's more open than in other parts of the state." They are less likely to cite lack of trust between black and white leaders and lack of good black leadership than other groups.

The black professional and business group also sees the need for improved leadership communication. More frequently than black political leaders, they cite lack of trust between black and white leaders: "People don't understand the difference between listening and waiting to hear someone talk. They listen but don't hear. We must respect each other." The need for more cohesion among black leaders is stressed and, though not unanimous, some express discomfort with militant blacks: "Some of our leaders have past vengeance. They were there in the fight and they still use that approach. We're beyond sign toting now, or I'd like to think so." Although blacks and whites are seen as sharing common goals, emphasis on specific tactics or interests sometimes differs: "We may share common goals but we go about it in a different way."

Black community organizers feel that communication between black and white leaders has improved and interracial coalitions are needed. They are the group that is most likely to see differing interests: "On the surface it looks like black and white leaders have common goals, but the white and black agendas are totally different. Black officials want black empowerment, real change. The white community doesn't want real change."

All groups of blacks are concerned about the division in black leadership: "The idealists say 'It's got to happen right now.' The realists recognize everyone has to give a little, you can't do it right away. There's also a group of traditionalists who think if you're going to get anything done, it has to be done through the white power structure and they've got to line up with whites." A common perception among all groups is that whites tend to identify and communicate with black "leaders" who do not really represent the aspirations of the black community.

Political leaders are the most divided in their evaluations of effective leadership strategies. Some feel that whites choose unrepresentative blacks as leaders: "Whites choose the people that don't buck the system. These are the ones they talk to, people who are close

to how whites want blacks to be represented." Some black political leaders, however, feel that accommodating to white expectations is the only way to get benefits for the black community: "Certain areas of the black community say 'Well, he thinks he's white because he runs in that circle.' Those who know the kind of services I deliver to black people don't say that. You've got to compromise if you want services." Yet another political leadership strategy is a non-racial agenda: "They catch flack but they are blazing trails. They don't make blacks a total agenda. That's the way of progress." Although there is a division among black leaders, whites most often mention the latter two strategies as particularly effective, and these are the types of leaders with whom they communicate.

When asked how optimistic they are about the Delta's economic future, blacks are overwhelmingly optimistic. Whites are uniformly less optimistic than blacks. White political leaders are the most optimistic about the future, but the traditional agrarian leaders and the white business and professional leadership are less uniform in their optimism about the economic growth of the region. Opinions range from "Ten years down the pike, I see beautiful fields of cotton and soybeans, the growth of industry, and a program to encourage out-migration, which will solve a lot of problems." to "My pessimism about the future of this area makes me glad my kids are getting out." or "We're not in a growth area. Population statistics show that Mississippi will get increasingly black and poor." Blacks, who are just beginning to attain political and economic power, see their opportunities increasing and have high aspirations. Whites, who have held economic and political power, are more likely to take a national economic perspective and to see the future as one of uncertainty and change.

We have reported general trends in perceptions of economic development and the factors that impinge upon it. There is, of course, individual variation in opinion within leadership categories on every topic. The leadership categories also overlap to some extent within race. These preliminary findings will be explored with a large, representative sample of Delta leaders in a questionnaire study.

Although no group of leaders supported only one model of economic development, it is clear that there is variation both between and within race on the type of model most preferred and on the way various factors impede or facilitate economic development. Blacks are more likely to interpret the term "economic development" to mean development of black communities. They are less likely than whites to see export agriculture and large farms as a beneficial paradigm. Although all groups see agricultural processing as a key source of industry, whites stress the benefits of catfish farming and blacks emphasize cotton textiles and other types of processing that are not currently present in the Delta and that whites tend to reject as not economically feasible. Politicians of both races and the white business and professional leadership are the most optimistic about attracting outside manufacturing to the Delta; they are the groups most directly involved in this endeavor. Small home-grown industries, especially if they are black-controlled, are viewed as a viable economic strategy by blacks but not by whites. Blacks are also much more likely than whites to see black-owned retail businesses as a good development strategy.

All groups agree that a number of factors impact on economic development. However, blacks and whites differ in the interpretation of how these issues affect economic growth. There is a dramatic racial difference in causation of poverty: Whites see poverty as caused by attitudes and lack of skills, while blacks see economic factors as the primary cause. Whites and blacks also differ in their evaluations of the work ethic of the poor, with blacks seeing it primarily as positive and whites as negative. Thus, poverty is seen as impeding economic development by whites; blacks see lack of economic development as basically perpetuating poverty.

Although an educated work force and good schools are important factors in developing the economy, whites perceive the problems of public education as due to the caliber of the

students, and blacks to the nature of the schools. The black and white professional/business leadership group is the only one which stresses the importance of attracting whites to the public schools as a way of facilitating economic development.

Racial tensions impede economic development by creating a poor image of the region and by deflecting energy from development, while good race relations enable groups to work together for the common goal of economic growth. Whites unanimously see race relations as better, while blacks see the need for considerable improvement. Whites tend to perceive racial problems as due to black attitudes and blacks to white attitudes, especially in the economic arena. Whites attribute the problems of the black community to black attitudes and behavior, and blacks attribute them to lack of jobs and racial discrimination. Each group feels that the other must change in order to facilitate an improved racial climate for economic development to occur.

Leadership is essential for economic planning. Whites tend to attribute communication problems to militant black leadership, and blacks attribute problems to the unwillingness of white leaders to share power and show respect. The greatest polarization of views and antagonism exists between the white traditional agrarian leaders and the black community organizers, who are at opposite ends of the spectrum in their commitments to the traditional social and economic order of the Delta.

Blacks are the most likely to see federal funding as essential for economic development, with whites more likely to see limited funding for selected areas like agricultural subsidies and infrastructure. Local capital is seen as more important by whites. Blacks are more uniformly optimistic than whites about the future of the Delta.

Within each racial group, variation also occurs. Among whites, traditional agrarian leaders are more likely to subscribe to agrarian-based models of development. They are also the most likely to see problems of race relations, education, and poverty as due to factors inherent in the black community rather than in existing institutions, to be suspicious of black militant leadership, and to be negative about nonagricultural federal funding. The business and professional leadership is the group most committed to a model of industrial development that is based on attracting manufacturing to the Delta. They are the ones most likely to see problems in race, education, and poverty as due to both individual attitudes and economic factors. They are also the most likely to stress the need for increased interracial communication among leaders.

White politicians have the most variation among white leaders in their perceptions of economic development, based on their location and the type of economy in their area. They are also most likely to be positive toward black politicians and to feel communication between white and black leadership has improved.

Among blacks, there is a consensus that small manufacturing plants and retail businesses are an important model of development, though black political leaders are most optimistic about recruiting outside industry and the least likely to stress a purely black-oriented model of development. Black politicians are also more likely to mention a variety of service industries and businesses and to mention federal contracts as a source of industrial growth. Problems of poverty, education, and race are seen by all black leaders as primarily due to the structure of institutions rather than to personal defects. Black community organizers are the group most likely to perceive a lack of improvement in race relations and to view the problems of the black community as based in racial discrimination. Although all groups see the need for interracial communication, black political leaders are more likely to stress shared goals and the need to work with whites, though there is a difference in the evaluation of effectiveness of different leadership strategies.

It is a basic axiom in sociology that one's interests determine one's ideologies. The Delta is no exception. Economic and social interests play a large part in perceptions of



economic development, with each group proposing models that are supportive of its own perceived interests. Despite these differences, there are also commonalities. All groups list economic development as a major priority, feel that interracial communication is important in achieving this goal, and that this communication has improved. A number of models of development are needed for a region like the Delta. However, the actualization of any type of development needs planning and communication to enhance the process. A commitment to economic development and the recognition of the need for interracial communication exists among all leadership groups. These commonalities represent the hope of the future for this region.

# ***Summing Up***

## **Chapter**

# **18**

### ***A Delta Without Change is a Symbol Without Meaning\****

***by Charles Washington\*\****

The term "delta" means more than the name of the area in which you live and work, in which cotton and catfish farming reign as the dominant economic activity. The word delta identifies a Greek alphabet that is represented by an equilateral triangle; that is, a geometric figure having three sides of equal distance: two sides and a base. This suggests that all sides are of equal importance if the triangle is to be an equilateral one. This also means that each side can be potentially the base of the triangle, depending on how it is rotated or moved around. So, no side is more important to an equilateral triangle than any other side. They all must be taken into consideration in equal proportion, and each contributes in equal proportion to the identity of the triangle as an equilateral triangle.

The term "delta," as represented by a triangular symbol, also has a traditional meaning in the academic environment. In economics, the delta symbol means *change*. This brings me to the focus of my comments, which is:

"A delta without change is a symbol without meaning."

Now, let me explain what this means. If we can accept for the moment that "delta," the symbol, means change, and that change means difference or something other than the status quo, then for a delta to be meaningful it must be associated with change. This has tremendous implications.

For the focus of your analysis, you have decided that the Delta region should be represented by the delta symbol—an equilateral triangle with three equal sides of specific current specification. This means that if we labeled each of these sides, the strength of the meaning and value of these labels would be of equal weight. If, for example, one side represented the social conditions of the Delta, the other the economic conditions, and the third the political conditions, then each would have equal meaning in order for the "delta" symbol to be properly defined. Put another way, when you think about it, if the social conditions in the Delta were of an enviable sort—such that people from around the world fell over

\*Adapted from the address given at the Delta Project Advisory Committee Meeting in Cleveland, MS, on January 17, 1989.

\*\*John C. Stennis Professor of Political Science and Director of the Stennis Institute of Government, Mississippi State University.

themselves trying to get here to enjoy those social conditions—and the prevailing political and economic conditions did not change, then the Delta, as we know it, would not be the Delta. The influx of persons seeking the enviable social conditions that exist here would have the positive effects of changing the economic and political conditions sufficiently that these two dimensions would ultimately be valued as much as the attractive social conditions. This would mean that, over time, for the Delta to remain the Delta, the economic and political conditions would have to become equal in significance to the positive social conditions.

By my logic, this implies change. And change would be appropriate, because change is consistent with the meaning of Delta. But how much change? The answer lies in the magnitude of the positive value of the social conditions. In direct proportion to the positive change in social conditions, there is the requirement for economic and political change.

But is this true with other variables? I suggest yes. If we define the three dimensions of the delta symbol in terms of any of the problems with which the Delta seeks to deal, then the impacting forces can be viewed in a triangular fashion. Let us take, for instance, the problem of generational hope for the future. This problem could be conceived as a function of the need to provide services to those who make our future—our children. This may be translated into a "Delta force," with hope as its centerpiece, and the equally valued dimensions for a solution might be preschool and afterschool care, kindergarten, and sound education while in school.

If the centerpiece focus of the Delta was conceived in economic terms and was seen as an economic product or products, then the equilateral solutions of product diversification, product improvement, and product marketing might prove to be essential to a solution; but one cannot lag behind the other; one cannot get too far out beyond the other. Progressive and aggressive marketing of a product that has not been improved to match the marketing effort is courting with entrepreneurial disaster; diversification of product line without product improvement and effective marketing does not produce effective profits and a good bottom line.

If we defined the central focus to be community consensus, then there must be equal consideration given to cooperation, tolerance, and exchange. This means our willingness to cooperate must match our tolerance for diverse ideas and different feelings of different intensities, and both our tolerance and our cooperation must be matched by an equal measure of exchange. Exchange really means to give and to receive in a reciprocal manner, to relinquish one thing for another, to replace something with something else. Without a clear understanding of this obligation and what it entails, the concept of cooperation without tolerance becomes a Delta without meaning.

If the central focus of the Delta is vision and hope, then the equilateral concerns must be possibility, innovation, and creativity. Without creativity in the midst of a multiplicity of serious concerns, innovation is impossible; rather, it is feared and is avoided, because the concept of possibility remains remote. If possibility looms as a great force in the minds of those who seek change, then the creativity necessary to produce innovative ideas and approaches will tend to abate the fear of experimentation, the risks of engaging in pilot projects, and the suspicion of change.

If the central focus of the Delta is approached from the problematic perspective, i.e., the Delta is viewed from the perspective of what is wrong or what impedes, it seems to me that an impediment of "status quo maintenance" can only be sustained if nurtured by the equally weighted dimension of racial polarization on the one hand, homogeneity of an agricultural economic base on the other, and the dysfunctional nature of rigid social and cultural attitudes on a third plane.

If the central focus of the Delta is viewed as an inability to set an appropriate agenda, however tentative or tenuous, perhaps this impediment to change is sustained only by the companion dysfunctional triadic relationships found in: intolerance for white or black vocal

activists; preference to engage only reactive whites and conservative blacks in meaningful dialogue; and tendencies to avoid moderate, disengaged, disinterested blacks and whites who would rather wait for the mysterious invisible hand to work its wonders. If one leg or branch of the Delta is weaker than the other, or stronger than the other, perhaps the natural tendency is to balance the degrees of Delta strength found among the three legs. The net effect is a feeding of one dimension upon the perceived strength of the other, which has an overall net negative effect.

If the Delta problem is seen as one of economic insufficiency, perhaps this condition is maintained by the mutually reinforcing factors of impotent governmental policy, economic base atrophy (a wasting away or diminution of economic activity), and inadequate education.

If, however, the Delta focus is defined as the problem of eradicating poverty, then the forces that must be activated in equal degree would include social commitment, economic commitment, and political commitment. That is, it becomes critical how people view, trust, think about, and interact with each other in social commitments. In economic commitments, people must be concerned about how they engage with respect to effective use of their economic resources—capital, land, money, tax dollars, and productive resources—to arrive at creative, and sometimes painful, ways to address perceived problems. It means that the political process of sharing power and using power must be rethought and fine-tuned for the purpose of achieving the greatest possible effects on the perceived problems.

Now, it serves little purpose to review with you the indicators of the Delta's economic and social problems. These, I understand, are well known to all of you. You live them or you pass them daily, perhaps with blinders on, but they affect you nevertheless. The value of knowing factually and empirically what those indicators are is part of the research and discovery process. What do the data say? What do the people say? How do the people feel? What do they perceive as their hope? What are they willing to do to change the conditions that exist? What are you willing to do? How can it be done? Will it be enough? Will it be done? What is the linkage between the data—the research agenda—and the economic and social policies necessary for meaningful change?

In the context of perceiving the Delta as a symbol of change, the process of change must be envisioned likewise. Considering the fact that the delta, as a symbol, is an equilateral triangle with equal sides, it may be at least parabolic for us to also see the Delta as a gridlock, a closed system, with each side as strongly committed to its position, to its value system, and to its agenda as the other. This gridlock consists of: 1) the landed gentry and owners or managers of capital (alternatively stated, the property holders, industrial managers, and small business owners); 2) the land cultivators, i.e., those who work the land; and 3) the dependent corps—the population without economic wherewithal, without adequate education, and outside of the productive job market.

The tightness of the Delta can make change within it difficult, if not impossible. For the possibility of change to be perceived and realized, the different dimensions of the Delta must be willing to expand and stretch out. To do this means one leg of the triangle must have the ability and the willingness to stretch beyond its current position; must be willing to take a chance, to take a risk, banking on the natural tendencies of the other dimensions to stretch also to attain an equal status with the expanded dimension.

This is a significant point. Why is it significant? It is significant because it means that change-agent intervention from outside can have neither automatic nor lasting effect. Unless and until the internal forces that form the relations within the Delta are willing themselves to impact the factors that influence the current conditions, external intervention is impotent. That is, internal forces must be willing to produce, to encourage, or to force a change from within. What we need is an internal Delta force, a push from within that would

produce the risk-taking, the creativity, the innovation, the cooperation, the sharing of economic resources needed to foster change.

A change from within means stretching the existing dimensions and factors to open the gates of possible intervention in the way of economic development, infrastructure improvement, educational improvement, entrepreneurship, property ownership, and exportation of tax burden. When internal forces for change are obvious to those outside, the inclinations to be a "part of the action," to claim a piece of the pride and progress, to introduce the new ideas and the added resources, to encourage, and to foster leadership become the goals of those who want to be a part of significant change.

As I present this analogy to you, I am not without knowledge of your human capital, your economic conditions, and your governmental shortcomings. And, I am equally persuaded, by both reason and my faith in the decency of mankind, that the forces of talent and creative ingenuity, the power of human love and resourcefulness, and the prevailing economic imperatives, that a significant impact can be made in many areas of the Delta. This is possible if the will is there, if the sacrifice for the future from those who have sacrificed little is there, and if there is a reason for change held out before those who must make substantial personal changes.

When this is done, vision replaces hopelessness, "we-ness" replaces blackness or whiteness, industrial investment interest peaks, a reason for adequate education is born, external resources can be attracted because of internal commitment, and the process of change becomes evident. When this happens, change is put into the Delta, and the symbol and the place called the Delta will have regained its essence.

## ***Chapter***

# **19**

### ***Framing the Future: Views on the Future of the Mississippi Delta***

***by  
Arthur G. Cosby\****

Forecasting the future is at best a precarious enterprise. The forces driving social and economic changes in a region such as the Mississippi Delta are clearly diverse and complex. The previous chapters in this volume document this claim in considerable detail. Collectively, these chapters reveal the complexity of the forces that frame the alternative futures that face the Mississippi Delta. From these numerous assessments, it is apparent that the region's future will be shaped by numerous internal and external influences that neither can be known nor understood in their entirety. Consequently, forecasting and predicting provide, at best, inexact estimations of the future with a recognized probability of error. While admitting this, it also is important to realize that the ability to make sound decisions, to move forward, and to institute improvements is in some manner dependent upon a view of what possibilities the future holds. Our conception of the nature and direction of change and our estimation of the likelihood of possible alternative futures in some ways set the limits of current actions.

This chapter has been entitled "Framing the Future," because it seeks to highlight major themes and forces that are anticipated to guide the future development of the Mississippi Delta region. It is felt that this framing process will provide an explicit structure for making more informed guesses about the course of change in this important region.

In framing the future of the Delta, there has been an intentional focus on influences and forces that have implications for change in the region's social and economic circumstances. The key to the future lies in large part in the ability of the region to improve dramatically in these two areas of life. The Delta Project research has clearly documented numerous social and economic deficits for the 18 county region of northwest Mississippi. The challenge for the Delta is to chart a course that will point toward improvement in these areas. Thus, the framing process is intentionally organized with the goal of suggesting strategies and tactics of intervention that direct the course of developmental change toward more desirable alternatives. In this context, the framing process is not simply a scholarly investigation into

the social and economic circumstances; rather, it is concerned ultimately with identifying approaches that will improve the quality of life for citizens of the Delta region.

### **Major Societal Themes**

It is critical that the framing of the future of the Mississippi Delta first be interpreted within a context of major currents that appear to be shaping the national and international landscape during this last decade of the 20th century. These trends, much as the meandering currents of a river, will direct, deflect, and in some cases force the future path of the Delta. Strategies of intervention and change that go against the current of these global, national, and regional trends are in all likelihood doomed to failure.

There are at least five sets of forces operating globally that have direct implication for the viability of future paths for the region. Each of these gives direction and sets limits on the framing process:

- 1- Free market, decentralization, and democratic solutions to the challenges of social and economic development have emerged as central themes for improved social and economic conditions throughout the global community. The profound transformations underway in the political and economic climates of Eastern Europe and over a decade of experimentation with market-based economic reforms in China are only the most dramatic manifestations of this trend. We also could point to the diminished public enthusiasm in the United States for Washington-directed "social engineering" approaches to social problems such as poverty. Similarly, the erosion during the last two decades of Western European "corporatist" policies of guaranteed employment, wage increases, and social welfare protections is indicative of this trend.

The new political and ideological trends toward free market, decentralized, and democratic views will be very strong in the United States. The creativity and energy produced in the free-market environment will be increasingly seen as the key to productivity; decentralization will be employed as the best and most adaptive approach to effective goal setting, program design, and decision making; and democracy will continue to be stressed as essential for broad-based "grass-roots" support. What this means for the Mississippi Delta is that the initiative for shaping the region's future must come from within the region and must focus on harnessing the human energies and material resources found within the region rather than waiting on policy guidance and infusions of resources from outside the Delta. The key to dramatic improvement will depend on the ability of Deltans to successfully adapt the strong creative force in such a manner to fully utilize the region's substantial human and natural resources.

- 2- The economic competition facing the Delta will be increasingly international in scope. Because of the emergence of a truly global economy, enterprises in the Mississippi Delta will have to prepare themselves to compete directly with enterprises throughout the world. The competition for investments that Delta communities will have to meet will not be from just other communities in the Midsouth or even the United States, but also from the newly industrialized countries of the Third World, a fully integrated Western European economy, ("Europe 1992") as well as the economies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Whatever advantages Delta communities might claim in the areas of land, labor, natural resources, capital, expertise, and proximity to markets will be judged in comparison to alternatives available throughout the world.



- 3- As a corollary to the reliance on market-based approaches to social problems, an acute awareness of the limits of government is emerging. There appears to be a growing consensus and realization that the federal and state governments have reached their economic and political limits for effective social and economic intervention. The failure of the "War on Poverty" and the plethora of programs it spawned has raised doubts among the public as to whether direct government intervention can resolve these problems. Regardless of one's stand on this issue, no one can deny that a \$2 trillion national debt that grows by the hundreds of billions of dollars each year has tied the hands of the federal government and severely constrained its willingness and ability to undertake new social initiatives that require substantial additional expenditures over a number of years. Even the much hoped for "peace dividend" that might accrue from the relaxation of Cold War hostility will in all likelihood be devoted to reducing the annual federal deficit, not to financing new programs.
- 4- The developmental strategies that are to be adopted in the Mississippi Delta will have to be shaped by an increased awareness of and sensitivity to the importance of protecting the environment. Explicit concern for environmental quality will impact upon the range of all possible economic and social activities. This is one area in which governmental involvement will most certainly increase in the foreseeable future.
- 5- The United States is changing from a biracial to a multi-ethnic society. Estimates suggest that by early in the next century, European-Americans will constitute less than 50 percent of the total United States population. Spanish-speaking minorities, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, and Black Americans will constitute major ethnic sectors. The politics and ideology of race will shift sharply to reflect the influence of minority groups. The special status of Black Americans as a minority will decrease. Race and ethnic status as a policy variable will become less important.

### **What We Should Not Expect**

The preceding survey of national and international themes sets the stage for the kind of trends, events, and developments that may occur in the Mississippi Delta. In some respects, these themes more clearly delineate what is not likely to happen, rather than point with great precision to exact future outcomes. Given these themes, for example, we should not expect massive federal or state intervention to solve the major problems of the Delta. In fact, there appears to be relatively little enthusiasm for such massive federal interventions as a 1960's style "War on Poverty," or the establishment of a new regionally oriented development agency such as the Appalachian Regional Commission. Such possibilities run counter to two major societal themes (free-market solutions to local problems and the limits of government) and, consequently, are judged by this observer to be of relatively low probability. Put simply, these major themes engender little national interest or support for massive governmental involvement, and the demands on the federal budget deficit preclude the financing of any major initiatives.

A second solution that will not occur for the Delta's economy is growth and diversification by using the prospect of cheap labor to attract vast new flows of investment. Delta labor is no longer cheap by international standards. Such locations as China, Mexico, India, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines have decided advantages in manufacturing labor costs. Furthermore, as the nations of Eastern Europe become integrated into the world economy, the Delta will find that those nations, too, can compete with the Delta on labor costs and will have the additional advantage of close proximity to large consumer markets of Western Europe. The Delta can no longer expect to

attract industry on the basis of inexpensive labor. New and emerging industrial activities will have to depend on other advantages and approaches to enhancing the region's industrial competitiveness.

The national transition to a multi-ethnic society may also set limits for the future of the Delta. When there are many ethnic groups who may qualify for "minority status," the significance and importance of minority status as a policy or legal identifier diminishes. Consequently, we should not expect significant new governmental or judicial targeting of a specific minority group for affirmative action treatment. Nor should we expect substantial new federal initiatives to eradicate poverty or health care problems in the Delta simply because the region has a majority black population. For example, there will likely be a diminished support for government set-aside programs for blacks or for strengthening of affirmative action guidelines. The emergence of a multi-ethnic society, at least at the national level, will diminish the significance of race as a category.

### **Major Regional Themes**

There are a number of themes or forces that are specific to the Delta region that will be helpful in focusing on more specific outcomes. Each of these will add structure to the framing process by further defining the range of possibilities. The following themes should be considered:

- 1- There most likely will be a turnabout in the decline of the Delta's population. For most of the last two decades, the total population of Delta counties has been declining. This trend is quite remarkable given the steady increases in U.S. population and, in more recent years, in the Mississippi population. The Delta's counties have been and will continue to be characterized by high fertility rates that suggest an increase in population. In previous years, out-migration has been so great that the Delta has experienced a net loss in population. Now, there will be a decline in out-migration, allowing for moderate growth in the Delta's population. Much of the out-migration of previous decades was motivated by the pursuit of greater economic opportunity in the more industrialized regions of the United States. The industrial decline of the Midwest and the shift in the U.S. economy away from traditional "smoke stack" industries have had major effects on Delta migration.
- 2- The dynamics of the Delta population within the region will change dramatically. Two trends are anticipated. First, the decline in the percentage of whites in the Delta population will accelerate, and second, internal migration from rural to urban areas will increase. These shifts will produce increased influence for the urban and black segments of the Delta population.
- 3- There will be a shift from a white-dominated political structure to one in which there is a substantial black influence and possibly black dominance in the number of elected officials. This implies that the black population will be increasingly empowered to reshape the agenda of local government. This new approach will include more demands on local government to provide social services. Local officials will find themselves operating with an increased gap between resource and demand.
- 4- A number of towns in the Delta are being transformed to an essentially new form of urban settlement. Geographer Charles Aiken maintains that a new type of black ghetto is being created in the rural South and has the following features: a substantial minority population (over 75 percent black population) and an economic structure dependent upon

government transfer payments and subsidies.<sup>1</sup> They are ghettos because they are isolated, having no real linkage to the economic activities of the surrounding area. Such urban settlement types were extremely rare prior to 1980, but are now becoming common in the Delta region. Their emergence is a consequence of the migration of Delta population from rural areas and small towns into larger urban areas. Private sector opportunities will be severely limited. The most coveted route of job mobility will be in the administration of government programs. Businesses in these ghettos will find it difficult to sustain themselves on a customer base that has no more disposable income than that which is provided by various state and federal income support programs.

- 5- There will be increased competition for what has previously been seen as plentiful natural resources. There will be great demand for high-quality water with municipalities, industrial interests, agricultural interests, and environmental groups being major actors in deciding how water resources will be utilized. Similar competition will occur concerning water management and flood control policies, with battle lines being drawn over the issue of limiting pollutants or increasing agricultural productivity through the use of chemicals.

### **Principles of Change for the Mississippi Delta**

An underlying theme developed states that strong external and internal trends establish a direction and a momentum for social and economic changes. Approaches that utilize and benefit from these general currents of change are apt to be successful, while those approaches that tend to run counter to these forces will have minimal chances of success. From this view, a set of principles can be set forth that judge strategies of programs and intervention that could be utilized to improve the Delta. These principles necessarily will be stated in the broadest terms, since they are intended to be used as standards for a wide array of interventions and programs.

**Principle 1:** The Delta needs to explicitly seek solutions that combine excellence and equity. The highly competitive internal marketplace will award those who achieve competitive advantages through their excellence. At the same time, the Delta, with its large, increasing population of blacks and declining population of whites, must also find solutions that stress equity between the races. Such solutions will be difficult in their conception and stressful in their implementation. Nevertheless, no other principle holds such promise for the long-term solution to the social and economic problems of the Delta.

**Principle 2:** The enhancement of free market economic activity is essential. A major problem in the Delta is the lack of wealth. Free market approaches offer the best alternative for producing additional wealth for the region. Government solutions may reallocate wealth, but do not produce additional wealth. The current economic pie is simply inadequate for the demands of the region's population, and market solutions hold the best approach for change.

**Principle 3:** Deltans must learn to solve their own problems. Since our view of the future does not involve the likelihood of or even the desire for external intervention, the Delta must look inward to its own people and resources to take advantage of opportunities. It can be argued that many of the major difficulties of the region are self-imposed and consequently,

---

<sup>1</sup>Charles S. Aiken, "A New Type of Black Ghetto in the Plantation South," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 80 (2), 1990, 223-246.

self-imposed solutions seem appropriate and advisable.

**Principle 4:** Deltans will need to become masters in the art of community building and leadership development. The diminished role of the federal government and the recognized limits of state government will leave local community organizations in a more important position in determining future events. The organization and motivation of local communities to define goals, develop strategies, and implement programs may very well be the primary technique of positive social change for the region. The future of Delta schools, economic development, race relations, and infrastructure improvements will depend, in large part, on the development of effective Delta communities and effective Delta leadership.

**Principle 5:** Deltans also will need to become accomplished in setting priorities and allocating resources. In an era of limited financial resources, the ability to wisely invest in those enterprises, which will lead to the betterment of the community, becomes critical. If financial resources are limited, how will they best be utilized? Setting priorities also may involve the allocation of human resources. Who in the community can best address a particular set of issues?

**Principle 6:** Strategies of intervention also should be fundamental and long term. The current circumstances of the Delta are the product of long periods of social change and reflect a number of underlying structural conditions. There can be no lasting change in certain areas unless the strategies are clearly long term in their applications and also involve a restructured environment.

### **Scenario for Economic Development**

This volume has documented the difficulties that the Delta will experience in attracting industry. There are a number of important limitations concerning availability of human capital, quality of schools, physical infrastructure, and other factors that do not place the Delta in a competitive position. It is our opinion that this judgment is valid and will most likely be valid for the remainder of the 1990's. Economic development strategies that involve substantial investments in industry attraction and reallocation are apt to have little chance of success. An alternative economic development scenario must be developed. Economic development activities in the Delta need to be restructured from a strategy of attracting businesses and industries to one of job retention and job creation. Economic development, expertise, and programs would center around the following three major types of endeavors.

**Job Retention Programs:** An analysis of economic patterns within the region reveals that there are a relatively large number of businesses that fail or businesses that move from the Delta. When this occurs, there is an obvious reduction in the amount of available jobs and consequently, a reduction in wealth in the region. If we develop programs that will cut into the rate of "business deaths" or business out-migration, we can have a sizeable impact on the number of available jobs in the region. What can communities do that will make firms remain in the Delta?

**Expansion and Diversification:** Economic activities in the region need to focus on approaches to expand businesses, industries, and firms that currently exist in the region. The same kind of incentives, assistance, and advantages that communities use to attract new industry should be directed toward existing industry to expand their scope of operation. Such a program holds a far superior chance of creating new jobs in the region than that of seeking new industry.

**Entrepreneurism and New Businesses:** There also should be a major focus by economic developers on approaches to encourage entrepreneurship, creativity, and invention. These are forces that will lead to the initiation of new businesses and firms. If it is reasonable to believe that the Delta will not be able to attract significant industries, then there must be a focus on facilitating the creation of firms internally. This approach, combined with preceding ones on retention, expansion, and diversification, needs to become the focus of economic development activities for the foreseeable future.

### **Scenario for Community Development and Leadership**

In developing scenarios such as economic development and education for the future of the Delta, we have specified sets of objectives and activities we believe will lead to more desirable alternative futures. An issue that needs to be addressed concerns what mechanisms or means can be used to set these programs into motion. The key to these is effective community organization and leadership. In other words, it is really local communities and local community leaders that must ultimately establish goals and develop mechanisms to see that they are achieved.

This volume has presented a thorough analysis on the major leadership groups that historically or recently emerged as critical actors in the Delta. The traditional agrarian aristocracy, the industrial/business leadership, and the emerging black leadership represent segments of the Delta population that have divergent economic interests, divergent social agendas, and vastly different histories. The great challenge in community organization and leadership is to develop a community structure that in some fashion brings together these groups to muster their collective energy and wisdom toward the common good of the communities. Unless community and regional organizations that combine the strengths of these three types of leaders evolve, there is little chance for Delta communities to move forward. The theme of excellence and equity is critical in setting the agenda for leadership development and community structures. Topics of race relations, conflict resolution, and associated difficulties of merging the goals and interests of different groups are applicable. Community organization is perhaps the single most important strategy for Delta improvement.

### **Scenario for Delta Schools**

There is perhaps no area of change in the Delta that holds more of a promise for long-lasting improvement than in the area of primary and secondary education. It is conventional wisdom that the key to improvement of underdeveloped areas is an effective investment in human capital, especially in educational improvement. Given that there is likely to be no substantial new funds directed toward education in the Delta, we must look for dramatic shifts in policies, priorities, and approaches that better utilize existing resources.

An analysis of the number of public and private school systems in the Delta has led to the unavoidable conclusion that, while there is a substantial amount of resources being spent on education in the region, these resources are greatly fragmented among a patchwork of public school districts and private school systems. The result is a wasteful duplication of effort, failure to achieve economies of scale, and generally suboptimal production from the resources that are available. Because community loyalties are split between public and private schools (and among public schools) in many Delta communities, there is often inadequate community support for the public and the private schools. It is up to the leadership in the Delta to devise a means to effectively utilize these very important educational resources. One could reasonably question whether the economy of the Delta is adequate to support one quality school system in each community; it is all but indisputable that few if any communities in the region are capable of supporting two school systems. Until the communities of the Delta muster the strength to more efficiently organize their limited resources in support of

education, the region can expect nothing more than a future dominated by economic and social underdevelopment.

We must fundamentally rethink the manner in which we organize education in other ways as well. If the Delta children are being out-performed at the state and national levels, we should look at fundamental restructuring of the manner in which existing educational resources are being utilized. One such alternative is a move from a 9-month school year to an 11- or 12-month school year. The 9-month school year was predicated on the idea that students were needed for agricultural labor. These reasons are no longer valid. This one policy change holds the promise of sending a strong signal to the rest of the world that people in the Mississippi Delta are serious about improving the education of their children.

### **Scenario for Managing Human Resources**

Analyses of the Delta's economic potential consistently cite human capital limitations as a hindrance to the future economic growth. There are not enough skilled, high-tech, and educated workers to fuel robust economic growth. At the same time, Deltans are aware that there has been a long-term out-migration of talent from the region. For example, each year there is a "brain drain" of college graduates who elect to leave the Delta after receiving their educations. For the foreseeable future, the out-migration of talent will grow with continued loss of talent. While the preceding judgment is shared by most observers, one obvious response has received almost no attention. In the most simple terms, if the level of human capital in the region is less than desirable and human capital is the most precious economic resource, shouldn't the Delta look for better ways to manage and enhance available talent?

As businesses realize the importance of carefully managing scarce resources, the Delta must learn to manage its talent. This scenario calls for an approach to managing, retaining and, on occasion, attracting talent to the Delta region. While the Delta is experiencing an out-migration of talented individuals, it is also true that there are a number of talented individuals who would choose to live in the Delta if there were adequate job opportunities. That is to say, there is substantial potential for talented people to locate in the Delta given occupational opportunities. There is a *potential supply of human capital* that far exceeds that which exists in the region. It is possible and desirable to use modern information technology to identify and manage the human capital potential for the region's area. By doing this, we can provide employers a better talent pool. We can provide Deltans who remain in the region a chance of finding a suitable occupation. Ultimately, we can provide the region an improved and presumably more productive labor force.

Earlier a scenario was developed that was targeted toward dramatic improvements in primary and secondary schools. These involved truly long-term investments whose returns could not be fully anticipated until well into the future. Managing existing talent, however, is an intermediate step to maximize the human capital now available and consequently, could reap immediate benefits.

### **Summary**

This chapter has attempted to frame the future of the Mississippi Delta for social and economic development. It has done this by identifying a number of external and internal forces that are thought to have the capacity to greatly influence the types of futures the region can experience. It was the intent of this discussion to identify scenarios that have more credibility for success and desirable consequences for the future. A great deal of emphasis was placed upon restructuring the Delta region through a heavy reliance on community development and leadership. Given the increased awareness of limits of government, local and regional organizations were stressed as mechanisms for social change. These scenarios were necessarily brief and intended only to suggest directions of change that seemed promising.

A great deal of additional work is needed to fully "flesh out" what types of programs, the types of organizations, and the types of emphases best suited to the future of the Delta. If nothing else, it is our hope that this volume will stimulate thought and discussion on what the future of the Delta should be and how desirable outcomes can be achieved. It is also our desire that the analyses, interpretations, predictions, and scenarios will be carefully analyzed and tested against reality. It is only through this process that a volume such as ours can be beneficial.