

The Delta in Global Context: A Workshop on Community-Based Research, Practice and Development

Delta State University in Cleveland, MS May 26–27, 2005

Globalization is reshaping our world. Corporate-driven capitalism is shifting production and consumption on a global scale and diffusing an economic rationality to the most remote corners of the planet. In its wake, organizational structures and cultural worldviews and practices are changing, and some believe this is producing social transformations equal to the industrial revolution. There is no doubt that globalization has brought benefits; however, these benefits have been unevenly distributed. These uneven effects have certainly been felt across nations, but discontinuities can be observed within both core and peripheral countries as well.

The Mississippi Delta is a region that combines persistent poverty and staggering wealth. The area's rich alluvial soils have supported agricultural systems ranging from the large plantations during the era of "King Cotton," to small sharecropper farms, to today's large-scale agribusiness. A legacy of underdevelopment has left Delta counties with some of the highest poverty rates of any counties in the U.S. On average, over 30% of the population in the Delta's core counties lives in poverty, compared to the national average of 12.4%. The area has also experienced industrial restructuring from both sides. First, manufacturing plants relocated to the Delta as they left the northern industrial areas to take advantage of the South's more relaxed business environment and non-unionized labor force; later, these same plants began leaving the Delta in search of even more favorable economic circumstances overseas, a process that continues today. If globalization's effects are experienced unevenly in the U.S., it is likely that the Delta is an area that will be slow to see globalization's benefits.

Reasoned consideration of these issues is of great importance for community and regional development efforts. Community-based research is a framework that combines participatory and action-oriented strategies of research to inform the development process. The framework offers the potential to add a deeper, grounded and applied understanding of the complex relationship between globalization and the Delta.

This workshop will bring together researchers and practitioners interested in examining the dynamics of globalization in the Mississippi Delta region. Workshop themes will include:

- Underdevelopment, education and workforce improvement
- Health status and access to services
- Agriculture, natural resources and sustainable development
- Culture and heritage preservation
- Collaboration and cooperative alternatives

The workshop will offer an opportunity to share experiences, refine ideas, and deliberate how globalization is reshaping the Delta and potential paths for development. Participants are encouraged to contribute a paper and deliver a presentation that draws connections between issues in the globalization debate and experiences in the Delta. Papers will be collected for publication in a workshop proceeding. Presenters should submit a 250–500 word abstract by January 11, 2005. Non-presenters are also invited to participate and engage in these important conversations.

The workshop will be hosted by the Institute for Community-Based Research, a collaborative effort of the Division of Social Sciences and the Center for Community and Economic Development at Delta State University. The Mississippi Association of Cooperatives/Mississippi Center for Cooperative Development is co-sponsor and co-organizer of this event. The workshop will be held on the DSU campus in Cleveland, Mississippi, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta.

If you are interested in participating in this workshop, please contact the organizers at:

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