

Opportunities and Obstacles to Development in a Mississippi Delta Community

Judy Maynard, University of Tennessee—
Martin

&

Michael Timberlake, University of Utah

Global Processes Shape Local Conditions

- ❑ The transformation of social life is part of the historical development of the “world-system”
 - ❑ How a region is “plugged into” the system matters.
 - ❑ Community, politics, economics, and culture are influenced.
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Characteristics of the World-system

- ❑ European-based
 - ❑ 500 year history
 - ❑ Started small, has continuously grown through “incorporation”
 - ❑ Hierarchically organized (e.g., rich/poor, core/periphery, more developed/less developed, First World/Third World, North/South, “internal peripheries”)
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CAPITALIST World-System

- Logic of Capitalism
 - profits
 - markets
 - competition among capitalist producers (firms)
 - This logic provides underlying incentive for various social changes (which, in turn, shape the opportunities people have for earning a living).
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The “Periphery”

- Historically, areas outside of the world system are incorporated such that they are economically subordinated to the dominant capitalist organizations in the core.
 - Such areas are the “periphery” of the world system.
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The Periphery

- Historically, many “periphery” areas were sources of raw materials and colonial agricultural products.
 - Socially, this was reflected
 - in extreme concentration of wealth and land
 - in relatively large, sometimes coerced, and always poorly paid agricultural/mining labor force.
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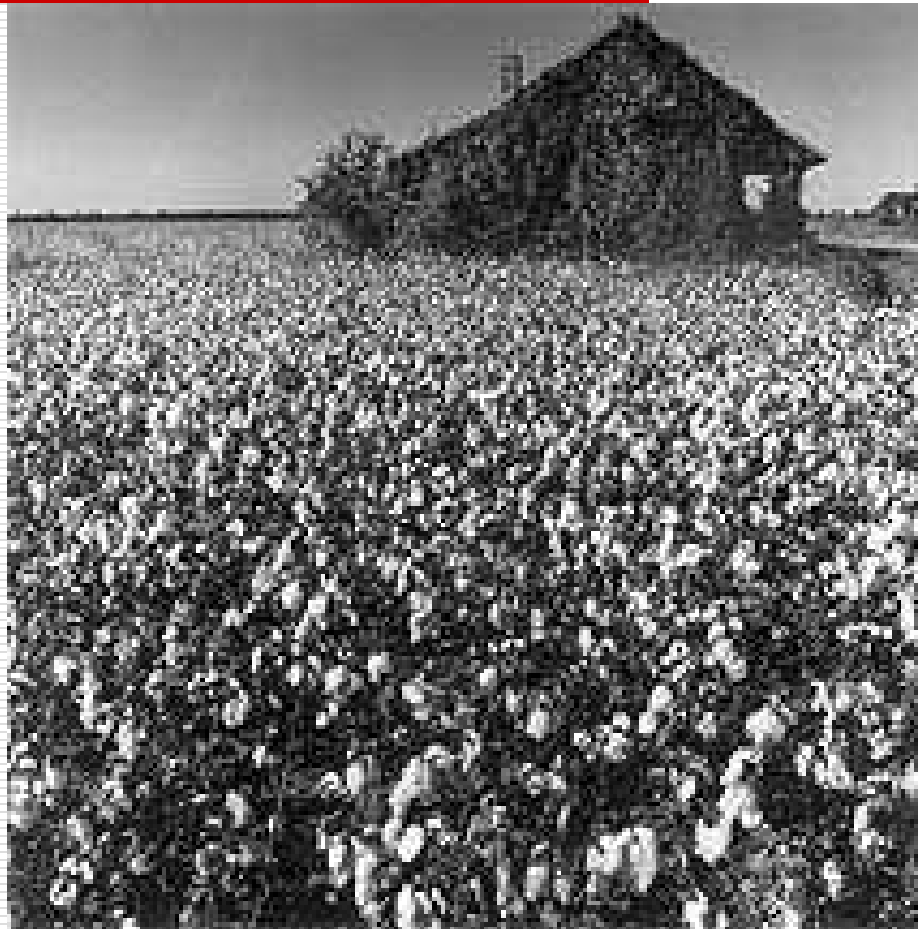
Delta as Internal Periphery

- Appalachia
 - Mississippi Delta
 - Rio Grande Valley
 - Upper Peninsula
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Like the periphery in general, the Delta's legacy includes the concentration of wealth, including land



A Poor and insecure work force



LEVEE COUNTY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

❑ FINAL PLANT CLOSING

❑ “THIS WAS A PSYCHOLOGICAL BLOW AND IS DEVASTATING TO OUR COUNTY.”

MAYOR

❑ DOWNWARD ECONOMIC SPIRAL

LEVEE COUNTY NOT ATYPICAL

- ❑ **Rural areas throughout industrial world impacted by economic restructuring of the global economy**
 - ❑ **Corporate farming, offshoring, layoffs, outsourcing, downsizing, and plant closings**
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Globalization: competition drives manufacturing offshore



Photo courtesy of Maquila Solidarity Network



ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION/HARDSHIP

☐ **OTHER FACTORS IMPACTING LEVEE COUNTY:**

- **RURAL**
 - **SOUTHERN**
 - **NOT ADJACENT TO A MAJOR METRO CENTER**
 - **ONE OF 219 COUNTIES OF THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA**
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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- ☐ **Historically, farming is basis of the county's economy, including its chief employment**
 - ☐ **Hundreds of working-class blacks and whites lived in shacks on cotton "plantations"**
 - ☐ **"Have nots" separated spatially, culturally, and socially**
 - ☐ **Race relations?**
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LOCAL POLITICS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

□ FARMING AND FARMERS

- **LARGE FARMERS HAVE BEEN THE DOMINANT POLITICAL FORCE IN THE COUNTY**
 - **SECURED POSITIONS ON COUNTY BOARDS**
 - **UNDERMINED NUMEROUS NON-FARM RELATED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**
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COMMENTS

"YEARS AGO, THEY WERE FEARFUL OF LOSING OF THEIR CHEAP LABOR FORCE" AND TODAY "THEY ARE AFRAID THEY WILL LOSE THEIR LAND AND WILL NEVER GET IT BACK"



Comments

“COUNTY POWER DID NOT WANT FOUR- LANE ROADS OR INDUSTRY. THE ULTIMATE GOAL WAS NOT TO ALLOW ANY PROGRESS IN THE COUNTY.”

“OUR COUNTY’S LIFE BLOOD HAS NOW BECOME ITS CURSE.”

CHANGES IN FARMING

☐ MECHANIZATION



☐ NEW TECHNOLOGY

☐ POLITICAL CHANGES OF 1980S

☐ SEVERE ECONOMIC CRISIS

EFFECTS ON LEVEE COUNTY

- ☐ STEADILY DECLINING POPULATION
 - ☐ LOSS OF FARM JOBS
 - ☐ SALES OF FARMS
 - ☐ FEWER FARMS/FEWER FARMERS
 - ☐ LOSS OF BUSINESSES
 - ☐ LOSS OF COUNTY REVENUES
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EFFECTS ON LARGE FARMERS

- ☐ **COUNTY FARMERS SWITCHED PRODUCTION FROM COTTON TO SOYBEANS**
 - ☐ **SOYBEANS MARKET GLOBALIZED WITH INCREASED DEMAND GLOBALLY AND NATIONALLY**
 - ☐ **LARGER FARMS/GREATER PROFITS**
 - ☐ **BENEFITED FROM GLOBALIZATION?**
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MANUFACTURING IN COUNTY

- ❑ **ECONOMIC PROSPERITY OF 1960S**
 - ❑ **UNPRECEDENTED GROWTH IN MANUFACTURING ACROSS AMERICA**
 - ❑ **MINI “INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION” FOR LEVEE COUNTY**
 - ❑ **COUNTY ATTRACTED ABOUT HALF A DOZEN MANUFACTURING PLANTS**
 - ❑ **EMPLOYED 600 EMPLOYEES, MOST OF WHOM WERE WOMEN**
 - ❑ **30 PERCENT OF LABOR FORCE- MANUFACTURING**
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URBAN VS. RURAL MANUFACTURING

□ RURAL MANUFACTURING TENDS TO BE:

- 1) NON UNION AND**
 - 2) LOWER WAGED**
 - 3) LOWER SKILLED**
 - 4) MORE ROUTINE**
 - 5) LESS DIVERSE**
 - 6) LESS COMPLEX**
- THAN URBAN MANUFACTURING.**
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LEVEE COUNTY MANUFACTURING

- ☐ **HARDSHIP EMPLOYMENT**
 - ☐ **MAINLY “CUT AND SEW”**
 - ☐ **WORK FOR LOW-SKILLED, LOW-EDUCATED, MAINLY FEMALE POPULATION**
 - ☐ **EVEN SO, RESPONDENTS COMMENTED
“THESE WORKERS MADE UP THE
BACKBONE OF OUR LITTLE RURAL
COMMUNITY”
AND**
-

SUPPORTED LOCAL BUSINESSES:

“I worked at that store over there when the factories were here. When both of the factories were operating, it was wonderful. They would not leave town to buy what they wanted. Yes, when those women got off work on Saturday, they would come in and buy a weeks' grocery. And when they got off in the afternoon, we would cook chickens and they would grab them and take them home to feed the kids. They did not make a lot, but they made enough to get by. And when the factories closed a bunch of 55 year old ladies who were too old to retrain and too young to retire. They were just sitting here as an employment base for factories to come in. What has happened to them now is that they have either adapted into the culture or have gone ahead now and become retirement age and are no longer interested.”

Economic Development Outcomes



MANUFACTURING LEAVES COUNTY

- ❑ ECONOMIC CHANGES OF 1980S**
- ❑ ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING/GLOBALIZATION**
--SMALLER FACTORIES CLOSE
- ❑ NAFTA 1990S**
--REMAINING "CUT AND SEWS" CLOSE

**"THERE IS A BELIEF THAT NAFTA HAS DESTROYED
SMALL COMMUNITIES IN NORTHWEST TENNESSEE"**

Levee County Star Editor

SERVICE SECTOR JOBS

☐ **MANUFACTURING REPLACED BY SERVICE SECTOR JOBS**

☐ **CHARACTERISTICS**

**1) VARY, BUT IN RURAL AREAS MAINLY
LOW-SKILLED, LOW PAY, SEASONAL,**

NO FRINGE BENEFITS, MAINLY FEMALE

2) DOWNWARD MOBILITY FOR INDIVIDUALS

**3) DOWNWARD STRUCTURAL MOBILITY FOR
COUNTY**

POVERTY IN RURAL AREAS

- ☐ **HIGHER RATES IN RURAL AREAS**
 - ☐ **MORE PERSISTENT AND ENDURING**
 - ☐ **STEREOTYPED**
 - ☐ **MAINLY PERCEIVED AS URBAN PROBLEM**
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POVERTY IN LEVEE COUNTY

☐ PERCEPTIONS

“NO POOR IN THIS COUNTY. THEY ALL WORK DOING SOMETHING, EVEN SELLING DRUGS.”

“THEY JUST DO NOT WANT TO WORK. THEY ARE LIKE THAT YOU KNOW.”

“I JUST CAN’T UNDERSTAND HOW THEY CAN BE SO LAZY AND STAY HOME AND WATCH TV ALL DAY.”

REALITY

- ☐ **SEVERE AND PERSISTENT PROBLEM**
 - ☐ **ABOUT 1/4 RESIDENTS LIVE IN POVERTY**
 - ☐ **PER CAPITA INCOME LESS THAN \$11,000**
 - ☐ **60 PERCENT OF ALL RESIDENTS HAVE INCOMES LESS THAN \$25,000**
 - ☐ **1 OUT OF EVERY THREE CHILDREN IN THE COUNTY LIVE IN POVERTY**
 - ☐ **OVER 50% OF SINGLE FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS LIVE IN POVERTY**
 - ☐ **60 PERCENT OF ALL BIRTHS IN 2003 TO SINGLE MOTHERS**
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OUT MIGRATION/UNBALANCED SEX RATIO

- ❑ **OUT MIGRATION OF MALES**
 - ❑ **25-30 YEAR OLD COHORT 66 PERCENT FEMALE; 34 PERCENT MALE**
 - ❑ **OVERALL POPULATION 40 PERCENT MALE; 60 PERCENT FEMALE**
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CONSEQUENCES OF OUT MIGRATION

- ☐ LOWERED POOL OF ELIGIBLES FOR FEMALES
 - ☐ HIGHER RATES OF FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS.
 - ☐ LOSS OF HUMAN CAPITAL
 - ☐ INCREASED POVERTY
 - ☐ LOSS OF LEADERSHIP
 - ☐ DIFFICULTY ATTRACTING NEW INDUSTRY
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LEVEE COUNTY ECONOMICS

☐ **SERVICE-SECTOR JOBS**

☐ **TOURISM**

☐ **PRISON**

☐ **THE PORT?**

Moving out of the Periphery: What must be done?

- Recognize and confront the obstacles
 - High rates of poverty
 - Low levels of human capital (e.g., education)
 - “Fractionalization” by race and by class
 - Disregard by national policies and leaders
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Same sad song?

- Twelve years ago, a report from the Lower Mississippi Delta Commission made recommendations that seem relevant still today.
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LMDCC (1990)

- ☐ Cultivate local leadership
 - ☐ Face the race and class divide; overcome it.
 - ☐ Improve education and skills
 - ☐ Identify and build on local assets
 - ☐ Increase development capital
 - ☐ Improve infrastructure
 - ☐ Build technical competence
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Local Initiatives in Levee County

☐ Federal Initiative: Even Start

- Seems effective, but may be eliminated in federal budget.

☐ Local Individual Leadership: the Superintendent

- Working hard to develop education competency and provide leadership training.

☐ Local Collective Leadership: The Main Street Association

Federal Initiatives?

- Difficult to point to federal initiatives likely to help overcome the obstacles mentioned above.
 - To the contrary:
 - Neoliberal trade policies
 - Devolution and withdrawal re: rural social programs.
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Hope or Despair?

- Population responses:

- Low or negative population growth
- Sex ratio imbalances

- VS.

- Attachment to Place:

“it’s home; it is home and I could not live anywhere else.”
