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Whither Rural? Development Policy and the Debate over Rural America's Future, 1945-
1980

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

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1980

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by

Douglas William Genens

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ABSTRACT

Whither Rural? Development Policy and the Debate over Rural America's Future, 1945-

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This project examines the response of policymakers, rural people, and social scientists to the major economic and demographic changes transforming the rural United States after 1945. Farm land concentrated increasingly in fewer hands, competitive markets and low prices for farm products strained small farmers, and many farm jobs mechanized. Rural jobs beyond the farm, particularly in mining and timber, began to disappear as well. These changes were not necessarily new but were deeper and far more wrenching following World War II. The population loss, community decline, and unemployment they caused posed the more general question of rural America's future. My project aims to understand not just how these changes were understood and addressed, but more importantly how policymakers, experts, and rural people envisioned the place of rural America in a changing society.

Examining major and in some cases pathbreaking rural development initiatives in California, Missouri, and Georgia, my research ranges across the broad diversity of rural America to analyze the emergence of three distinct approaches to solving the rural crisis. One, focused primarily on what was referred to as "nonfarm" development, saw the era of the small farm as finished, and aimed to replace disappearing farm jobs with federal loans

and grants that funded infrastructure projects, industrial development, and rural tourism. Another solution found its fullest expression in the land reform efforts of small, African American-led farm cooperatives, who blended calls for civil rights and economic justice in their attempt to build a cooperative farm economy. Finally, Mexican American farmworkers allied with activist lawyers to regulate California's large farms and fight for collective bargaining rights. Taken together, these two efforts at farm reform suggested that rural America could be revived only through a dramatic reorganization of agriculture. Delving into the assumptions, legislative and administrative politics, and the federal and local power dynamics that shaped the practice of rural development, my project tells the story of a deepening rural crisis, and the effort to solve that crisis and in the process redefine rural America.

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Introduction

The Rural Crisis

Writing in 1957, rural sociologist Lowry Nelson warned his readers of a “crisis” in rural America. On the one hand, rural America had simply too many farmers growing too many things, making it hard to earn a decent living. On the other hand, a distinctly rural identity seemed to be disappearing in the face of a burgeoning urban and industrial society.¹ Fifteen years later, Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey spoke in support of a 1972 bill to expand the role of the United States Department of Agriculture in rural economic development. Small towns, Humphrey argued, faced a crisis caused by a population exodus from the country to the cities.² Iowa Representative John Culver agreed, asserting that the U.S. needed to “recognize the crisis” caused by widespread rural economic decline.³ Looking back from the 1980s, Charles Prejean, the leader of a farm cooperative organization, argued that the rural Black South had been in a “continuous crisis” for fifty years, caused by economic exploitation, racial discrimination, and disappearing rural black communities.⁴ From multiple, distinct perspectives, rural America seemed to be facing a crisis situation. What explains the persistence of this talk of a rural crisis, and what did policymakers, rural communities, and social scientists want to do about it? Delving into the wide-ranging debates, legislative and administrative politics, and on-the-ground efforts to save rural communities, this project argues that rural America did indeed face a crisis. In response, a set

¹ Lowry Nelson, “Rural Life in a Mass-Industrial Society,” *Rural Sociology* 22 (March 1957): 20-30.

² *Rural Development: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Rural Development of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Part Two, Senate, 92nd Congress, 52*, (1972) (Statement of Hubert Humphrey, Senator from Minnesota).

³ *Rural Development: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Rural Development of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Part Three, Senate, 92nd Congress, 392*, (1972) (Statement of John Culver, Representative from Iowa).

of clashing policies and movements emerged to solve the rural crisis and, in the process, revive and reimagine rural America.

Invocations of crisis, from Nelson to Prejean, were more than just rhetorical flourishes to draw attention to the problems that concerned them. These individual utterances pointed to deeper, structural changes in rural America that reach a crisis level in the postwar period. The rural crisis emerged first of all as a product of economic restructuring. In agriculture, farms got bigger, land increasingly concentrated in fewer hands, and small farmers and tenants found themselves pushed out of the farm economy altogether. Though farm communities received the most attention in the postwar years, other rural industries, particularly mining and timber, faced major reorganizations as well. With work in mining, timber, and agriculture drying up, many rural people left their communities in search of work in the cities. Dramatic population loss devastated many small towns. Those who did not migrate experienced intensified economic inequality, racial discrimination, and poverty. Substandard housing, infrastructure, and social services compounded these problems. This crisis did not target a specific problem region or area. Postwar rural decline affected nearly all types of rural areas across the country. Given this widespread poverty, economic decline, and population loss, the rural crisis posed the more general, existential question: what sort of future, if any, did rural America have?

In response to the poverty and decline that increasingly characterized the countryside, three distinct solutions appeared, each with its own understanding of the rural crisis and vision of rural renewal. One strand, which will be called rural development, grew out of the efforts of postwar policymakers, social scientists, and local rural politicians and businessmen. Funded by federal loans and grants, proponents of rural development wanted to replace

⁴ “Annual Report of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” 1986, Folder 21, Box 83,

disappearing jobs with work in manufacturing and tourism and invest in new infrastructure and services. Another set of solutions found their fullest expression in the land reform efforts of small, African American led farm cooperatives. Blending calls for racial and economic justice, these farmers sought to build an alternative to concentrated, large-scale agriculture through small farm cooperation. In California, a far different set of initiatives developed. There, Mexican American farmworkers allied with activist lawyers to regulate California's large farms, improve working conditions, and secure collective bargaining rights. What emerged in response to the rural crisis was less a coherent plan or set of ideas than a clashing, contradictory set of proposals with starkly different solutions to rural decline. In the face of both internal and external imitations, these projects did not succeed in stopping the rural crisis, but they did not wholly fail either. They kept some farmers on the land, regulated large farms, and created new rural jobs.

Why use the concept of a "rural crisis"? Though Culver's claim that such a crisis needed greater recognition might suggest that it lacked purchase among his contemporaries, the phrase helps to elicit the devastating decline that afflicted small towns in the postwar period. Though policymakers, local rural people, and social scientists interpreted rural change differently, their subjective understandings stemmed from an objective, dramatic decline in rural communities. Using the phrase ultimately helps to capture the deeply rooted and intertwined political, economic, and social problems facing rural America in the postwar period.

What are the primary features of the rural crisis? First, the rural crisis must be understood as

a postwar phenomenon. Though many aspects of the rural crisis characterized rural America before the 1940s, the problems of the postwar period differed in both degree and kind. Take two of the most important indicators that will be discussed more fully below: changes in the farm economy and population statistics. While each factor was present before World War II, they accelerated mostly rapidly, and with greater force, after the war. While this study ends in the early 1980s, when the major solutions to the rural crisis no longer attracted federal or grassroots support, the major trends of the rural crisis continued to undermine small towns well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The rural crisis also encompassed more than just agriculture and more than just the regions typically identified with rural poverty: Appalachia and the South. Many pre-World War II policymakers conceptualized rural problems in terms of farming, but this framing would not suffice after the 1940s. Postwar policymakers, rural experts, and small towns needed to address a rural decline of far greater breadth than previous generations. The postwar rural crisis defied regional boundaries as well. Though the Roosevelt administration saw the rural South as the number one economic problem, postwar rural decline undermined small towns from coast to coast. This widespread decline culminated in questions that few pondered before World War II: should small towns be allowed to disappear? And if not, what should be done to salvage them?

The rural crisis had its origins in a broad, rural economic restructuring. In agriculture, it was driven in part by a set of ideas about what constituted the ideal farm. By the early twentieth century, both Congress and the USDA had embraced a set of farm policies focused primarily on improving farmer productivity and maximizing profit. In order to accomplish this goal, farmers needed to adopt the latest technologies and management techniques,

specialize on fewer crops, and grow them on larger plots of land. This framework became the starting point for a series of policymaking decisions that would transform many rural communities.⁵

The greatest catalyst for the restructuring of agriculture, however, emerged from the Great Depression and the New Deal. For many farmers, the depression began not in 1929, but in the years immediately following World War I. During the war, U.S. farmers profited handsomely from European demand for their products. As Europe recovered in the early 1920s, it relied less on U.S. farmers for basic commodities and many saw their incomes collapse. At the same time, farmers continued to follow farm policy's best practices. Continuing to ratchet up productivity glutted the market and pushed incomes down even more.⁶ As these problems worsened after 1929, the Roosevelt Administration signed into law the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act. The law created a system of payments that encouraged farmers to take land out of production, which would result in fewer crops grown and a subsequent rise in farm prices. The payment system served as useful carrot to attract farmers to the program, evidenced by the fact that, just in the South, over a million cotton farmers participated by the end of 1934.⁷ The AAA instigated a major shift in the composition of agriculture and signaled that the rural crisis had begun.

The rural crisis in agriculture can be seen in part by the changing structure of farms. Between 1900 and 1940, the number and size of farms barely shifted. As farmers used AAA payments to buy out smaller competitors and push tenants off the land, the size and number

⁵ Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁶ Sheingate, *The Rise of the Agricultural Welfare State*, 101; Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*; Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

⁷ Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion*, 203; For an old, but still useful, history of the AAA, see Richard Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (University of Missouri Press, 1966).

of farms changed rather markedly. At the end of World War II, the U.S. had nearly six million farms in operation. Three decades later, only 2.3 million could be counted. On average, those remaining farms more than doubled in size from 195 acres to 440. These large farms also used AAA payments to grow their power in the marketplace. They purchased new technology that allowed them increase productivity and their operations accounted for a greater share of sales at the expense of smaller operations. To be sure, this shift occurred at different rates across the U.S. California had long been known for its large farms.⁸ The South had some of the lowest rates of land concentration before 1940. By 1970, those states would be some of the most unequal in terms of land ownership.⁹ The Midwest offers a similar story. By 1970 land concentration had increased, but at a slower pace and with a more equal distribution overall.¹⁰

The rural crisis would have been far less expansive, or devastating, had similar transformations not occurred in two other primary rural industries: mining and timber. In regard to the latter, changes resulted less from government policy than the actions of rapacious firms. Timber had become an important industry in many rural communities from the southeast to the northwest beginning in the nineteenth century. Logging companies practiced little in the way of resource conservation. As a result, by the 1960s many forests had been stripped of their resources and jobs disappeared.¹¹ In the mining industry, slightly

⁸ Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (University of California Press, 1939); Linda and Theo Majka, *Farm Workers, Agribusiness, and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Stoll, *The Fruits of Natural Advantage*; Henke, *Cultivating Science, Harvesting Power*.

⁹ *The Changing Concentration of U.S. Agricultural Production During the 20th Century*, 8-10.

¹⁰ *The Changing Concentration of U.S. Agricultural Production During the 20th Century*, 8-10; Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

¹¹ Lawrence Lipman, *Workers and the Wild: Conservation, Consumerism, and Labor in Oregon, 1910-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980*

different processes played out. Many mining jobs, for example, disappeared as a result of mechanization. Foreign competition also strained many domestic mines, while forcing others to shutter altogether. Consolidation also affected many rural miners. In the Missouri Ozarks, St. Joe Minerals Corporation began buying out competitors in the 1930s, which spurred further job loss. On top of mechanization, competition, and consolidation, many firms quickly stripped mines of their minerals, and left boarded up mines in their wake.¹²

Combined with major changes in the economic structure of agriculture, transformations in mining and timber formed the core of the rural crisis and laid the groundwork for the further destabilization of rural communities.

Another key element of the rural crisis, and one intricately connected to economic restructuring, was population decline. When jobs disappeared, many rural people packed up for cities with better job prospects. Long term, aggregate statistics bear this process out. Though the U.S. was still a majority rural country in 1910, with over half the population in the country, by 1980 nearly three quarters of the population lived in metropolitan areas. This nationwide trend masks even more devastating declines at the local level. Between 1940 and 1950, nearly 100,000 people left the farm country of the Missouri bootheel. In Bacon County, Georgia, twenty five percent of the total population, 8,500 people, left between 1950

(Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 67-8, 153; Thomas Clark, "The Impact of the Timber Industry on the South," *Mississippi Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (March 1972): 141-164; William Robins, "Labor in the Pacific Slope Timber Industry: A Twentieth-Century Perspective," *Journal of the West* (1986): 8-13; Nancy Wood, "Clearcut: A Conservationist Views America's Timber Industry," *American West* 8, no. 6 (November 1971): 10-15; James Fickle, "'Comfortable and Happy?' Louisiana and Mississippi Lumber Workers, 1900-1950," *Louisiana History* 40, no. 4 (October 1999): 407-432.

¹² Ronald Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (University of Kentucky Press, 2008); Thomas Kiffmeyer, *Reformers to Radicals: The Appalachian Volunteers and the War on Poverty* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008); Milton Rafferty, *Ozarks: Land and Life* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001), Ch. 9; Emily Slape, "Ozark Exodus: Population Decline in the Arkansas Ozarks, 1940-1960," (Master's Thesis, Arkansas Tech University, 2015); Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee, *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

and 1960.¹³ Like water circling the bathtub drain, this rural exodus raised the specter of a disappearing and empty rural America.

Poverty and precarity emerged as another central feature of the rural crisis. Small farmers struggled to compete in an economy increasingly dominated by large producers and their incomes dwindled. Others, forced to sell their land or break their leases, turned to daily farm labor, which provided little of the security that landownership or even renting provided. By the mid-1960s, forty-three percent of the poor lived in rural areas. If one includes nonmetropolitan counties, those without a town of more than 50,000 people, over sixty percent of the poor lived in rural areas or small towns. These national unemployment totals conceal the desperation many communities faced. In Calexico, California, where most of the population worked seasonal farm jobs, twenty percent earned less than \$3,000. In Bacon County, three-fourths of its people, many of whom owned or rented small plots of farmland, lived in poverty.¹⁴

The rural crisis also cannot be disentangled from race. In the South, the economic restructuring of agriculture formed part of a much longer history of discrimination against Black farmers. Black landowners rarely received the support the USDA gave white farmers. Black sharecroppers also found it difficult to climb the tenure ladder. Their landlords cheated them out of their earnings and they often took on debts to begin farming each season. Their inability to pay back creditors forced them to migrate in search of new land. The AAA intensified these patterns. AAA subsidies went overwhelmingly to white landowners, who in

¹³ James Milne and John Remmert, *Bootheel Regional Profile* (University of Missouri, Extension Division, 1972), 30; Slash Pine Area Planning and Development Commission, *Area Wide Economic Base and Population Study* (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Community Development, 1975), 45.

¹⁴ Rural Development Corporation, *Calexico's Economic Development: A Preliminary Report* (Los Angeles, 1970), I-5; Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission, *Second Year Planning Statement, Comprehensive Model Cities Program, Alma-Bacon County, Georgia* (Alma, Georgia: Model Cities Commission, 1971), II-6.

turn used those payments to push tenants off the land. Sharecroppers organized the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in 1934 in part to force a more equitable distribution of AAA subsidies. White landowners and state governments met them with violence. As a result, many Black farmers left the rural South, and experienced the second great migration as forced migration.¹⁵ Though many Black farmers left the South, many stayed behind where they struggled to earn a living off the land. Forced expulsion, discrimination, loss of land, and poverty defined the rural crisis for black farmers.

A different pattern prevailed in California, where farmworkers of Mexican descent performed most of the labor on large farms. As in the South, New Deal farm policy enhanced the political and economic power of the state's large farmers. Through the Bracero Program, the state helped California's large farmers procure a flexible, low-wage labor force from Mexico. While farm policy strengthened large landowners, New Deal labor policy failed to protect farmworkers. Key labor laws, particularly the Wagner and Fair Labor Standards Acts, excluded farmworkers. Wages on large farms were dismally low, and workers labored for long hours with little in the way of workplace protections. To scrape a living together, many traveled a circuit of migratory labor that began in California's Imperial Valley and extended north through the Central and Salinas Valleys. Workers periodically organized against this exploitation but were met with violence from landowners and the state.¹⁶ For workers of

¹⁵ Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present* (Princeton University Press, 2016); Jacqueline Jones, *The Dispossessed: America's Underclass from the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Pete Daniel, *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the*

Mexican descent, class and racial exploitation intensified the poverty that defined the rural crisis in other areas.

The final element of the rural crisis was that it spurred a wide-ranging debate about the rural future. By the early 1960s, the notion that rural America faced a crisis achieved relatively wide acceptance. A unified solution, though, did not emerge. Instead, three broad solutions emerged: rural development, land reform and small farm cooperatives, and farm labor organizing. Though quite different, some of their commonalities should be stressed. Each located the root of rural decline in a shifting economy while downplaying explanations that focused on cultural or individual deficiencies. Moreover, they all saw a significant financial and organizational role for the federal government. And though they envisioned the rural future differently, they believed that rural America could not be allowed to shrink and disappear.

The New Deal also proved to be template setting for rural developers and agricultural reformers alike. The former carried to the postwar era the New Deal's planning and development ethos, represented best by the Tennessee Valley Authority.¹⁷ Similarly, the AAA developed a far-reaching, albeit short-lived, land use planning program. Led by Henry Wallace and M.L. Wilson, this program brought together federal officials, county agents, and farmers to work on projects of adult education, rural research, and production planning in

Origin of Our Time (New York: Liveright, 2014); Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2011); Mario T. Garcia, *The Chicano Movement: Perspectives from the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge Press, 2014); George Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Benny Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2016); Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

farm communities.¹⁸ This model of decentralized planning would re-emerge in postwar rural development projects. For grassroots farm activists, the land reform and labor organizing projects of the New Deal prefigured important elements of their programs. The Resettlement Administration (RA), for example, tried to help the small farmers ignored by the AAA. It helped some farmers settle on cooperative farms, while aiding others in making improvements on their small, individually owned plots of land.¹⁹ In the manufacturing sector, the Wagner and Fair Labor Standards Acts provided workers with collective bargaining rights and workplace protections, respectively. Both the land reform and labor reform elements of the New Deal would reappear among agricultural activists in the postwar period.

How, then, did rural developers and agricultural reformers envision the rural future? Proponents of rural development, especially federal policymakers, local rural elites, and social scientists, believed that rural economic restructuring was permanent. They accepted the large farm, for example, as the best way to organize agriculture. Rural development aimed instead to use federal loans and grants, along with state, local, and private sector money, to create new jobs and infrastructure in small towns with the goal of creating a new rural economic base. Development focused in particular on creating new jobs in manufacturing and tourism. The goal was not to create large cities out of small towns, but to use the land and resources available to revive rural economies and stabilize and increase their populations. Rural development was embedded in the Area Redevelopment Act of 1961 as well as its successor, the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965, both of

¹⁷ Michael McDonald and John Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed* (University of Tennessee Press, 1981); Sarah Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Jess Gilbert, *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

¹⁹Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*; Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt*; Brian Cannon, *Remaking the Agrarian Dream: The New Deal's Rural Resettlement Program in the Mountain West* (University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

which operated out of the Commerce Department. The Agriculture Department also operated several of its own rural development initiatives. These policies built a public-private rural development state aimed at reviving, not abandoning, rural communities.

Some rural developers envisioned it as a way to enact major changes in the composition and structure and U.S. industry and population. Orville Freeman, who served as Agriculture Secretary under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and Hugh Denney, a scholar of community development at the University of Missouri, illustrate these ideas. Each man saw the concentration of people and jobs in megacities as detrimental to human life and the economy and hoped that rural development would allow for a broader decentralization of the U.S. Freeman sought to create “Communities of Tomorrow,” or a series of small towns organized around industry and services. These communities would embrace the best features of cities – their jobs and services – with the best features of rural life – small scales and community. Denney embraced a similar idea. He developed an ideal mapping of population and industrial placement that would space out services, infrastructure, and jobs in a network of small, but connected, towns. Regardless of whether or not rural developers embraced these more far-fetched ideas, development promised to remake the economic base of rural America.

A much different approach to the rural crisis emerged among two distinct grassroots agrarian movements. One, developed in California, was represented by the Mexican American farmworkers and activist lawyers that formed California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA). The other, coming from the South, formed around the small, mostly black, farmers in the Federation of Southern Cooperatives (FSC). While their visions were different, each grappled with the question of how to respond to the large-scale farm economy. Unlike rural developers, who embraced the large farm, these activists believed that the rural crisis could

only be solved by dealing with the political and economic inequities created by U.S. agriculture. Each group launched a challenge against farm policy, the political and economic power of large farmers, and the racial exploitation and discrimination that undergirded much of the U.S. farm economy.

CRLA envisioned a highly-regulated farm economy worked by well-compensated and organized farmworkers. Though they accepted the proletarianization of farmworkers in California, they believed large-farms, and their owners, needed to come under regulation from the state. Using the law, CRLA wanted to win collective bargaining rights for workers and regulate field conditions. Unlike New Deal reforms, though, CRLA's lawyers and farmworker clients saw discrimination and racism as a major feature of rural life that needed reform. Their legal reform program was in many ways a method for empowering Mexican American farmworkers. Though CRLA primarily focused on the workplace, it targeted other sectors as well. CRLA saw discrimination affecting not only working conditions, but the broader lives of farmworkers, and it launched lawsuits against longstanding patterns of discrimination in rural housing and education. For CRLA, rural America's future would look more like that of the regulated, unionized manufacturing workforce.

While CRLA accepted the large farm, the FSC wanted to build an alternative to it through a land reform program. The FSC envisioned a farm economy populated by small Black farmers. The group saw an economically empowered black cooperative movement as the best way to secure civil, political, and economic equality for African Americans. Co-ops would help farmers with marketing, the sharing of tools and labor, and the purchase of seeds and machinery. The FSC believed that these arrangements, which had worked well for large farmers, could be of similar benefit to small ones. The FSC also experimented with the communal ownership and operation of farmland. In contrast to the monoculture taking hold

of large-scale farming, the FSC promoted agricultural diversification. The organization hoped that these policies would help black farmers stay on their land. Moreover, the group did not see the city as a haven for Black men and women and hoped that their agricultural revitalization would draw them to the countryside. The FSC ultimately envisioned the creation of an economically self-sufficient and racially just small farm economy.

Rural development and agricultural reform both achieved some, albeit limited, successes. Rural development resulted in the creation of new jobs in both manufacturing and tourism in all of the rural communities examined here. New roads, bridges, homes, and a variety of other public facilities and infrastructure were constructed as well. The FSC built an organization that came to encompass over 30,000 families organized in co-ops across the south, while CRLA scored major legal victories, including an extension of collective bargaining rights to California's farmworkers. However, no group fully implemented their program. In part, the reasons were external. Rural development existed among a host of policies that encouraged rural outmigration and the concentration of people and jobs in cities. Agricultural activists faced similar countervailing trends, but they also faced a resistance that rural developers did not. Large farmers and their allies in the local, state, and federal governments put up a massive resistance to grassroots activists that made implementing their reform programs difficult.

For rural development, though, many of its limitations were internal. The public-private development state created by federal policymakers made it difficult to achieve its major aims. The federal government never provided enough money to fully fund the scale of projects that would be needed to reverse rural decline. Instead, small towns had to compete for limited public financing. Moreover, federal aid went overwhelmingly to white rural communities. With the locus of development planning fixed in small towns, and with those

towns fighting each other over public funds, the broader goal of decentralization, which would require extensive federal planning, would remain elusive. Development also relied on the private sector to create the bulk of new jobs, but private industry also could not meet the demand for new rural work. Thus, many small towns were guaranteed to lose out.

Rural development also conceived of the rural crisis in sometimes narrow ways. First, by accepting the large farm, rural developers ensured they would do little to solve major economic and racial inequalities stemming from the farm economy, an economy that was a major driver of the rural crisis in all its dimensions. They also did not acknowledge the environmental problems beginning to plague many rural communities. Though many experts, policymakers, and local officials worried about traditional ways of life passing, they did not fret over the environmental damage large farming unleashed on rural communities and their land. Eventually, environmental concerns about dam construction in Georgia would be used to halt certain rural development projects. Indeed, as the discussion of California will show, the embrace of dams had disastrous consequences for a small town's economy.

Perhaps the most important limitation revolved around the question of Native Americans, many of whom lived in communities that would be considered rural. The reservations on which they lived had some of the deepest levels of poverty in the U.S. What was striking about expert discourse and policy debates about rural crisis and development, though, was their silence on Native American poverty. Rural developers simply did not consider Native Americans in their policies. Their crisis was different from the rural crisis. Much like agriculture and the environment, then, rural development's sometimes narrow perspective prevented it from fully addressing the rural crisis. Ultimately, the limitations and failures not just of rural development, but of farm labor organizing and land reform as well, opened the way for continued rural decline into the twenty-first century.

Rural America, in general, attracts relatively less attention from historians. While scholars have discussed some of the issues and policies affecting rural communities after World War II, the scale of rural decline and the various movements and policies brought to bear on it have not been studied in a comprehensive way. This project seeks to conceptualize more fully, and argue for the existence of, the postwar rural crisis and the distinct, rural-focused solutions put forth to solve it as a major, underexamined component of postwar U.S. history. Illuminating this distinct, underexamined moment in postwar U.S. offers the opportunity to build upon a rich variety of literatures on the urban crisis, regional studies of rural decline, the War on Poverty, development policy, New Deal liberalism, and rural history.

This dissertation draws in part from the wide-ranging literature on the urban crisis. Scholars of the urban crisis have shown that it resulted from the interaction of economic transformations, public policy, and racism. Moreover, they demonstrate that the crisis resulted from the convergence of long-term trends that played out over the twentieth century.²⁰ This literature has also presented a complicated picture of the public policies designed to reverse the urban crisis. According to historian Wendell Pritchett, policymakers developed “innovative, but conflicting, solutions” to urban problems ranging from poverty, to housing deterioration and segregation, and local government reform. At the grassroots

²⁰ Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Alice O'Connor, “The Privatized City: The Manhattan Institute, the Urban Crisis, and the Conservative Counterrevolution in New York,” *Journal of Urban*

level, civil rights and antipoverty activists waged local campaigns against poverty and unemployment, conditions in the housing market, and policy brutality.²¹ However, as Alice O'Connor has argued, these actions “swam against the tide” of contradictory policy goals, broader economic forces, and limitations internal to the policies.²²

While the urban crisis has received significant attention from historians, its rural counterpart is under-conceptualized, and this project draws on the urban crisis literature to make the case that a similarly disruptive crisis swept rural America. This project seeks to bring that crisis into focus, and it argues that, in many ways, the main outlines of the rural crisis reflected those of the urban. Much like the urban crisis, the rural crisis reflected the convergence of long-term, and deeply intertwined, economic, political, and social problems. Moreover, the solutions to the rural crisis, while sometimes innovative, faced strong headwinds. Though affecting different regions of the U.S., the rural and urban crises shared important DNA.

An analysis of the rural crisis can also better enhance our understanding of its urban counterpart. Proponents of rural development and agricultural reform saw the two crises as linked. Policymakers and grassroots reformers alike argued that the structural changes roiling rural America fed the congestion and poverty of the cities. As rural people lost their jobs,

History 34, no. 2 (January 2008): 333-353; David Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²¹ Self, *American Babylon*; Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Guian McKee, *The Problem of Jobs: Liberalism, Race, and Deindustrialization in Philadelphia* (University of Chicago Press, 2008); Rhonda Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); *The Business of Black Power: Community Development, Capitalism, and Corporate Responsibility in Postwar America*, Laura Warren Hill and Julia Rabig, eds. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012).

²² Wendell Pritchett, “Which Urban Crisis? Regionalism, Race, and Urban Poverty, 1960-1974,” *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 2 (January 2008): 266-286; Jane Berger, “‘There is Tragedy on Both Sides of the Layoff’: Privatization and the Urban Crisis in Baltimore,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 71 (Spring 2007): 29-49; Timothy Weaver, “Urban Crisis: Genealogy of a Concept,” *Urban Studies* 54, no. 9 (July 2017): 2039-2055; O'Connor, “Swimming Against the Tide.”

they moved to the city in an attempt to better their lives. What many found though, were poor living conditions and low-wage jobs. They believed these conditions only exacerbated urban racial divisions and made the possibility of future unrest all the more likely. The solution, then, lay in finding a way to keep people in rural communities, either through new manufacturing and tourism jobs or through land reform measures that helped keep people on the land.

Though historians have not necessarily used the framing of a “rural crisis” before, they have noticed rural poverty and decline. These historians have illuminated major features of rural economic and demographic decline, as well as the ways in which policymakers tried to reverse rural fortunes. Ronald Eller, for example, laid out the combination of public policy and mechanization of key job processes that fueled poverty and rural population decline in Appalachia. As life outside the country grew more appealing, Appalachian rural communities were hollowed out. Eller also analyzed the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to address these issues. The ARC’s primary focus revolved around the construction of new highways and job opportunities in larger Appalachian cities. Its goal was not to help people stay in their communities by providing new job but make it easier for people to leave their failing towns. A different approach appeared in the South. There, state and local officials sought to industrialize their economies by luring northern manufacturers to small towns by using tax credits and promises of a business friendly climate.²³

²³ Robert Weise, “New Towns for Red Bird, Kentucky: Isolation and Civic Society in Twentieth Century Discussions of Appalachian Poverty,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2001); Ronald Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (University of Kentucky Press, 2008); James Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); James Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008); David Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994); Tami Friedman, “Exploiting the North-South Differential: Corporate Power, Southern Politics, and the Decline of Organized Labor after World War II,” *Journal of American History* 95,

This project builds upon this scholarship in two ways. First, it argues that in order to properly understand postwar rural decline, the scale must be enlarged. Rural poverty and decline affected a wide swath of small towns. A crisis roiled nearly all rural America, not just Appalachia and the South. Moreover, while this project does examine the rural crisis in a southern state, it brings into focus a far richer set of alternatives to rural decline. In contrast to the ARC, rural development, labor organizing, and land reform all saw rural America as a worthy site of investment or reform. In their own ways, these distinct programs assumed that depopulation would not solve small town troubles and put forth instead solutions that would bolster rural communities. Each solution examined here also differed sharply with the southern industrial attraction model. The latter's primary focus revolved almost solely around bringing in new jobs, and state and local leaders cared little for the quality of the work and sought to maintain the southern class and race status quo. In contrast, land reformers and agricultural labor organizers directly challenged the power structure of the farm economy. Rural developers also put forth an alternative to the southern model. Their policies banned industrial poaching and tried, unsuccessfully, to do outlaw tax giveaways for industry. Moreover, rural developers sought a deeper investment in services and infrastructure that southern industrial attraction ignored. Indeed, the expansion of state capacities in this direction would have been anathema to many southern governors and small-town mayors who tried to limit the welfare state's expansion. This project therefore shows that the rural crisis ignored regional boundaries and that a much wider array of solutions that focused specifically on reviving small towns existed.

This project also contributes to the ongoing reevaluation of the War on Poverty, and in particular the grassroots mobilizations it inspired. Historians working in this field have

no. 2 (Sept. 2008): 323-348; Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy Year Quest for Cheap*

challenged traditional interpretations of the War on Poverty that emerged in the 1970s, but which continue to shape popular and scholarly understandings of it today. These older views generally focused on the workings of federal level policymakers and the social scientists they turned to in order to craft the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The policymakers and social scientists who shaped this bill largely saw poverty as a reflection of individual or cultural problems, ensuring that its structural underpinnings would go untouched.²⁴ While this scholarship revealed important elements of postwar antipoverty policy, new scholarship has painted a far different picture by focusing on the ideas and actions of people at the grassroots. There, local activists linked together the political, economic, and racial structures that created poverty and developed antipoverty campaigns that tried to deal with these structural problems. Many of these local antipoverty campaigns also produced multiracial coalitions that opened the possibilities for wider reform.²⁵

Labor (New York: The New Press, 2001).

²⁴ Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984); Ira Katznelson, "Was the Great Society a Lost Opportunity?," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*, eds. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton University Press, 1989); See also, Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁵ Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (New York: Beacon Press, 2005); Wesley G. Phelps, *A People's War on Poverty: Urban Politics and Grassroots Activists in Houston* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014); Kent B. Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for a Great Society* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds., *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964–1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty: From Watts to East L.A.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008); Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); William S. Clayson, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Gordon K. Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960–1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Thomas Kiffmeyer, "We are Ordered to do Everything": The National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, American Social Thought, and the War on Poverty," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 107, no. 3 (Summer 2009); *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964–1980*, eds. Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Susan Youngblood Ashmore, *Carry it On: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008);

This project's examination of CRLA and the FSC, both funded by the War on Poverty, expands upon this grassroots turn in the literature. The ideas and actions of each group reaffirm the arguments of the grassroots scholarship by showing that, in the hands of local activists, the War on Poverty could be used to attack the structural conditions that led to poverty. These two groups also show that the War on Poverty made important interventions into the agricultural economy. While much of the new grassroots scholarship is urban-focused, a growing contingent of it has brought to light rural antipoverty struggles. However, these studies have not fully examined how the War on Poverty was brought to bear on economic, political, and racial inequality in the farm economy. The FSC and CRLA ultimately point to the wider range of problems that the War on Poverty addressed.

The rural crisis also offers an opportunity to contribute to the growing literature on development. Scholars have investigated development as both an idea and a set of policies pursued by the U.S. government and philanthropies during the twentieth century in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia. Modernization theory guided many of these projects. This idea posited a linear path of historical change that began with primitive societies and ended with the capitalist, urban-industrial society exemplified by the U.S. Many proponents backed large scale infrastructure and industrial development programs that would bring supposedly backward societies into the future. Another smaller scale vision existed as

Thomas Kiffmeyer, *Reformers to Radicals: The Appalachian Volunteers and the War on Poverty* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008); Francois Hamlin, *Crossroads at Clarksdale: The Black Freedom Struggle in the Mississippi Delta after World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Robert Korstad and James Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Inequality in 1960s America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Françoise Hamlin, *Crossroads at Clarksdale: The Black Freedom Struggle in the Mississippi Delta after World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Stephen Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

well.²⁶ According to Daniel Immerwahr, U.S. policymakers, diplomats, and social scientists sought “development without modernization.”²⁷ Proponents of this vision sought to maintain the structure of overseas rural communities while improving them with small “community development” projects. Whether they embraced modernization or community development, historians have argued that these programs flourished abroad in the years after World War II and made their way back to the U.S. to influence policy at home during the 1960s and 1970s.²⁸

While this project frames the postwar rural crisis and its varied solutions as part of the broader, global discussion of development, the solutions put forth to solve the rural crisis do not fit so easily into categories established by scholars of foreign development. Rural development, for example, sought a middle ground between the large scale modernizers and the community developers. Rural development did not want to turn small towns into large cities, but instead sought to bring modern amenities and jobs to small towns while preserving their small scales. Land reform and labor organizing, on the other hand, were not promoted by U.S. policymakers abroad in the postwar period. Instead, they often pushed the sorts of high-tech, high-yield farming taking over U.S. agriculture. Aside from offering alternative, and somewhat insulated, models of rural renewal, the U.S. rural crisis also challenges the

²⁶ David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Harvard University Press, 2003); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Harvard University Press, 2003); Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003); for examples of European-led development initiatives, see Joseph Hodge, *The Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Ohio University Press, 2007); Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory* (University of Illinois Press, 2011).

²⁷ Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

²⁸ Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*; Nancy Kwak, *A World of Homeowners: American Power and the Politics of Housing Aid* (University of Chicago Press, 2015); Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America’s Vision for Human Rights* (Harvard University Press, 2005); Amy Offner,

argument about the circulation of development ideas, policies, and personnel. Far from waiting for development to circle back around to the U.S., this project argues that state officials, social scientists, and grassroots reformers sought out their own solutions to rural decline at the same time as foreign development projects proliferated abroad.

This project's analysis of the rural crisis also seeks to intervene in the ongoing debates about liberalism and its legacy, particularly after the New Deal. One of the key narratives of U.S. liberalism, articulated by Alan Brinkley, argues that it underwent a major transformation in the late 1930s and early 1940s that ultimately saw an "end of reform." During the New Deal, liberalism tried to reform capitalism to the benefit of a broad working class. The ideas undergirding the New Deal, while varied, assumed that the federal government would need to play a larger role in bringing about economic security and equality. Following the strengthening of Congressional conservatives and the defeat of organized labor in the South in the 1940s, the horizon of liberalism diminished, and the period of New Deal reform ended. Going forward, liberals would turn away from deeper state interventions, focusing instead on the maintenance of a patchy welfare state and a fiscal policy focused on encouraging economic growth and managing demand by "fine-tuning" the balance between unemployment and inflation. While New Deal-era policymakers had seen poverty and unemployment as a product of economic structure, these problems were increasingly characterized as individual or cultural after World War II.²⁹

This argument has exercised considerable influence over how historians understand agricultural and economic development policy. While the AAA dominated agricultural discourse in the 1930s, New Deal programs like the Resettlement and Farm Security

Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

Administrations represented a reformist agricultural ideal. However, according to Jess Gilbert, the shuttering of the Farm Security Administration in 1946 symbolized the denouement of farm reform. In Tore Olsson's words, "questions of productivity and efficiency, rather than landlessness and poverty, were the watchwords of the decades that followed."³⁰ Similarly, scholars have portrayed the Area Redevelopment Act as a poor successor to the New Deal. Though it carried forward some of the New Deal's planning ethos, Gregory Wilson has argued that the ARA was more reflective of the limited liberalism of the postwar period.³¹

Historians have begun to question such sharply defined periodizations. Guian McKee's study of Philadelphia, for example, challenged the characterizations of liberalism made by the "end of reform" school. McKee argues for the existence of a "local liberalism" among city officials and grassroots activists after World War II who did not shy away from using the power of the state to revive industry, create jobs, and train workers. Others have argued that in order to understand twentieth century U.S. politics, historians should soften sharp periodizations and focus more on durable structures and ideologies. Brent Cebul and Mason Williams, for example, argue that "cooperative federalism" characterized liberalism

²⁹ Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (Vintage Books, 1995); Gary Gerstle and Steve Fraser, eds. *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

³⁰ Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics*; Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*; Brian Cannon, *Remaking the Agrarian Dream: The New Deal's Rural Resettlement Program in the Mountain West* (University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Paul Mertz, *New Deal Policy and Southern Rural Poverty* (Louisiana State University, 1978); the quote is from Tore Olsson, *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the U.S. and Mexican Countryside* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 11; For a similar argument, see Jess Gilbert, *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal* (Yale University Press, 2016).

³¹ Gregory Wilson, "Deindustrialization, Poverty, and Federal Area Redevelopment in the United States, 1945-1965," in *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, eds., Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Gregory Wilson, *Communities Left Behind: The Area Redevelopment Administration, 1945-1965* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009).

before and after World War II.³² In this framework, federal funds flowed to state and local governments and the private sector to pursue economic development projects. Their work compliments scholars of the U.S. state who have found that public-private arrangements and an adherence to federalism have long characterized public policy.³³ Amy Offner's work on economic development in Colombia and the U.S. makes a similar point. In each country, Offner argues, a decentralized, public-private apparatus for pursuing a variety of development goals emerged. This planning apparatus helped to build up a developmental state in the first few decades of the postwar period, while the argument for decentralization also deconstructed that state in the 1980s.³⁴

The case of the rural crisis suggests that a more muscular liberalism, and one defined by a "cooperative federalism," characterized how policymakers, social scientists, and local people sought to reverse rural decline. Land reformers and labor organizers, for example, carried on the long tradition of agrarian critiques of concentrated political and economic power dating back to the populists. Their campaigns suggest that narrow questions of productivity and efficiency did not exhaust the horizons of postwar agricultural discourse.

³² Brent Cebul, Lily Geismer, and Mason Williams, eds., *Shaped by the State: Toward A New Political History of the Twentieth Century*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

³³ William Novak, "The Myth of the Weak American State," *American Historical Review* 113, no. 3 (2008): 752-72; Richard John, "Governmental Institutions as Agents of Change: Rethinking American Political Development in the Early Republic," *Studies in American Political Development* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 347-380; see also, James Sparrow, William Novak, and Stephen Sawyer, eds., *Boundaries of the State in U.S. History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ellis Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an 'Associational State,' 1921-1928," *Journal of American History* 61, no. 1 (June 1974): 116-40; and Ellis Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and their Institutions, 1917-1933* (Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Press, 1992); see Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Andrew Morris, *The Limits of Voluntarism: Charity and Welfare from the New Deal to the Great Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Steven Smith and Martin Lipsky, *Nonprofits for Hire: The Welfare State in the Age of Contracting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

³⁴ Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy*.

Rural development also did not mark a major break with the New Deal past. The local liberalism that McKee found on display in Philadelphia manifested in many small towns in their pursuit of new jobs, infrastructure, housing, and social services. This “local” liberalism also extended to federal policymakers. While federal rural developers may have operated in a context less open to state interventions, they pushed against moderates and conservatives for a more aggressive response to the rural crisis led by the federal government. They saw rural decline as a structural, not individual, problem, and argued for a greater federal role in ensuring a more equitable distribution of economic growth and jobs. The rural development state they created followed the longstanding patterns of state development outlined by Cebul and Williams.

If the story of the rural crisis and rural development offers an opportunity to reevaluate the sharp boundaries between New Deal and postwar liberalism, it opens a similar window onto liberalism’s putative end: the Ronald Reagan administration. Historians long saw the Reagan presidency as marking a sharp break with the “New Deal Order.” Recently, however, this periodization has been questioned. Cebul and Williams, for example, challenged the association of centralization with liberalism and the New Deal, and decentralization and the market with conservatism or neoliberalism after the 1980s. The transition from liberal to conservative power was instead marked by a renegotiation of the bounds of cooperative federalism. Offner similarly argued that decentralization and public-private policymaking characterized each era. Still others, including Martha Derthick, Stephen Teles, and Robert Collins have suggested that Reagan’s administration had much less success in rolling back the state than early historians argued.³⁵ What these debates about Reagan’s

³⁵ Gerstle and Fraser, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*; for more recent evaluations, see Richard Conley, ed., *Reassessing the Reagan Presidency* (New York: University Press of America, 2003); W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham, eds., *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and its Legacies* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003); Robert

legacy suggests is the need to pay close attention to particular policy areas in order to better understand political shifts in the twentieth century.

The rural crisis offers just such an opportunity and does not paint a simple picture of conservatism overtaking liberalism. The varied solutions to the rural crisis approached the 1980s on different tracks. The arrival of the Reagan administration did not mark a major turning point for the agrarian activism of CRLA and the FSC. By the time Reagan took office, federal support for each group had tapered and the most reformist elements of their programs had been subdued. On the other hand, rural development might, at first glance, offer a story of continuity. Support for rural development remained strong through the 1970s, and its public-private structure might suggest that the Reagan administration could be sympathetic to it. However, the Reagan administration's approach to rural development represented a rather dramatic break from postwar policies. Though Gregory Wilson has argued that the ARA served as the model for the market-based development programs of the 1980s, the Reagan administration disdained the programs created by the postwar liberals and offered a much different development policy.³⁶ Reagan tried, but failed, to permanently cut the development programs of Commerce and Agriculture. However, his administration succeeded in dramatically curtailing their funding. Moreover, it deflated development and its broader aims as a policy goal. In place of an active federal policy of investments in infrastructure and job creation, the administration offered deregulation, privatization, and more local and state control as the strategies for achieving rural prosperity.

The rural crisis also offers an opportunity to contribute to the fields of rural and agricultural history. Historians of rural America have shown it to be in a nearly constant state

Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture during the Reagan Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); see also, Cebul and Williams, "Really and Truly a Partnership," and Kim Phillips-Fein, "The History of Neoliberalism," in *Shaped by the State*.

³⁶ Wilson, *Communities Left Behind*, 152.

of change. For much of the field's history, historians sought to explain what they called the "agrarian transition." Not unlike proponents of modernization theory, these historians embraced a largely linear conception of historical time that saw an unstoppable march of modernity trample over traditional rural folkways. Many of these historians lamented this process and romanticized rural life.³⁷ While much of this scholarship portrayed rural America as experiencing a forced adaptation, since the 1980s new rural historians portrayed rural communities as driving capitalist development, economic growth, and social change, challenging assumptions that equated progress with urban and industrial society.³⁸ Regardless of their approach, these historians frequently equate agricultural America with rural America.

This project takes up the suggestion of Anne Effland to move beyond this equation of rural with agriculture.³⁹ First, it examines rural areas with economies not defined by agriculture, or where agriculture made up only one part of its economy. This approach was dictated in part by policymakers and other supporters of rural development who included nonfarming communities in their discussion of the rural crisis. More importantly, instead of taking "rural" as a static category – one whose limits are defined by population levels or a particular industry associated with rural communities – this project seeks to analyze the

³⁷ David Vaught, "State of the Art – Rural History, or Why is There No Rural History of California?" *Agricultural History* 74, no. 4 (Autumn 2000); Robert Swierenga, "The New Rural History: Defining the Parameters," *Great Plains Quarterly* (Fall 1981).

³⁸ Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, editors, *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Christopher Clark, "The Agrarian Context of American Capitalist Development," Jonathan Levy, "The Mortgage Worked the Hardest: The Fate of Landed Independence in Nineteenth-Century America," Edward Baptist, "Toxic Debt, Liar Loans, Collateralized and Securitized Human Beings, and the Panic of 1837," Inheriting Property and Debt: From Family Security to Corporate Accumulation," in Michael Zakim and Gary Kornbluth, eds., *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012; Gabriel Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

³⁹ Anne Effland, "When Rural Does Not Equal Agricultural," 74, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 489-501.

shifting meaning of rurality. As discussions among rural sociologists show, the meaning of rurality was hardly a settled matter, and the rural crisis threw those conflicted interpretations into further question. Solutions to the rural crisis – either land reform, farmworker organizing, or rural development – envisioned rural futures quite distinct from the past. The postwar period ultimately saw a rural economy and conceptions of rurality in flux as small town leaders, grassroots activists, social scientists, and policymakers tried to solve the rural crisis.

The breadth and depth of the rural crisis requires that this project cast a wide net. It brings together the history of ideas – ideas about rural America, its decline, and how the crisis should be resolved – with the history of policymaking. The rural crisis cannot be captured, though, by only paying attention to experts and policymakers. How the various solutions to the rural crisis played out on the ground provides a better sense of what people wanted out of a revived rural America, while also illustrating the promises and pitfalls of the solutions themselves. This project therefore moves from higher level debates about the rural crisis that played out among experts and the creation of federal level policies to the how rural development and agricultural activism looked at the local level.

The extent of the rural crisis can also only be understood by surveying distinct rural regions across the United States. While the image that often gets conjured up of rural America includes a barn on a small farm, rural communities and the industries that support them range widely. This project focuses on California, Missouri, and Georgia. Each state examined here brings with it distinct characteristics that, when brought together, highlight the extent of the rural crisis. California helps illustrate the poverty and exploitation, faced most often by Mexican Americans, that occurred on its large farms. It also illustrates the political

and class power held by large agricultural elites and their consequent ability to mobilize against farmworker movements. There is more to rural California, though, than its large farms. This project also looks to its more remote, northern regions to examine the plight of towns once grounded in timber and mining.

Missouri highlights a far different set of rural issues. This project focuses particularly on the Ozarks, long associated in the popular imagination with isolated mountain communities and a hearty, hardworking rural culture. The Ozarks help illuminate the problems faced by marginal farming and mining communities, many of which were populated by poor whites. Rural Georgia, populated with many small farmers as well, offers a similar story of impoverished white communities eagerly undertaking rural development. However, both states had significant rural Black populations that worked primarily as sharecroppers, tenants, and farm hands, though some owned farms as well. The plight of these communities offers insight into the rural Black experience and how Black farm movements tried to reimagine rural America. Thus, while this project covers a lot of ground, it needs to in order to show the pervasiveness of the rural crisis, but also the variety of ways that people tried to re-envision and revive rural America.

This project begins by examining the response of social scientists working in rural sociology, community development, and agricultural economics to the unfolding rural crisis. In their own distinct ways, social scientists helped to shape understandings of the rural crisis and how it might be reversed. Rural sociologists, for example, focused considerable attention on the disappearance of what this project calls “rurality,” or a distinctly rural culture. Largely ill-defined, sociologists debated whether or not a distinct rurality existed in the postwar period. Agricultural economists and community developers, on the other hand, engaged in debates about how best rural America should be revived, or if it should be saved at all. These

debates proved to be of more than academic importance. Social scientists created a framework for understanding the rural crisis and many would go on to shape and implement rural development policy.

The next three chapters examine how these debates played out in policy at the federal and local level. Chapter two examines the creation of a federal rural development policy in the 1950s. It traces in particular the passage of the Area Redevelopment Act in 1961, the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965, and the many rural development initiatives launched by the USDA. This chapter argues that policymakers crafted a rural development policy at odds with the emerging moderate Keynesian consensus, and sought to solve the structural problems plaguing small towns. Chapters three and four examine the implementation of key planks of the rural development project. The third chapter looks at the fate of new infrastructure projects and industrial attraction in small town Missouri, Georgia, and California. Chapter four looks at the implementation of rural tourism projects in those same states. Each set of rural development initiatives experienced some success, but overall, they failed to solve the rural crisis.

Chapters five and six turn toward two grassroots agrarian movements that emerged in California on the one hand, and Missouri and Georgia on the other. Chapter five explores the attempt of California Rural Legal Assistance to bring New Deal style industrial regulations and collective bargaining policy to the large-scale farm economy of California. Chapter six examines the much different program pursued by the Federation of Southern Cooperatives and their attempt to build a cooperative, small farm economy for the region's black farmers.

This story concludes by examining the fate of rural development after 1980. While rural problems were not a major priority for the Reagan administration, it did lead to important changes, particularly in the policy of rural development. The administration's

actions in the field of rural development dramatically reduced the federal role in making investments in small towns, while enlarging even further the role of the private sector in creating new rural jobs. Indicators of job growth and population suggested some aggregate improvements in rural America through the 1970s. However, the abandonment of rural development policy removed one of the only tools for small towns to solve their problems of demographic and economic decline and opened the way for a deepening of the rural crisis that has not abated in the decades since.

This project thus tells the history of how postwar Americans tried to end the rural crisis and, in the process, rebuild and redefine rural America. Far from ignoring rural problems or encouraging outmigration, a broad swath of policymakers, rural experts, and local rural people tried to revive it. Confronted by a profound crisis rooted in deep, structural changes to the rural economy, they pursued varied, often conflicting, programs of rural renewal that ultimately failed to stop the flow of people and jobs out of the countryside.

Chapter One

A Post-Rural America? Postwar Experts and the Rural Crisis

Some of the first people to begin examining the rural crisis came from the social sciences. Rural experts played an essential role in framing how the origins of the rural crisis were understood, the impacts it made on small towns, and the ways the crisis could be resolved. This chapter traces the ideas and debates of academic experts working in rural sociology, agricultural economics, and the emerging, if amorphous, field of community development. What came from their work was an extensive if not always coherent debate about the major changes remaking rural life. Though they provided sometimes different interpretations of the rural crisis, debate among these rural experts focused on a few core themes. One of their major concerns revolved around the character and origins of the changes reshaping rural America. Rural experts pointed overwhelmingly to the restructuring of rural economies as the source of the rural crisis. Another set of debates revolved around the many ways that relationships between rural and urban places, both domestically and abroad, shifted in the postwar period. The last major theme that emerged from these debates focused on solutions to the rural crisis and what role, if any, the state might play in reviving small towns. Some experts proposed letting rural communities largely wither, while others advocated for a rural development policy that would build infrastructure and create new jobs in struggling small towns. While these debates occurred largely in academic journals, many expert ideas would go on to inform the creation and implementation of rural development policy. Rural expert discourse ultimately opens a window onto the broader state of confusion and anxiety surrounding the future of rural America in the postwar period.

Working in the midst of deep structural changes in rural America, social scientists understood them in ways both capacious and narrow. With the exception of agricultural

economists, many rural experts did not see the changes sweeping small towns as solely impacting farm communities. While agriculture figured prominently in many of their debates, their studies showed that the same processes of economic restructuring, demographic decline, and poverty impacted a broad swath of rural communities. Moreover, the rural development policies that many of them came to champion re-envisioned the place of the small town in the U.S. Far from abandoning rural communities, academic proponents of rural development wanted to revive rural economies with new industries. Some of the more far-reaching supporters of rural development even envisioned it as a way to remake all of the U.S. by decentralizing industry and population in a network of small towns.

However, academic debates about the rural crisis also contained major blind spots. Many of the limits of postwar rural expertise stemmed from the overwhelmingly white, male, and Midwestern identity of those experts. Many grew up on small farms and their concerns reflect those origins. Though they highlighted the economic origins of the rural crisis, racial inequality and discrimination within rural communities did not figure into their analysis. They understood the rural crisis as a largely white rural crisis. Additionally, their understanding of the rural crisis did not fully address the role of public policy in spurring rural change, nor did they critique the political and economic power structures in rural America that produced many of the problems they identified. This oversight largely reflects the fact they worked in academic departments linked to the USDA. This is not to suggest some conspiracy of silence. Instead, many of these social scientists embraced the large-scale farm economy produced by the policies pushed by the USDA, while still seeking solutions to the problems it created.

These experts debated similar subjects and themes, but they approached them in different ways. Rural sociologists studied the shifting economic and social relationships

within rural communities, and their effect upon rural identity. While the field struggled to develop a coherent vision for a new rural America, many nonetheless promoted rural development as a solution to rural decline. Scholars working in community development articulated an analysis of economic restructuring not unlike rural sociologists. They too believed it threatened the economic and cultural foundation of small towns. What set them apart from rural sociologists though, was their fuller vision of rural renewal. They articulated a vision that revolved around community driven, but federally financed, rural development policy that would result in a broader demographic and economic restructuring of the U.S. Agricultural economists, on the other hand, studied the emergence of the “agribusiness” economy and the problem of the small, low-income farmer. While many agricultural economists supported rural development, this chapter will highlight an alternative vision embraced by some in the field. These economists saw changes in rural America as part of a rational adjustment to market forces and argued that policymakers should not intervene to create new jobs in rural communities. Instead, displaced farmers should find work in cities and suburbs.

This chapter focuses primarily on rural expert debate from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. During this period, the changes remaking rural society came into focus for social scientists and the effects of the rural crisis became impossible to ignore. By the end of the 1950s a rough consensus emerged that rural economic restructuring had destabilized small towns across the U.S. and that some sort of response would be needed. The way rural experts responded to questions about the origins of rural poverty and population decline helped create a sense that rural America was experiencing a crisis, not only among social scientists but, as later chapters will show, in policymaking circles as well.

Though their approaches to the rural crisis differed, rural sociologists, agricultural economists, and community developers shared similar backgrounds. Overwhelmingly, rural experts were white, male, from the Midwest, and had often grown up on farms. In this way, they were not much different from many midcentury academics. In rural sociology, a small, Midwestern farm background was common.⁴⁰ Midwestern institutions dominated the field as well. Based on the number of publications in the flagship journal *Rural Sociology*, published out of the University of Missouri, scholars from Missouri, Michigan, and Wisconsin published most, with Cornell and Penn State rounding out the top five. Even if they ended up in a non-Midwest institution, most postwar rural sociologists had a Midwest background.⁴¹ A similar story can be told for agricultural economics. Many came from, or worked in, Midwestern colleges. By the 1930s, Iowa State University, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Wisconsin were major centers of research.⁴² One of the first academic departments for community development, and the first to offer advanced degrees, started at the University of Missouri and some of its early leaders had Midwest farm backgrounds.⁴³ While the rural background of many of these experts made them sensitive to rural issues, they also saw the rural crisis through a particular lens that obscured and downplayed certain features. They took their background as the typical rural experience and focused much, but

⁴⁰ Jess Gilbert, *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Richard Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (University of Missouri Press, 1966); William Sewell, "Rural Sociological Research, 1936-1965," *RS* 30, no. 4 (1966): 428-451.

⁴¹ Michael Grimes, Thomas Pinhey, and June Phifer, "Department Prestige in Rural Sociology: Its Measurement and Comparison with General Sociological Prestige Hierarchies," *RS* 43, no. 1 (1978): 7-16.

⁴² Gilbert, *Planning Democracy*; Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Willard Cochrane, *Agricultural Economics at the University of Minnesota, 1886-1979* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Experiment Station, 1983), 69.

⁴³ Hugh Denney, "History and Current Status of Community Development Work at the University of Missouri," September 1965, Folder: Budget, Box 1, Arthur Hugh Denney Papers, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia.

not all, of their efforts on understanding how postwar rural decline impacted the communities from which they came.

Though their shared rural background gave them considerable authority in framing the rural crisis, so too did the broader expansion of universities and the growing cachet of experts after World War II. University growth was driven in part by the G.I. Bill, funding for Cold War related projects, and other public investments in research and education that resulted in an explosion in the number of students attending post-secondary institutions. Alongside this growth in the university system was a rise in the stature of the expert. The professionalization of social science that began in the late nineteenth century deepened by the middle of the twentieth. Experts enjoyed greater social prestige and many of them worked in the public sector or had some access to political power.⁴⁴ Though the rural experts examined here would not share the same reputation as other experts, particularly those in the harder sciences, they still benefited professionally from the postwar university boom.

Postwar rural experts also profited handsomely from the expansion of the USDA and its deepening ties to the university system provided rural experts with a large base of employment and funding for research. The 1887 Hatch Act and 1914 Smith-Lever Act created the experiment and extension systems in land grant colleges, respectively. These places became critical sites for the creation and dissemination of rural research. The 1925 Purnell Act also expanded federal support for sociological and economic research in the

⁴⁴ Mary Furner, *Advocacy and Objectivity: A Crisis in the Professionalization of Social Science, 1965-1905* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1975); Michael Bernstein, *A Perilous Progress: Economists and Public Purpose in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); James Smith, *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite* (New York: Free Press, 1993); Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Rebecca Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University: The Transformation of Stanford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Matthew Levin, *Cold War University: Madison and the New Left in the Sixties* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

extension system.⁴⁵ As a result, rural social scientists became increasingly prevalent in universities. In rural sociology, only six schools awarded PhDs in the field before World War II. By the end of the 1950s, 874 rural sociologists taught and researched in 610 academic institutions. Twenty-five states also employed rural sociologists in their extension programs.⁴⁶ While the growth of community development in universities was largely a postwar phenomenon, they too benefited from these earlier policies. When universities created community development programs, they were often linked to their extension programs and received USDA funding for their research and practice. By the mid-1960s thirty five universities had community development programs.⁴⁷ Agricultural economists similarly profited from the growth of the USDA and university system. The postwar period saw a great boom in the field, which became an established part of universities, either in separate agricultural economics departments or as specialties within standard economics departments.⁴⁸ To an extent unrivaled by the other two groups, agricultural economists became key parts of the USDA bureaucracy at the federal level. Their research on commodity prices and the functioning of agricultural markets became essential components of the farm policy birthed during the New Deal, which required massive amounts of specialized data for its operations.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Nelson, *Rural Sociology*, 86-8.

⁴⁶ Olaf Larson, "The Role of Rural Sociology in a Changing Society," *RS* 24, no. 1 (1959): 1-10.

⁴⁷ D.L. Beran, *Community Development in Colleges and Universities in the United States* (Columbia: University of Missouri Department of Regional and Community Affairs, 1967), 10.

⁴⁸ Willard Cochrane, *Agricultural Economics at the University of Minnesota, 1886-1979* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Experiment Station, 1983); Gregory Perry, "What is the Future of Agricultural Economics Departments and the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association?" *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 32, no. 1 (2010): 117-134.

⁴⁹ Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*; Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics*; Daniel Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928* (Princeton University Press, 2001); Adam Sheingate, *The Rise of the Agricultural Welfare State: Institutions and Interest Group Power in the United States, France, and Japan* (Princeton University Press, 2001); Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

However, all this expansion occurred at precisely the moment that the foundations of rural America began to shift considerably. These shifts forced rural experts to reckon with the way they understood the dynamics of rural economies and communities in sometimes new ways. How they responded to these major rural transformations, though, depended in large part on the histories and assumptions that shaped the fields in which they worked. While many of the rural experts examined here shared similar backgrounds, taught in comparable institutions, and benefited from postwar university expansion, they brought with them distinct interests that influenced how they viewed the rural crisis, what they thought about its larger impact, and how to craft the best solution for addressing the problems it created.

Rural sociology's early history was defined by a focus on practical problems and applied research. The field began to form in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when traditional sociologists turned their attention toward rural institutions, particularly the family, school system, and church. Industrialization and urbanization seemed to threaten rural society, and sociologists tried to understand how those forces were reshaping small towns.⁵⁰ This practical emphasis expanded during the Progressive Era with the publication of the Report of Country Life Commission in 1911. This report publicized problems related to farm profitability, farm population decline, farmer organization, and education for future farmers.⁵¹ In the wake of this report, rural sociologists dedicated a lot of their research toward studying these issues and advocating for better education for rural people in general and farmers in particular. A more radical rural sociological tradition emerged around Howard Odum, Rupert Vance, and Arthur Raper at the University of North Carolina. There, rural

⁵⁰ Lowry Nelson, *Rural Sociology: Its Origins and Growth in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1969).

sociologists studied southern political and economic structures and detailed the vast racial and class inequality that underpinned southern society. To a much greater extent than Progressive Era research, this southern strand struck at the heart of rural inequality and would help shape New Deal programs dealing with southern poverty and the problems of farm tenancy in the region.⁵² While rural sociologists at North Carolina and elsewhere performed important and pathbreaking scholarship on the south, their work remained in the field's minority. Instead, the overwhelmingly Midwest and small farm heritage of the field focused research on different topics that, while important, were less controversial.

For understanding the field's postwar response to the rural crisis, the work of Charles Galpin looms much larger. Galpin, a minister turned rural sociologist, published in 1915 a study of a rural Wisconsin town. Galpin delineated the boundaries of its neighborhood – a collection of farm families anchored around a church and school – and its community. The rural community radiated farther, and comprised the village or small town, the professionals and merchants who lived there, and the farmers they served.⁵³ Galpin's study inspired many rural sociologists in the USDA's Division of Farm Life and in rural sociology departments to define rural neighborhoods and communities in many other places. Though rural sociologists gained new insights into the economic and social structures of rural life, their studies reflected the discipline's larger limitations: they focused mostly on white, Midwestern

⁵¹ William Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Kennikat Press, 1974); Scott Peters and Paul Morgan, "The Country Life Commission: Rethinking a Milestone in Agricultural History," *Agricultural History* 78, no. 3 (2004): 289-316.

⁵² Howard Odum, *Race and Rumors of Race: The American South in the Early Forties* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Arthur Raper, *Sharecroppers All* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941); O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*; Louis Mazzari, *Southern Modernist: Arthur Raper from the New Deal to the Cold War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

⁵³ Charles Galpin, *The Social Anatomy of an Agricultural Community* (Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin, 1915).

towns.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, many rural sociologists, who themselves grew up in a “Galpin community,” saw it as the typical rural community. That community’s experiences with rural decline in the postwar structured their understanding of the rural crisis. A major focus of their research focused on debating the impact of economic restructuring and population decline on the community outlined by Galpin.

Scholars working in community development also expressed great concern about the decline of this rural community. In contrast to rural sociology, though, the disciplinary boundaries of community development were more amorphous. The Department of Community Development at the University of Missouri, founded in 1957, illustrates this point. Missouri’s department was recognized as one of the earliest and as having “the best academic program for training community development specialists.”⁵⁵ The department had two main functions: helping small towns with development projects and training specialists in community development. The department’s specialists – both faculty and students – provided those development services. Though the department trained specialists in a PhD program, the education they received was more eclectic than many graduate programs. Students took courses in anthropology, economics, rural sociology, political science, social work, and geography.⁵⁶ The faculty, who received PhD’s mostly from Midwestern schools, came from anthropology, economics, political science, education, and other fields.⁵⁷ The purpose of this education was not to produce a focused researcher, but a practitioner. The

⁵⁴ Nelson, *Rural Sociology*, 34-41; N.L. Sims, *The Rural Community* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920).

⁵⁵ “Summary Report: Department Self-Study of Regional and Community Affairs,” February 1979, Folder 16, Box 4, Department of Community Development Papers, University Archives, University of Missouri, Columbia.

⁵⁶ William Howard, “Survey, Analysis, and Comments on the Curriculum Development of the Department of Regional and Community Affairs,” MS Thesis, University of Missouri, 1968, 16.

⁵⁷ Beran, *Community Development*, 23; “Summary Report,” 37.

department hoped that this interdisciplinary training would provide students with a breadth of knowledge they could take with them in their careers as community developers.⁵⁸

Though the education received in the Department of Community Development was varied, it did not totally lack unifying elements. The process of community development, a focus on small towns, and the training of the community development expert provided important structure. Though community development flowered in the postwar period, Arthur Dunham, a Missouri faculty member, pointed to a 1915 book by Frank Farrington entitled *Community Development: Making the Small Town a Better Place to Live and a Better Place in which to do Business* as a prototype for postwar efforts.⁵⁹ The author called for small town citizens to band together through voluntary associations or local government to improve services and local industry. Through deliberation and participation, small towns could be bettered.⁶⁰ This focus on the process of community participation suffused postwar books about community development as well as the education students received. Though community developers sometimes employed radical sounding phrases like “participatory democracy,” their vision of community involvement was generally limited to local civic and business groups.⁶¹ As rural conditions worsened, community developers in Missouri and elsewhere could not rely on the small town gumption prized by Farrington. They increasingly looked to the state and federal governments to help fund, organize, and plan the process of development. Moreover, the expansion of community development programs came with a

⁵⁸ Hugh Denney, “Type of Student to be Produced in Master’s Degree Program,” Folder; U of M CDP, Box 3, Denney Papers.

⁵⁹ Arthur Dunham, “Community Development in North America,” *Community Development Journal* 7, no. 1 (January 1972), 17.

⁶⁰ Frank Farrington, *Community Development: Making the Small Town a Better Place to Live and a Better Place in Which to do Business* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1915).

⁶¹ Katherine Lackey, *Community Development Through University Extension* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960); John Croll, *The Hannibal Community Survey: A Case Study* (Columbia: University of Missouri Extension Division, 1969); *The Process and the Product: Community Development in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Extension Division, 1970).

new emphasis on the specialist's role. At the University of Missouri, students may have received an eclectic education, but much of it centered on studying the process of community development and they capped it with a "field experience" working on a local project. The developer would be an "expert" in the process of development and would be able to use their skills to help small towns plan and implement projects. Development experts understood how to get communities organized, what sorts of projects could be pursued, and how to navigate the federal bureaucracy.⁶² This emphasis on locally planned, but federally supported, development guided community development's response to rural decline.

Much like rural sociology, agricultural economics flowered during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Agricultural economists, however, focused far more attention on problems of farm prices, productivity, and marketing. In line with the broader field of economics at the time, concepts of rationality and efficiency guided agricultural economics. They focused on devising the most rational, productive, and efficient farm unit. In the first half of the twentieth century, many agricultural economists saw the small, family operated farm as the exemplar of farm efficiency.⁶³ While the field had roots in neoclassical economics, many of its practitioners readily embraced state intervention into agricultural markets to improve prices, efficiency, and productivity. Key figures in the field, including Henry C. Taylor, M.L. Wilson, Howard Tolley, and John D. Black, as well as Black's student, John Kenneth Galbraith, became major players in the development of New Deal farm policy and

⁶² C.B. Ratchford, "The Community Development Profession in Today's Society," *Journal of the Community Development Society* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 5-13; John Croll, *A Three-County Planning Program* (Columbia: University of Missouri Extension Division, 1971), 28.

⁶³ Carlisle Runge, "Agricultural Economics: A Brief Intellectual History," *Staff Papers from the University of Minnesota Department of Applied Economics* (2006); Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*; Laurie Winn Carlson, *William J. Spillman and the Birth of Agricultural Economics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005); Richard Levins, *Willard Cochrane and the American Family Farm* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); B.F. Stanton, *Diverse Beginnings: Agricultural Economics, 1880-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station,

its program of price supports and crop reductions.⁶⁴ Wilson, Tolley, and others also stretched New Deal planning and farm policy to its limits with the creation of a land use planning program. Between 1938 and 1942, this program brought together rural experts, farmers, and the federal government in an attempt to create a more efficient, but also democratic, agricultural economy and farm policy. The basic structure of crop reductions and price supports persisted, but this ambitious planning program ended as a result of conservative attacks on the New Deal.⁶⁵ However, the ideas undergirding the program did not disappear. Rural sociologists and community developers drew inspiration from the local-federal-expert planning structure developed at the USDA for their ideas about rural development.

Though a strong support for New Deal farm policy persisted among agricultural economists, two mid-century developments would have a major impact on how many in the profession viewed the rural crisis. The first was a growing consensus that the large-scale, highly specialized farm represented the most efficient and rational production unit. This farm, created in no small part by New Deal policies, became the dominant way to organize agricultural production after World War II.⁶⁶ The second was an embrace of human capital theory, outlined by agricultural economist Theodore Schultz. Schultz, reared on a South Dakota farm, taught at Iowa State and then the University of Chicago. Schultz did not outright oppose New Deal-style farm policies. Instead, he believed that the wiser course of action would be to invest heavily in farmer education and agricultural research, which could

1984); Henry C. Taylor, "Early History of Agricultural Economics," *Journal of Farm Economics* 22, no. 1 (February 1940): 84-97.

⁶⁴ Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion*; Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics*; Paul Mertz, *New Deal Policy and Southern Rural Poverty* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); on Black and Galbraith, see Richard Parker, *John Kenneth Galbraith: His Life, His Politics, His Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); chapters 3 and 4.

⁶⁵ Gilbert, *Planning Democracy*.

⁶⁶ Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*, 8; Shane Hamilton, "Agribusiness, the Family Farm, and the Politics of Technological Determinism in the Post-World War II United States," *Technology and Culture* 55, no. 3 (2014): 560-590.

be used to improve the farm economy.⁶⁷ Large farmers with highly capitalized operations became the primary target for human capital investment. As we will see, this combination of human capital and the field's embrace of the large farm led a number of agricultural economists to call for a response to the rural crisis quite at odds with rural development. The remainder of this chapter examines how agricultural economists, community developers, and rural sociologists responded to and understood the dramatic changes reshaping rural America.

Soon after the end of World War II, rural experts began to notice that poverty and outmigration started undermining the fabric of small towns and they turned their attention toward examining the origins of these problems. Some of the earliest attempts to understand the forces reshaping rural America came from agricultural economists. Given their disciplinary focus, they concentrated most of their attention on the changes roiling farms across the U.S. While he did not speak for all agricultural economists, John Davis's work examining the origins of the agribusiness economy critically shaped the way the postwar farm world was understood by experts in the field. Davis grew up on a small farm in Missouri before going on to study agricultural economics at Iowa State University and the University of Minnesota. Davis served as the assistant secretary of agriculture at the USDA from 1953 to 1954 under Ezra Taft Benson. Though Benson was a free market ideologue, Davis held slightly more tempered views regarding state intervention into the farm economy. Like Schultz, Davis liked the stability provided by New Deal-era farm policy but believed

⁶⁷ Theodore Schultz, *Agriculture in an Unstable Economy* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1945); Theodore Schultz, *The Economic Value of Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); Mary Jean Bowman, "On Theodore W. Schultz's Contributions to Economics," *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 82, no. 1 (1980): 80-107; Mark Nerlove, "Transforming Economics: Theodore W. Schultz, 1902-1998, In Memoriam," *The Economic Journal* 109, no. 459 (November 1999): 726-748.

they would need to be scaled back to let market forces determine production goals. Davis, along with Ray Goldberg, laid out these views as well as his interpretation of agricultural change in *The Concept of Agribusiness*, published in 1957. The book proved incredibly popular with agricultural researchers and policymakers, and copies were distributed to every experiment and extension-service director in the U.S.⁶⁸ The book, then, played a key role in shaping the broader conversation around rural change.

Davis saw the rise of agribusiness as a central feature of the midcentury farm economy. He defined agribusiness as all the economic activities related to the production and distribution of farm products.⁶⁹ The agribusiness economy contained several interrelated parts. First were large, highly capitalized farms who grew a smaller, specialized set of products. As farmers focused on fewer crops, they shed many processes normally performed on the farm. More and more, new businesses, often large corporations, emerged that processed agricultural products and manufactured the farm implements that made planting and harvesting possible. At the same time, large farmers increasingly formed marketing agreements and other cooperative arrangements that gave them greater market control.⁷⁰ Many of these new co-ops left out small farmers. Importantly, Davis analyzed the important role played by the state in creating the agribusiness economy. Public policy made it possible for farms to expand, and for farmers to combine in cooperative arrangements. The term “agribusiness” therefore came to encompass the increasing linkage between farm supply manufacturers, distributors, processors, marketers, the state, and farmers. Though Davis did

⁶⁸ This account of Davis’s early life is drawn from Hamilton, “Agribusiness, the Family Farm, and the Politics of Technological Determinism in the Post-World War II United States.”

⁶⁹ John Davis and Ray Goldberg, *A Concept of Agribusiness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

⁷⁰ Davis and Goldberg, *A Concept of Agribusiness*; John Davis, “Policy Implications of Vertical Integration in United States Agriculture,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 39, no. 2 (1957): 300-312.

not intend the term to be synonymous with large-scale, mechanized farms, they, along with off-farm businesses and the state, dominated the new farm economy.⁷¹

Davis saw the emergence of the agribusiness economy as a rational response to the political and economic conditions faced by U.S. farmers and new technologies that encouraged integration. Davis focused in particular on the choices made by large farmers. He wrote that these farmers increasingly found themselves ensnared in a “cost-price squeeze.” A rigid cost structure imposed by use of machinery and technology, on the one hand, and an extremely competitive market on the other placed these farmers in a bind. While these pressures were old, Davis argued, they operated more extensively in the years after World War II and forced farmers to find new solutions to maintain profitability. In response, they streamlined on-farm activities by shedding less productive ventures and integrated their operations with off-farm businesses and with each other through cooperative arrangements. By subsidizing farm production, the state further enabled farmers to introduce the new machines and technology produced by off-farm businesses and expand their holdings through the purchase of new land. The economy that resulted contained far fewer farmers and would likely have even fewer if trends in efficiency and productivity continued. What Davis ultimately saw was a collection of rational actors seeking to optimize their efficiency, productivity, and, especially, profits. Davis’s account, influential as it was, ignored the power struggles and, in many cases, violence, that radically transformed the farm economy in the twentieth century. Davis’s account framed the arrival of agribusiness in rural America as a positive development that would yield a more efficient agriculture.

Rural sociologists also took notice of the rise of the agribusiness economy and saw the transformations reshaping rural America as rooted in those economic changes. In contrast

⁷¹ Hamilton, “Agribusiness, the Family Farm, and the Politics of Technological Determinism

to Davis's embrace of agribusiness, though, rural sociologists showed far more ambivalence. In 1964, Olaf Larson and Everett Rogers published a survey of rural sociological research that had been conducted since the end of World War II on agricultural change. Much like Davis, Larson and Rogers had Midwest farm pedigrees. Instead of following in their family's tradition, though, the two men left agriculture to study rural sociology. Larson came from a family of farm owners in Wisconsin and studied at the University of Wisconsin. Following that, he worked as a researcher at the USDA's Bureau of Agricultural Economics and then taught rural sociology at Cornell. Raised on a farm in Iowa, Rogers took his degree from Iowa State University and went on to teach at Ohio State, Michigan State, and then the University of Michigan.⁷²

Synthesizing nearly two decades of research, Larson and Rogers found an agricultural economy undergoing a stark transformation. Their account in many ways confirmed the changes outlined by Davis. Larson and Rogers noted that the scope of rural change could be measured in rising rates of crop specialization, ever-larger farms, and productivity. Farmers increasingly focused their efforts on growing one or two crops using chemical inputs to maximize the harvest. This "enterprise specialization" accelerated at a higher rate between 1954 and 1959 than during any previous five-year period.⁷³ These productive and specialized operations required larger tracts of land and higher levels of capital investment in farm inputs, which had the double effect of pushing out smaller, less productive farmers and raising the barrier of entry to farming. Larson and Rogers showed that while 5.9 million farms operated in 1945, only 3.7 million did in 1959, which led to a concentration of

in the Post-World War II United States," 563-5.

⁷² Olaf Larson and Everett Rogers, "Rural Society in Transition: The American Setting," in *Our Changing Rural Society: Perspectives and Trends* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1964).

⁷³ Larson and Rogers, "Rural Society in Transition," 52.

farmland in fewer hands.⁷⁴ These specialized farmers fed more people than ever before. Between 1900 and 1950, the number of people fed per farmer increased from only seven to fifteen. By 1960, however, one farmer could feed twenty-five people.⁷⁵ The two men noted that the agricultural economy was increasingly characterized by a sort of vertical integration, with off-farm businesses at the top, dictating production to farmers at the bottom. What Larson and Rogers ultimately saw was a shift away from the small, independent farm and toward what they called the “trend to agribusiness.”⁷⁶

In contrast to Davis, Larson and Rogers did not celebrate this trend. The two rural sociologists saw the rise of agribusiness not as a product of rational decision making, but of shifting power relations in the farm economy. They put forth an analysis of agribusiness that echoed critiques of bureaucratization developed in the 1950s by sociologist C. Wright Mills.⁷⁷ Instead of celebrating the productivity and efficiency gains, Larson and Rogers bemoaned the shift from “autonomous farmer” to agribusiness. The two rural sociologists argued that “dependence” increasingly characterized the farmer’s daily existence. Farmers grew reliant upon off-farm business for pesticides, machinery, and seeds. In some cases, these firms exercised control over what was grown and how in order to meet not only their needs, but those of supermarkets and their customers as well. Larson and Rogers framed this transition as a centralization of “both economic and political power” that took away “decisions once made within the rural community” and lodged them within “complex governmental or business organizations.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Larson and Rogers, “Rural Society in Transition,” 44.

⁷⁵ Larson and Rogers, “Rural Society in Transition,” 43. See also, Glen Fuguitt, “The City and Countryside,” *RS* 28, no. 3 (1963): 253.

⁷⁶ Larson and Rogers, “Rural Society in Transition,” 63 fn. 18.

⁷⁷ C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

⁷⁸ Larson and Rogers, “Rural Society in Transition,” 56-7; Rural sociologist Robin Williams discussed these broader trends in “American Society in Transition: Trends and Emerging

While their analysis pointed to critical shifts in political and economic power, it was not without its limits. The two sociologists traded in romantic stereotypes of the independent farmer that perhaps reflected an idealized vision of their own Midwestern small farm backgrounds. While some farmers may have inhabited this role, Larson and Rogers, and the scholarship they synthesized, failed to point out that “dependence” and exploitation had long characterized many relationships within agriculture. The experience of tenants, sharecroppers, and farm hands, for example, did not factor into their analysis, nor did the racial discrimination and exploitation at the root of many of these arrangements. Moreover, while Davis and Goldberg acknowledged the role played by public policy in creating an agribusiness economy, Larson and Rogers left that topic largely unexplored. Unfortunately, though their synthesis left ample room for further analysis, rural sociologists largely did not follow up on their research into agricultural transformation.

While agriculture figured prominently in early postwar rural sociological studies, some turned their attention to the changes underway in mining-based rural communities as well. Much like farm regions, rural sociologists found that mining towns experienced dramatic population loss and poverty in the postwar period driven by the reorganization of the industry that began soon after World War II. While Harry Caudill’s examination of Appalachian poverty in *Night Comes to the Cumberland* captured the attention of policymakers and the public in the early 1960s, Herman Lantz’s 1958 book *People of Coal Town* uncovered similar economic devastation in the coalfields of southern Illinois.⁷⁹ Like many sociological studies, Lantz focused on a single community. Lantz’s “coal town” experienced a dramatic growth in the coal industry beginning the late nineteenth century, and

Developments in Social and Cultural System,” in *Our Changing Rural Society: Perspectives and Trends* (Ames: Iowa State University, 1964).

⁷⁹ Harry Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area* (New York: Little, Brown, 1963).

an equally precipitous decline by the 1950s. While the early twentieth century saw major capital investments and record production and profit, the industry had collapsed by 1956. Lantz argued that this rapid decline stemmed from multiple factors. In part, the corporate firms that controlled the region's mines quickly exhausted their resources. Additionally, many jobs were lost as a result of mechanization.⁸⁰ As Lantz's colleague Harold Marley remarked, when southern Illinois mine operators depleted the resources found deep in the ground, they turned to "strip" mining, which exploited ore closer to the surface. Aside from leaving a scarred, environmentally devastated landscape, Marley pointed out that strip mining required fewer workers, which compounded the region's economic devastation. As more contemporary scholars have shown, this process of resource exhaustion and mechanization played out in many small mining towns.⁸¹ Much like the nation's agricultural regions, the decline of mining communities across the U.S. was rooted in a deep, economic restructuring.

While less dominant than either agriculture or mining, the rural timber economy also experienced a major decline in the middle of the twentieth century. Rural sociological research found that jobs in the forest or the sawmills were often low-paid, seasonal jobs.⁸² Rural sociologists found that, by the early 1940s, many firms in the major timber regions – the north east, upper Midwest, and northwest – began exhausting lumber resources, producing what they called "cut-over" regions. These cut-over regions were defined by rising

⁸⁰ Herman Lantz, *People of Coal Town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); Harold Marley, "Coal Burden," *Social Science* 39, no. 2 (April 1964): 102-106; see also, David Walls and Dwight Billings, "The Sociology of Southern Appalachia," *Appalachian Journal* 5, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 131-144.

⁸¹ Ronald Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (University of Kentucky Press, 2008); Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee, *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.)

⁸² M.R. Benedict, "The Problem of Stabilizing the Migrant Farm Laborer in California," *Rural Sociology* 3, no. 2 (June 1938): 188-194.

levels of unemployment, poverty, and population decline.⁸³ Much like the changes sweeping the agricultural and mining economies of rural America, timber-dependent regions entered the postwar era in a state of stark decline.

The economic transformations analyzed by agricultural economists and rural sociologists led to a major shift in the boundaries, interdependences, and relationships between rural and urban places. The meaning of these changes emerged as another major theme in the scholarship of postwar rural social scientists. In community development, many experts expressed great alarm over the shifting boundaries between rural and urban in the postwar period. Here, the writings of Hugh Denney, who shaped the curriculum of the Department of Community Development at the University of Missouri, are instructive. Denney was born in Andrew County, Missouri, a rural county in the northwest portion of the state. Denney did graduate work in biology at the University of Missouri before working with the Missouri Conservation Commission and the Forest Service in the Ozarks in the early 1940s.⁸⁴ His travels through many impoverished rural communities must have sparked within Denney a desire to change career paths. By 1944, he began working with the state's Department of Commerce and Industrial Development, which implemented economic development programs.⁸⁵ Given his experience in the public sector and with economic development, the Department of Community Development hired Denney in 1958 as a consultant to help shape

⁸³ Gladys Bowles, *Population of the Northeast: Growth, Composition, and Distribution, 1900-1950* (College Park: Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station, 1960); D.C. Gibson, *Socioeconomic Evolution in Timber Area in Northern Michigan: A Case Study* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Agricultural Experiment Station, 1944); Robin M. Williams, "The 'Near' Category of Dun and Bradstreet," *Rural Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June 1950): 175-9; John Mason, "Private and Public Costs of Isolated Settlement in the Cut-Over Area of Minnesota," *Rural Sociology* 5, no. 2 (June 1940): 206-221; William Duerr, *The Economic Problems of Forestry in the Appalachian Region* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949).

⁸⁴ "Missouri Conservation News," *The Reveille*, 19 April 1940.

the program. By the early 1960s, his role in the department expanded and he began teaching courses as well.⁸⁶

In publications, public lectures, and in the classroom, Denney described a rapidly declining rural community and a metastasizing city. Denney argued that the economic and social ties in rural communities frayed as people and jobs vanished. Much like Larson and Rogers, Denney romanticized rural life and mourned its disappearance.⁸⁷ The flipside to this declining rural America was an ever-expanding city. Transportation improvements, better job prospects, and the lure of city life attracted rural migrants to urban areas.⁸⁸ In their growth, though, Denney argued that cities had “lost their human scale.” The center of many cities, Denney argued, were “rotting,” while the ever-expanding network of highways that allowed cities and suburbs to grow only worsened air pollution. Two community developers working in Missouri’s program agreed, writing that cities voraciously consumed land in an attempt to house their burgeoning populations. Cities had failed to provide a meaningful life, though, and instead creating “megalopolises” where people “get up earlier, spend more time breathing their neighbor’s car exhaust, and return home later.”⁸⁹ Community developers in Missouri therefore tapped into a longstanding dichotomy that pitted the virtuous countryside against the decadent city or, in Denney’s framing, the human countryside versus the inhuman city. The latter was rapidly consuming the former. While they tapped into a moralistic

⁸⁵ “Albany – Wake Up!” *Albany Ledger*, 5 December 1963; “At Urban-Rural Meeting Hugh Denney Speaker Oct 29,” *Clinton Eye*, 29 October 1959.

⁸⁶ Hugh Denney, “History and Current Status of Community Development Work at the University of Missouri,” September 1965, Folder Budget, Box 1, Denney Papers.

⁸⁷ Hugh Denney, “A Paper Presented at Midwest Non-Metropolitan Conference,” 29 March 1973, Folder REA 364 Handouts, Box 1, Denney Papers.

⁸⁸ “Development Expert tells Rotarians of Plans for Growth,” *The Democrat-Argus*, 8 December 1961; “Albany – Wake Up!” *Albany Ledger*, 5 December 1963; “Area Approach to Stem Decline is Sought by Four Counties,” *Chillicothe Constitution Tribune*, 8 November 1965.

⁸⁹ Bryan Phifer and Fred List, *Community Development: A New Dimension of Extension* (Columbia: University of Missouri Extension Division), 6.

rhetoric, their concern about a shifting rural-urban balance reflected real concerns about the quality of life that people had in large cities.

The blurring of rural-urban boundaries in the postwar period received a much fuller discussion and analysis by rural sociologists. By the 1950s, many in the field had begun to notice that sharp rural-urban borders seemed to be diminishing. In part, these borders were physical. A varied collection of rural commentators had long remarked that “isolation” from mainstream America was an essential feature of rural life. This isolation came most often in physical form, but the distance between rural communities and the cities produced a social and cultural isolation as well.⁹⁰ However, in the face of major transportation projects in the middle of the twentieth century, rural sociologists increasingly questioned whether physical isolation continued to dominate rural life. Glenn Fuguitt and Nora Ann Deeley, for example, argued that new highways and paved country roads collapsed the spatial distances between the city and the country. The easy flow of people between city and country greatly diminished physical isolation.⁹¹

Rural sociologists also analyzed the blurring economic boundaries between rural and urban America. In particular, they catalogued the growth in what they saw as nonrural jobs and people in small towns. Whereas the economic bases of rural communities before had been defined by resource based industries, economic restructuring and the industrialization of the countryside shifted the employment balance away from the farm, the mine, and the forest.

⁹⁰ Michal Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Scribner, 1962); Thomas Kiffmeyer, “We are Ordered to do Everything”: The National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, American Social Thought, and the War on Poverty,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 107, no. 3 (Summer 2009); Robert Weise, “New Towns for Red Bird, Kentucky: Isolation and Civic Society in Twentieth Century Discussions of Appalachian Poverty,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2001); Thomas Kiffmeyer, *Reformers to Radicals: The Appalachian Volunteers and the War on Poverty* (University of Kentucky Press 2008); Eller, *Uneven Ground*.

Moreover, many people moved out to the countryside, while commuting to their urban or suburban jobs. By 1957, the trend had accelerated so much that Lowry Nelson worried about an “invasion of the open country” by nonrural people.⁹² Indeed, Fuguitt showed that by 1960 seventy percent of the rural population no longer worked in traditionally rural occupations.⁹³ Talk of invasions in part reflected practical concerns. Walter McKain and Robert Burnight wrote that the encroachment of city people into the countryside was impacting land values, making it more expensive to live in small towns.⁹⁴

However, worries about an invasion of nonrural people and the diminishing rural-urban boundaries also pointed to deep anxiety about the rural future. Many postwar rural sociologists grew up in the types of communities outlined by Galpin, and they spent a lot of energy documenting its decline. In particular, they wrote about the decline of the “trade center,” or that part of the rural community that provided services and commerce. As more and more farmers left agriculture, for example, and as travel to larger cities became easier, rural trade centers faltered. It is important to stress, though, that as late as the early 1940s, many rural sociologists believed the fabric of the rural community remained strong. Studies by Carl Taylor, Edward Moe, Earl Bell, and Dwight Sanderson on Iowa, Kansas, and New York confirmed that larger trade centers increasingly captured the business of farmers, but that the rural community remained coherent.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Glenn Fuguitt, “The City and Countryside,” *Rural Sociology* 28, no. 3 (1963): 246-261; Glenn Fuguitt and Nora Ann Deeley, “Retail Service Patterns and Small Town Population Change: A Replication of Hassinger’s Study,” *Rural Sociology* 31 (March 1966): 53-63.

⁹² Nelson, “Rural Life in a Mass-Industrial Society,” 23-4.

⁹³ Fuguitt, “The City and the Countryside,” 256.

⁹⁴ Walter McKain and Robert Burnight, “From the Rural Point of View,” *Rural Sociology* 18, no. 1 (March 1953): 108-117.

⁹⁵ Carl Taylor and Edward Moe, *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: Irwin Iowa* (BAE Rural Life Studies, 1942); Earl Bell, *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: Sublette, Kansas* (BAE Rural Life Studies, 1942); Dwight Sanderson, “The Rural Community in the United States as an Elementary Group,” *RS* 1, no. 2 (1936); Dwight Sanderson, *Rural Social and Economic Areas in Central New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, 1934); see

From the 1950s on, though, rural sociologists called this stability into question. Gerald Hodge, writing about Canada and the U.S., argued that population decline, farm consolidation, and improvements in transportation undermined the farm trade center.⁹⁶ Two Missouri rural sociologists placed the growth of agribusiness in the local grape industry at the center of their analysis of trade center decline.⁹⁷ They argued that the shift from small, locally owned operations to large scale farms owned by outside investors devastated local trade networks. Trade center decline impacted rural communities based in mining and timber as well. As firms exhausted resources and mechanized jobs, small towns emptied of locally owned businesses.⁹⁸ Looking at these trends across the U.S., Fuguitt argued that the rural trade center had “almost completely vanished from the American scene.”⁹⁹

The disappearance of the trade center, along with the blurring physical and economic boundaries between rural and urban communities, produced a debate among rural sociologists about rural culture and identity, or rurality. If rural economic structures were undergoing major changes, rural sociologists debated what would happen to the culture that they produced. Would a similar blurring of rural and urban cultures take place as well? This

also Allen Edwards, “Ecological Patterns of American Rural Communities,” *RS* 12 no. 2 (1947): 150-161; Edmund deS. Brunner and T. Lynn Smith, “Village Growth and Decline, 1930-1940,” *RS* 8 no. 2 (1944): 103-115; Paul Landis, *South Dakota Town-Country Trade Relations, 1901-1930* (South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station, 1932); C.E. Lively, *Growth and Decline of Farm Trade Centers in Minnesota, 1905-1930* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, 1932); C.R. Hoffer, *Changes in Retail and Service Facilities of Rural Trade Centers in Michigan, 1900 and 1930* (Lansing: Michigan State University Agricultural Experiment Station, 1935).

⁹⁶ Gerald Hodge, “Do Villages Grow? Some Perspectives and Predictions,” *RS* 21, no. 2 (1966), 183.

⁹⁷ William Heffernan and Paul Lasley, “Agricultural Structure and Interaction in the Local Community: A Case Study,” *RS* 43, no. 3 (1978): 348-361; for other examples, see Douglas Marshall, “Nationality and the Emerging Culture,” *RS* 13, no. 1 (1948): 40-47; Glen Fuguitt, “The Places Left Behind: Population Trends and Policy for Rural America,” *RS* 36, no. 4 (1971): 449-470.

⁹⁸ Robin M. Williams, “The ‘Near’ Category of Dun and Bradstreet,” *Rural Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June 1950): 175-9; Donald Field and Robert Dimit, *Population Change in South Dakota Small Towns and Cities* (Brookings: South Dakota State University Experiment Station, 1970); Gerald Hodge, “The Prediction of Trade Center Viability in the Great Plains,” Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1965.

⁹⁹ Fuguitt, “The City and Countryside,” 257-8.

debate drew upon definitions of rurality created by two founders of the field, Carle Zimmerman and Pitirim Sorokin. Zimmerman was born on a small farm in Cass County, Missouri, and studied with leading rural experts of the early twentieth century, including Carl Taylor and John Black. Sorokin, who grew up in the Komi Territories of Russia near the border with Finland, studied criminology and sociology in St. Petersburg. The two met at the University of Minnesota in the 1920s and played foundational roles in the creation of a sociology department at Harvard.¹⁰⁰ Their textbook, *Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology*, published in 1929, helped define rural sociology. Zimmerman and Sorokin argued for a stark rural-urban dichotomy as foundation to the field. They maintained rural people constituted a distinct culture with their own identity apart from the city. Among other things, they argued that rural people were superstitious, wise, innocent, honest, pious, familial, individualistic, and community-oriented.¹⁰¹ This study therefore provided a wide-ranging, and sometimes conflicting, list of traits that sowed the seeds for future debate.

While many rural sociologists continued to see essential differences between rural and urban people, the major economic and demographic transformations of the early postwar period forced them to soften the stark dichotomy put forth by Zimmerman and Sorokin. In its place, many postwar rural sociologists adopted a rural-urban “continuum.” This concept was first outlined in 1950 by C.P. Loomis and J.A. Beagle in their textbook *Rural Social Systems*.¹⁰² They argued that a sliding scale could more accurately identify the gradations in rural and urban cultural patterns while still upholding critical differences between the two.

¹⁰⁰ Barry Johnston, “Pitirim A. Sorokin and Sociological Theory for the Twenty-First Century,” *Michigan Sociological Review* 12 (Fall: 1998): 1-23; Richard Simpson, “Pitirim Sorokin and His Sociology,” *Social Forces* 32, no. 2 (December 1953): 120-131; T. Lynn Smith, “Obituary: The Life and Works of Carle C. Zimmerman,” *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 13, no. 2 (Autumn 1983): 119-125.

¹⁰¹ Sorokin and Zimmerman, *Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology*. See chapter fourteen in particular.

Their system relied upon an analysis of three categories: place of residence (namely the size of the town in which the person lived and its proximity to a city), occupation, and values. However, rural sociologists never fully agreed upon how the continuum should be used or what combination of variables produced an identity more rural than urban. Nonetheless, the continuum structured debate about the persistence of rural identity in the postwar period.

Despite the economic restructuring and demographic decline experienced by small towns across the U.S., many rural sociologists continued to argue that a distinct rural identity persisted. Examining the residence category of the rural-urban continuum, they found that rural settings, particularly those farthest from cities, still produced distinct personality types. In one study, rural sociologists administered a test to 15,000 ninth-grade rural and urban Minnesotans. The rural students came from farm and nonfarm rural backgrounds. The authors argued they found clear evidence for personality differences. Rural students, regardless of gender, expressed “feelings of shyness, self-depreciation, [and] suspicion of others,” while urban children were “more apt to rebel against authority and are less self-critical and less suspicious of the motives of others.”¹⁰³ A study of rural and urban boys in Michigan came to a similar conclusion. As in Minnesota, this study did not focus solely on agricultural families. The authors argued that rural boys generally had fewer interactions with non-family members, while urban boys had a diverse array of encounters. This difference explained the study’s findings that rural boys had lower intelligence, lower aspirations, and scored high on measures of “submissiveness, depressive anxiety, withdrawn shyness, practical concernedness, and lack of nervous tension.” Urban boys, in contrast, scored highest on “independent self-sufficiency, positive evaluation of physical mobility,” and

¹⁰² C.P. Loomis and J.A. Beagle, *Rural Social Systems* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1950). See also, I.A. Spaulding, “Serendipity and the Rural-Urban Continuum,” *RS* 16, no. 1 (1951).

¹⁰³ Starke Hathaway, Elio Monachesi, and Lawrence Young, “Rural-Urban Adolescent Personality,” *RS* 24, no. 4 (1959), 346.

desire for higher education.¹⁰⁴ These studies were important because they showed that, regardless of occupation, a distinct rural culture emerged in people who lived far from urban and suburban areas. Rural identity could persist in a sphere autonomous from economics.

Indeed, the increasingly tenuous existence of agricultural and other rural economies pushed many rural sociologists to sever the ties between economic base and culture altogether. A 1963 study by Peter Munch and Robert Campbell, and a follow up study in 1971 by William Haga and Clinton Folse outlined this argument.¹⁰⁵ Examining farm communities in Wisconsin and Illinois, respectively, the authors distinguished between functional and nonfunctional elements of community. The former comprised economic ties while the latter including “kinship attachments, spiritual values, career satisfactions, work relationships, and participation in community-oriented activities.”¹⁰⁶ The studies asked rural people two questions: to which community do you belong? And where do you go for goods and services? The studies found that rural people identified a community, but it had no relationship to trade patterns like the old Galpin community. Instead, their community emerged increasingly in nonfunctional relationships. In other words, a distinctively “rural” culture rooted in community ties continued to exist. Haga and Folse similarly concluded that the production of a rural identity came less from economic foundations and more from nonfunctional ties.

George Lowe and Charles Peek built on these studies but provided a different way to measure the persistence of rural identity. Examining survey polling data on a variety of

¹⁰⁴ A.O. Haller and Carole Ellis Wolff, “Personality Orientations of Farm, Village, and Urban Boys,” *RS* 27, no. 3 (1962), 283; Others reached similar conclusions, and argued that the farther one was from a city, the more one embraced traditional values. See J. Lynn England, W. Eugene Gibbons, and Barry Johnson, “The Impact of a Rural Environment on Values,” *RS* 44, no. 1 (1979): 119-136.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Munch and Robert Campbell, “Interaction and Collective Identity in a Rural Locality,” *RS* 28 (1963): 18-34; William Haga and Clinton Folse, “Trade Patterns and Community Identity,” *RS* 36, no. 1 (1971): 42-51.

¹⁰⁶ Haga and Folse, “Trade Patterns and Community Identity,” 50.

topics, Peek and Lowe found that a distinctive rural “lifestyle” existed. Like the studies in Michigan and Minnesota, Lowe and Peek did not focus solely on rural farm communities, but instead cast a wide net on all rural occupations. They found that residence in a rural setting, which they defined as a low-density, low-population area, predicted a whole host of responses to questions on topics ranging from divorce to 1960s public policy. When they added a “lifestyle” variable – the choice to consume alcohol or not – Lowe and Peek found that they could predict and identify a range of opinions that pointed to the existence of a separate rural culture.¹⁰⁷ Along with Munch, Haga, Campbell, and Folsie, Lowe and Peek showed that rural culture and patterns of behavior persisted long after rural economic structures had transformed.

Though many studies seemed to back up the claim that rurality persisted in the postwar period, a wide array of rural sociologists attacked this argument. A key assumption of these studies was that isolation – be it physical, social, or economic – no longer characterized rural life. Writing early in the postwar period, Douglas Marshall argued that new technology and improvements in transportation would dissolve the distinctive rural identity that he had found in the Midwest.¹⁰⁸ Herbert Auerbach, writing about Appalachian communities in 1955, argued similarly that new transportation improvements had ended much of the deep isolation that had characterized many mountain societies.¹⁰⁹ Rural sociologists also looked to the spread of television sets in rural communities as evidence that rural culture was dissolving. With widespread rural electrification, a product of the New Deal, more and more rural homes had televisions. Sociologists argued that the spread of

¹⁰⁷ George Lowe and Charles Peek, “Location and Lifestyle: The Comparative Explanatory Ability of Urbanism and Rurality,” *RS* 39, no. 3 (1974): 392-420.

¹⁰⁸ Douglas Marshall, “Nationality and the Emerging Culture,” *Rural Sociology* 13, no. 1 (1948): 40-47.

¹⁰⁹ Herbert Auerbach, “A Guttman Scale for Measuring Isolation,” *RS* 20, no. 2 (1955): 142-145.

television sets in rural as well as urban homes ensured that people, regardless of their location, would increasingly consume similar cultural products.¹¹⁰ Summarizing their conclusion about the inability to identify a distinctive pattern of rurality, Fern Willits and Robert Bealer argued that “despite the popularity, easy verbalization, and apparent sophistication of taking ‘rural’ to mean a composite or complex of ideas, the empirical utility of such a compound definition appears questionable.”¹¹¹

Other rural sociologists took on the arguments put forth Peek, Lowe, and others more directly by questioning whether rural residence could actually predict rural identity or values. One 1952 study of rural communities in Washington state wanted to test whether rural residence predicted political and economic conservatism. Looking at a wide array of rural communities in the state, the author found that no strong correlation existed between rural residence and conservatism: “the hypothesis that in the state of Washington conservatism is positively associated with rurality...is not tenable.”¹¹² Such difficulties led Harold Hoffsommer to question the validity of “urban” and “rural” as analytical categories entirely. He argued that economic changes in rural America rendered these categories “analytically impotent.”¹¹³ For many rural sociologists, the changes restructuring the rural community nearly erased any definable rurality.

¹¹⁰ Lloyd Bostian and John Ross, *Mass Media and the Wisconsin Farm Family* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Agriculture Experiment Station, 1962).

¹¹¹ Fern Willits and Robert Bealer, “An Evaluation of a Composite Definition of ‘Rurality,’” *RS* 32, no. 2 (1967), 177.

¹¹² John Haer, “Conservatism-Radicalism and the Rural Urban Continuum,” *RS* 17, no. 4 (1952), 346. Other studies came to similar conclusions. See, Carl C. Taylor, “Attitudes of American Farmers – International and Provincial,” *American Sociological Review* 9 (1944); Howard Beers, “Rural-Urban Differences: Some Evidence from Public Opinion Polls,” *RS* 18, no. 1 (1953): 1-11; J.C. van Es and J.E. Brown found that socioeconomic status, in combination with residence or occupation, was a better determinant of values than occupation of residence alone. J.C. van Es and J.E. Brown, “The Rural-Urban Variable Once More: Some Individual Level Observations,” *RS* 39, no. 3 (1974): 373-391.

¹¹³ Harold Hoffsommer, “Rural Sociological Intradisciplinary Relations within the Field of Sociology,” *RS* 25, no. 2 (1960): 175.

The seeming disappearance of rural communities led many rural sociologists to despair that their field might vanish as well. What would be left to study if urban and rural cultures blended together, and fewer and fewer people lived in small towns? Lalit Sen, who worked for the National Institute of Community Development in Hyderabad, told U.S. rural sociologists not to lose hope. He agreed that postwar rural changes rendered the term rural, at least in the U.S. context, meaningless. However, he told U.S.-based rural sociologists that if they felt “they are running out of research problems...[they] should feel comfortable working in one of the developing countries” where an identifiable rurality still existed.¹¹⁴ Carl Taylor mimicked Sen’s sentiments. Taylor, who spent many years studying rural life in Argentina, told rural sociologists that conditions in many rural communities overseas mirrored those in the U.S. at the turn of the century when the field was born. Thus, an opportunity opened for rural sociologists to help foreign leaders “understand, not only their rural problems, but also their rural people.”¹¹⁵ Many U.S. rural sociologists heeded Sen and Taylor’s call and went abroad. A large body of scholarship emerged by the end of the 1950s from these American sojourns abroad that became foundational texts on the rural areas on which they were based.¹¹⁶ This turn toward foreign communities seemed to confirm, then, that the rural no longer existed in the United States.

While many rural sociologists and community developers lamented the shrinking rural sector and rapidly expanding cities, agricultural economists often looked upon this rebalancing with favor. The focus on culture and the anxiety over the rise of the big city on

¹¹⁴ Lalit Sen, “Current Issues in Rural Sociology: A Non-American Viewpoint,” *RS* 34, no. 2 (1969), 246; see also M.E. John, “Rural Sociology in the Years Ahead,” *RS* 27, no. 2 (1963): 107-115.

¹¹⁵ Carl Taylor, “The Development of Rural Sociology Abroad” *RS* 30, no. 4 (1966), 473.

¹¹⁶ Sewell, “Rural Sociological Research,” 447; See N.L. Whetten, *Rural Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948); Olen Leonard, *Bolivia, Land, People, and Institutions* (Washington: Scarecrow Press, 1952); Carl Taylor, *Argentina Rural Life* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana

display in community development and rural sociology gave way in agricultural economics to a discussion that revolved around rationality and efficiency in the economy. Economic and demographic changes in rural and urban America reflected a new equilibrium. This perspective was perhaps articulated best by Vernon Ruttan. Ruttan was born in the town of Alden, Michigan where he grew up on a small dairy, potato, and bean farm. Ruttan received his PhD in agricultural economics at the University of Chicago in 1952, where he studied under Theodore Schultz. After stints at the Tennessee Valley Authority, Purdue University, and the University of California, he worked joined the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Minnesota in 1965. Much of Ruttan's work examined agricultural and rural development.¹¹⁷

Writing at the end of the 1950s, Ruttan examined the changes between the rural and urban sectors created by a government-backed large-scale farm economy. More precisely, Ruttan analyzed the relationship between an increasingly fruitful farm economy with dwindling labor inputs and a growing urban and industrial sector. In a farm sector defined by highly productive, large scale enterprises, Ruttan argued that the need for a wide-base of small farmers disappeared. On the urban side, high demand for industrial employment in cities and suburbs existed, so it made sense that a shift in rural-urban population patterns would occur. A smaller yet productive farm sector not only freed people up to work in cities and suburbs, but also yielded affordable food that could be sold in domestic and overseas markets. Ruttan argued that nonrural consumers in the domestic marketplace quickly became used to these low prices and the ability to eat whatever they wanted year-round. These changes in productivity, the composition of the labor market, and consumer purchasing habits occurred during a relatively compressed period of time in the early to mid-twentieth

State University Press, 1948); Bryce Ryan, *Caste in Modern Ceylon: The Sinhalese System in Transition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1954).

century. Despite the short time-frame, Ruttan argued they led to a remarkably stable rebalancing of rural-urban economic relationships and composition of the population. He predicted that the large, productive farm and the concentration of people and jobs in cities would continue into the future and would yield a more efficient economy.¹¹⁸

While Ruttan's analysis suggested that the remaking of rural-urban relationships in the U.S. had an overseas component, his University of Minnesota colleague G. Edward Schuh expanded on this shift and made it central to his understanding of agricultural transformations. Born on a small vegetable farm outside Indianapolis, Schuh went on to earn his bachelor's degree in economics from Purdue University in 1952. He took his PhD in agricultural economics from the University of Chicago in 1961 where he worked with Schultz. Following the completion of his doctorate work, Schuh traveled to Brazil to work with the Ford Foundation on a project to expand the Federal University of Vicosa, at that time a small rural college patterned after U.S. land grant institutions. He taught at Purdue University for much of the 1960s and 1970s and finished his career at the University of Minnesota. According to his Minnesota colleague C. Ford Runge, Schuh's scholarship led the way in integrating an analysis of global markets, state policy, and foreign trade into the study of agricultural economics.¹¹⁹

When Schuh began his career in agricultural economics in the late 1950s, farmers not only grew more on larger plots of land for burgeoning domestic markets, but for overseas consumers as well. The federal government, for example, helped U.S. farmers unload

¹¹⁷ Cochrane, *Agricultural Economics at the University of Minnesota*, 43.

¹¹⁸ Vernon Ruttan, "Agricultural Policy in an Affluent Society," *Journal of Farm Economics* 48, no. 5 (1966): 1100-1120; for a similar argument, see Kenneth Bachman, "Economics of the Low-Income Farm Problem," *Journal of Farm Economics* 37, no. 5 (December 1955): 1408-1418.

¹¹⁹ Cochrane, *Agricultural Economics at the University of Minnesota*, 62; Ben Cohen, "Economist G. Edward Schuh Made Mark Far Beyond U," *Star Tribune*, 18 August 2009; M.J. Pehl, "Driven to Discover," <http://uawards.umn.edu/former-regents-professors/g-edward-schuh>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

agricultural surpluses as part of overseas development programs. U.S. policymakers and farmers alike embraced exports as a solution to the rising agricultural productivity. Exports would ensure that domestic markets would not be glutted and, in turn, depress the prices that farmers received. For skeptics of New Deal farm policy, exports also had the virtue of raising farm prices without the use of direct subsidies.¹²⁰ U.S. farmers therefore became increasingly intertwined with, and dependent upon, foreign agricultural markets.

Schuh saw the growing interdependence of world economies and the rising value of U.S. agricultural exports as a natural and rational process that produced largely positive results. More specifically, Schuh argued that this new arrangement reflected the comparative advantage of the U.S. farm economy, predicated as it was on high tech, high yield production. U.S. farmers could produce farm commodities far cheaper than others. For Schuh, the growing prominence of farm exports complimented the budding role played by the service sector in reshaping the U.S. economy. Schuh argued that the U.S. should embrace this arrangement by lowering trade barriers that would make it easier to import manufactured goods, which were too expensive to produce stateside. If the U.S. or other countries tried to “impede these forces,” either through industrial protectionism or support to small, less efficient farmers, global economic growth and prosperity would decline.¹²¹ Instead, Schuh advocated for “rational international economic policy” in the U.S. and abroad that would further this trade liberalization and global integration. Though Schuh’s scholarship clearly

¹²⁰ Carolyn Dimitri, Anne Effland, and Neilson Conklin, *The Twentieth Century Transformation of American Agriculture* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2005), 7-8; Jonathan Coppess, *The Fault Lines of Farm Policy: A Legislative and Political History of the Farm Bill* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018); 98-101, 138-9.

¹²¹ G. Edward Schuh, *Agriculture and Community Issues: New Challenges and New Opportunities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1979); G. Edward Schuh, “Current Challenges for Agricultural Policy,” *Western Journal of Agricultural Economics* 3, no. 2 (December 1978): 233-243; G. Edward Schuh, “Effects of Some General Economic Development Policies on Agricultural Development,” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 50, no. 5 (1968): 1283-1293.

reflected a bias in favor of free trade, it nonetheless helped to illustrate the deepening integration of U.S. agriculture into the world economy.

Agricultural economists also saw a major shift within the rural agricultural economy that occurred alongside this shift in rural-urban and domestic-overseas relationships. Many in the field focused their attention on what, by the 1950s, was seen as a “dichotomy” in U.S. agriculture or, in Ruttan’s phrase, its “dual structure.”¹²² The new postwar farm economy was defined by a sharp split between productive, commercial farmers with relatively large plots of land and smaller farmers who struggled to earn an adequate living. Beginning in the mid-1950s, agricultural economists focused their attention on the latter, and what they called the problem of the “low-income farmer.”¹²³ During that decade, the problem had become quite large. One study found that over half of all farmers made less than \$2,500 per year. Many of these farms shared similar qualities. They operated on small plots of substandard land, had little, if any, capital investments in machinery, poor farm management skills, and a history of poor financial management that prevented them from accessing new lines of credit.¹²⁴ Agricultural economists also found a correlation between geography and low-income farmers. The low-income farm problem stretched covered the area encompassing the Missouri Ozarks, Appalachia, and the South.¹²⁵ While their analysis of the dual structure

¹²² Ernest Grove, “The New Dichotomy in Agriculture,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 45, no. 2 (May 1963): 277-284; Ruttan, “Agricultural Policy in an Affluent Society,” 1108.

¹²³ H.R. Moore, “The Low-Income Farm Problem,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 37, no. 5 (December 1955): 1435-1438; Louis Ducoff, “Trends and Characteristics of Farm Population in Low-Income Farming Areas,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 37, no. 5 (1955): 1399-1407; William Hendrix, “Income Improvement Prospects in Low-Income Areas,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 41, no. 5 (December 1959): 1065-1075; Bushrod Allin, “Agriculture’s Public Relations,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 40, no. 2 (May 1958): 187-195; Sydney Staniforth, “Institutional Considerations in Farm Management in the Decade Ahead,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 38, no. 5 (December 1956): 1293-1300; Dale Hathaway, “Another View of the Planning of Agriculture,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 34, no. 1 (February 1952): 105-111.

¹²⁴ Moore, “The Low-Income Farm Problem,” 1436.

¹²⁵ Johnson, “Technological Changes and the Future of Rural Life”; Ducoff, “Trends and Characteristics of Farm Population in Low-Income Farming Areas.”

highlighted a major cleavage in the farm economy, it left much to be desired. Of most importance was the question of race. Though agricultural economists identified the south as a problem region, their analysis did not take into account racial discrimination, nor the differential impact of farm policy on black farmers. While the field sometimes accounted for the role played by agriculture policy in stimulating economic change, it generally did not criticize policy for creating the low-income farm problem.

Could anything be done to help these small, low-income farmers, and those who had lost their jobs in the mines and forests? What, if anything, could be done to reverse the economic and demographic decline in rural America? Much like their debates about the origins of the rural crisis and its impact on rural-urban relationships, rural experts put forth conflicting solutions to the rural crisis. In general, though, two main solutions emerged. One, advocated for primarily by agricultural economists, called for the further depopulation of rural communities. The other, pushed by rural sociologists and community developers, called for a rural development policy that would invest in new infrastructure and jobs and, in the process, reverse the economic and demographic collapse that had devastated small towns.

One of the major assumptions held by many postwar agricultural economists was that agriculture going forward would need fewer farmers. In particular, agriculture would need fewer small, low-income farmers.¹²⁶ Agricultural economists did not think that these farmers could make significant contributions to the modern farm economy. Davis, for example, argued that low-income farmers should not attempt to improve their bargaining position through marketing agreements or through the formation of cooperatives. While these

¹²⁶ W. Elbert Hendrix, "What to do about Low Incomes in Agriculture," *Journal of Farm Economics* 38, no. 5 (1956): 1385-1387; Roger Woodworth, "Solution to the Problem of Low Income in the South: Farm Reorganization," *Journal of Farm Economics* 39, no. 5 (1957), 1463; Lowell Hill,

arrangements had worked well for large farmers, the benefits of scale would not translate as well for small farmers. Their low levels of capitalization would prevent them from taking advantage of new machinery and technology, which would in turn preclude their integration into the agribusiness economy. Human capital and other investments would be better spent elsewhere.¹²⁷ Ruttan and Schuh argued that small farmers would not be able to provide affordable food to domestic and overseas markets accustomed to cheap produce.¹²⁸ It also made little sense to invest in small farmers to teach them how to be more productive. These investments would not only be costly but would “create competitive pressure elsewhere.”¹²⁹ In other words, helping small farmers would only yield more farmers glutting the market and depressing prices. Ruttan summarized this position most bluntly: these farmers, he argued, “are not underdeveloped – they are redundant.”¹³⁰

Though they may have been redundant in the farm economy, an alternative existed. Investments could be made in new rural jobs and infrastructure that would allow displaced farmers to find new work in their communities. Sounding not unlike Hugh Denney, agricultural economist Harold Breimyer believed that rural America should in fact be developed as “a countermeasure to the relentless national trend to envelop everyone and everything into a giant, faceless, mechanistic, conglomerate-corporation urbanized bureaucracy.”¹³¹ His colleague J.K. McDermott argued that the federal government would have to play a major role in these efforts. McDermott argued that “full reliance on ‘the

“Characteristics of the Farmers Leaving Agriculture in Iowa,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 44, no. 2 (May 1962).

¹²⁷ Davis, “Policy Implications,” 305.

¹²⁸ Ruttan, “Agricultural Policy in an Affluent Society;” G. Edward Schuh, “Agricultural and Community Issues: New Challenges and Opportunities,” *Staff Paper Series, Institute for Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics, University of Minnesota Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics*, 1979, 3.

¹²⁹ C.E. Bishop, “The Rural Development Program and Underemployment in Agriculture,” *Journal of Farm Economics*, 42, no. 5 (1960), 1203.

¹³⁰ Ruttan, “Agricultural Policy in an Affluent Society,” 1111.

market” would not lead to rural revitalization, and that local efforts would scarcely make a dent in rural decline.¹³² McDermott and others believed that the trends undermining rural communities were simply too large and required a more thoroughgoing development program.¹³³

However, many came to the opposite conclusion and argued that investments in rural development would do little to reverse the rural crisis. Much like their case for the large-scale farm economy, the arguments of agricultural economists against investment in new sources of work for rural people turned on the question of rationality and efficiency. C.E. Bishop, who published a popular introductory agricultural economics textbook in the 1950s, spoke for many when he argued that investments aimed to help rural communities attract new manufacturing jobs would fail. Bishop stated that the type of manufacturer that rural communities would be able to attract would likely be low-wage, low-yield, and undercapitalized firms with little ability to compete. Public funds would be better spent elsewhere, primarily in larger metropolitan areas, where higher levels of productivity would be assured.¹³⁴ E.J.R. Booth used more colorful language in describing his opposition to rural industrialization. Booth argued that, at best, rural communities would be able to attract the “cast offs of the industrial system” that would, by providing them a few jobs, simply “prolong the local agony.” Investment and people should ultimately go to larger metropolitan

¹³¹ Quoted in Lauck, *American Agriculture and the Problem of Monopoly*, 9.

¹³² J.K. McDermott, “A Framework for Rural Development,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 42, no. 3 (1960), 567.

¹³³ Frank Bachmura and Robert Glasgow, “Rural Area Development in a Growing Economy,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 43, no. 5 (1961): 1532-1537; John Blackmore, “Rural Economic Development: Some Lessons from the Past,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 46, no. 4 (1964): 780-790; Don Paarlberg, “Rural Development Achievements and Shortcomings as Seen at the Federal Level,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 43, no. 5 (1961): 1511-1518; Frank Sheppard, “Rural Development Achievements and Shortcomings as Seen at the State Level,” 43, no. 5 (1961): 1521-1528.

¹³⁴ C.E. Bishop, “Approaches to the Rural Development Program,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 39, no. 2 (1957), 276-7.

areas because small rural towns had no “growth potential.”¹³⁵ These places, called “growth centers,” would offer the greatest return on public and private investment and were often medium to large cities.¹³⁶

However, agricultural economists did not think that rural people should be left to fend for themselves. Instead, they called for human capital investments in education and relocation assistance to help rural people make the transition from country to city. Bishop argued against a laissez-faire approach, stating that it would be ridiculous to think that rural people could simply “lift themselves by their own bootstraps” and find new work. For Bishop, economic development was a “national problem and that it should be tackled on a national scale.”¹³⁷ Even Theodore Schultz, whose work sometimes criticized the heavy hand of farm subsidies, argued that the federal government would need to help rural people relocate and find new jobs.¹³⁸ Schuh similarly called for federal support for the relocation and retraining of low-income farmers.¹³⁹ Ultimately, these agricultural economists believed that the most efficient rural community was one populated by a small number of large-scale, highly productive farms. Cast-offs from the farm economy would best be served by leaving agriculture and rural America altogether.

A much different perspective emerged among rural sociologists and community developers. Scholars working in community development did the most to outline a vision of rural revival at odds with the ideas put forth by Schultz, Schuh, and others. At the University

¹³⁵ E.J.R. Booth, “The Economic Dimensions of Rural Poverty,” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 51, no. 2 (May 1969), 439.

¹³⁶ For a discussion of the growth center concept in Appalachia, see Eller, *Uneven Ground*.

¹³⁷ Bishop, “The Rural Development Program and Underemployment in Agriculture,” 1204, 1206.

¹³⁸ Theodore Schultz, “Some Reflections on Poverty in Agriculture,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 31 (November 1949).

¹³⁹ G. Edward Schuh, “Neoclassical Economic Theory, Poverty, and Income Distribution,” in Robert Coppedge and Carlton Davis, eds., *Rural Poverty and the Policy Crisis* (Ames: Iowa State

of Missouri, where one of the earliest and most influential community development programs emerged, practitioners developed a vision of rural development that ultimately encompassed more than just the small town where development began. They saw rural development as a means for a greater reorganization of the U.S.

When scholars at the University of Missouri spoke of community development, what exactly did they mean? Harold Kaufman, who taught in Missouri's community development program, defined community as a grouping of population, institutions, and values.¹⁴⁰ He also saw it more dynamically as the daily activities of people living in a given place. Community development was thus the concerted action of the community for improvement.¹⁴¹ Arthur Dunham, another community development instructor at Missouri, saw community development as the efforts of the community to improve its economic, social, and cultural conditions.¹⁴² The goal of community development was an expansion of new jobs and infrastructure, funded by both public and private investments.¹⁴³ Supporters emphatically insisted that community involvement was essential.¹⁴⁴ One of the reasons many in community development disliked the concentration of people and jobs in cities was because it tended to concentrate decision making power there as well. Kaufman and C.B. Ratchford, who oversaw extension and community development programs at Missouri, worried that this

University Press, 1977); G. Edward Schuh, "Current Challenges for Agricultural Policy," *Western Journal of Agricultural Economics* 3, no. 2 (1978): 233-243.

¹⁴⁰ Harold Kaufman, "The Rural-Urban Community: Development in the South," February 1979, Folder D 96, Box 3, Harold Kaufman Papers, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia.

¹⁴¹ Harold Kaufman, "Toward Community Development," ca. 1970, Folder D 99, Box 3, Kaufman Papers.

¹⁴² Arthur Dunham, "'Community Development in North America,'" *Community Development Journal* 7, no. 1 (January 1972), 13.

¹⁴³ Dunham, "Community Development in North America," 13; *Community Development: A New Dimension of Extension*, 30; Arthur Hugh Denney, "Operation of the Community Development Program of the University of Missouri in a Community," ca. 1965, Folder Budget, Box 1, Arthur Hugh Denney Papers, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia.

¹⁴⁴ John Croll, *A Three-County Planning Program* (University of Missouri – Extension Division, 1971).

concentration of authority would mean that the smaller communities might lose “the power to decide” many of the most important aspects of their future.¹⁴⁵ Community development would therefore re-empower local communities. In practice, though, local elites and development experts controlled development projects.

While the first goal was to improve the local community, Denney envisioned the ultimate outcome of development to be a much more decentralized industrial economy and a population spread out in smaller rural towns. In contrast to many agricultural economists, he argued that many small towns were positioned well enough – because of location or resources – to serve as growth centers. However, Denney explicitly argued that not all small towns would be saved by community development.¹⁴⁶ To determine the most optimal distribution of people and jobs, Denney developed a mapping and classification system. The goal was to spread out employment in such a way that jobs and services would, in his words, “reach the maximum number of citizens at the minimum total travel distance.” The overall focus of development would be investment in what he termed “class seven” and “class six” towns. The former would contain essential services, particularly larger medical centers, as well as junior colleges or regional satellites of state universities. Industrial employment would also be concentrated there.¹⁴⁷ People located in more remote rural areas would ideally be able to reach class seven towns within one hour. Class six towns, on the other hand, would offer a smaller range of options. They would offer ambulance and hospital services for remote residents, as well as basic retail shopping. While Denney did not argue that cities on

¹⁴⁵ C.B. Ratchford, “The Community Development Profession in Today’s Society,” *Journal of the CDS* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1970), 7; Kaufman, “Toward Community Development,” 7.

¹⁴⁶ Denney, “A Paper Presented at Midwest Non-Metropolitan Conference.”

¹⁴⁷ Hugh Denney, *Decongesting Metropolitan America* (University of Missouri Extension Division, 1972), 27.

the scale of New York needed to disappear, he believed that the major targets of investment should be these smaller cities, around which new economic activity would occur.¹⁴⁸

This vision for rural development was not bounded by the borders of the U.S. On the contrary, Denney and others in the Department of Community Development believed they had developed universally applicable ideas that could be exported around the globe. The global character of the department was reflected in part by its diverse student body. By the end of the 1960s, students from over fifty countries had learned the principles of community development from Denney and the rest of the faculty.¹⁴⁹ Students from South Korea and Nigeria, for example, worked on projects that applied Denney's mapping system to rural development projects in their home countries.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, faculty took leave to work on community development projects in foreign countries. For example, Denney and Boyd Faulkner, another professor in the department, travelled to Cameroon and Nigeria to consult on community development projects.¹⁵¹ Insights into rural society and development gleaned from working in the Midwest could therefore be brought to bear on rural problems in far-flung locations.

This ambitious development agenda, however, left several important questions unanswered that plagued not only community development, but the enterprise of rural development more broadly. The vision of development articulated by community developers would be implemented through cooperation between local communities, the private sector,

¹⁴⁸ Denney, *Decongesting Metropolitan America*, 26; Denney, "A Paper Presented at Midwest Non-Metropolitan Conference."

¹⁴⁹ "Alumni Newsletter," November 1970, Folder Budget, Box 1, Denney Papers; "Summary Report: Department Self-Study of Regional and Community Affairs," 30; *Annual Report, Department of Regional and Community Affairs, 1965-1966*, Folder Staff Meetings, Box 1, Denney Papers.

¹⁵⁰ See Yang Boo Choe, "Application of Polygon Mapping Technique and Space Organization: A Case of South Korea," 9 December 1974 and Von L. Hall, "Polygon Mapping for Planning in Nigeria and the North Eastern State," 10 December 1974, Folder U of Mo CDP, Box 3, Denney Papers.

expert planners, and the federal government.¹⁵² However Denney left key questions about process and decision making, particularly those that would inevitably arise between local and national interests, unanswered. How, for example, would the development goals of a multiplicity of small towns be reconciled with the larger, national goal of decentralization? Community development's emphasis upon local communities driving the planning process clashed with the need for more national-level guidance to achieve decentralization and opened the way toward political conflict. Denney did not address, for example, how exactly community development would adjudicate between competing community claims to be a class six city.

These questions were also left unanswered by rural sociologists who, for the most part, embraced rural development policy. In contrast to community developers, though, rural sociologists did not articulate a larger vision for development. Instead, they used their field's longstanding interest in community studies to evaluate rural development's impacts on small towns. Though many rural sociologists would advocate for rural development and even help implement local programs, they were mixed on its benefits. For example, Gene Summers' study of a sparsely settled rural area in Illinois found rural industrialization's impact to be mostly positive.¹⁵³ Summers discovered that income and employment levels increased overall, even if they were not distributed as evenly as one might hope. A study of rural industrialization in Ohio found that rural residents responded favorably to the arrival of industry, and many used it to supplement farm income. Contrary to the expectations of many proponents of rural development, the Ohio study found that small farming might not

¹⁵¹ "Visiting Professors from the University of Missouri, Columbia, U.S. of America," 19 July 1974, Folder Journey to Cameroon and Nigeria, Box 2, Denney Papers.

¹⁵² Denney, *Decongesting Metropolitan America*, 125.

¹⁵³ Gene Summers, *Large Industry in a Rural Area: Demographic, Economic, and Social Impacts* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Experiment Station, 1973); see also Gene Summers,

disappear with the arrival of new industry.¹⁵⁴ Alvin Bertrand and Harold Osborne's study of rural industrialization in Louisiana found similar benefits.¹⁵⁵ The authors noted that industrialization did little to alter the fabric of social and community life. In other words, infiltration of new employment did not necessarily undermine "rural" ways of life and coexisted comfortably with more "traditional" aspects of rurality.

However, the ability of rural industrialization to stem community decline appeared to be rather weak. Michael Nolan and William Heffernan, two Missouri based rural sociologists, argued against Summers and others by showing that most employment gains resulting from industrialization went to non-locals.¹⁵⁶ In other words, those benefitting from rural industrialization did not live in the places that spent the resources to attract new industry. A study of industrialization in Jackson County, Ohio found that many formerly urban people moved to this rural county for new industrial work, and that they took over leadership positions in local school boards.¹⁵⁷ Other studies showed that – contrary to expectations – rural industrialization had only a small "multiplier" effect on private service sector employment.¹⁵⁸ These studies countered the popular claim that new industry would

Before Industrialization: A Rural Social System Base Study (Urbana: University of Illinois Experiment Station, 1969).

¹⁵⁴ Wade Andrews, Ward Bauer, and Everett Rodgers, *Benchmarks for Rural Industrialization: A Study of Rural Development in Monroe County, Ohio* (Wooster: Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station, 1960).

¹⁵⁵ Alvin Bertrand and Harold Osborne, *Rural Industrialization in a Louisiana Community* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Experiment Station, 1959); see also, John Christiansen, Sheridan Maitland, and John Payne, *Industrialization and Rural Life in Two Utah Counties* (Logan: Utah Agricultural Experiment Station, 1959).

¹⁵⁶ Michael Nolan and William Heffernan, "The Rural Development Act of 1972: A Skeptical View," *RS* 39, no. 4 (1974): 536-545; See also J.B. Stevens and L.T. Wallace, *Impact of Industrialization on Howard County, Indiana, 1947-1960* (Lafayette: Purdue University Agricultural Experiment Station, 1964).

¹⁵⁷ Leonard Sizer and William Clifford, *Rural Industrialization: A Case Study in Educational Values and Attitudes* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Experiment Station, 1965).

¹⁵⁸ H.A. Wadsworth and J.M. Conrad, *Impact of New Industry on a Rural Community* (Lafayette: Indiana Agricultural Experiment Station, 1966); USDA, *The Impact of New Industry on Local Government Finances in Five Small Towns in Kentucky* (Washington D.C.: Economic Research Service, USDA, 1970).

result in more general prosperity for rural areas. Nolan and Heffernan also cited studies that showed rural industrialization did little to actually arrest population decline. Most importantly, though, they argued that even if the benefits for these small towns were universally positive, promoting rural development was foolhardy because far too many small towns existed to benefit from it. There simply would not be enough private sector employment to go around. Rural industrialization, then, could not halt the disappearance of rural America. These studies reveal that, at best, rural development's impact would be limited and localized. As the next two chapters will show, the implementation of rural development would yield only partial, incomplete benefits.

Nonetheless, while many rural experts embraced a prescription for the rural crisis that promised more than it could deliver, they played an essential role in the process of understanding and framing the rural crisis. Beginning in the early years of the postwar period, rural experts working in agricultural economics, community development, and rural sociology charted the major changes reshaping rural life. Despite their different interpretations, these experts generally agreed that economic restructuring drove a process of job loss and population decline that radically reshaped many small towns. Moreover, in their own ways, rural experts showed that these changes recalibrated relationships between urban and rural America, and even rural America's place in global trade. Postwar rural scholarship ultimately demonstrated that the rural America of the early and mid-twentieth century was quickly disappearing. Many rural experts, though, were not content to let that happen. As the next chapter will show, rural experts advocated for the creation of rural development policy at the federal level, and many of their ideas about the rural crisis and possible solutions to it would find themselves echoed in policy debates. More importantly, rural experts, particularly those working in community development, would put their ideas into practice in small towns.

Chapter Two

Prosperity Amid Poverty: The Emergence of Rural Development Policy in the Federal Government

As experts analyzed the meaning of the rural crisis, policymakers in the federal government began creating programs to stem the tide of rural decline. Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, policymakers instituted a set of programs focused on combatting economic decline, rural outmigration, and poverty. In contrast to conservatives and many moderate liberals, proponents of rural development did not view the postwar economy as characterized by unparalleled prosperity and argued that the federal government would need to play a much larger role in reversing economic decline. With the passage of the Area Redevelopment Act in 1961 and the creation of the USDA's Office of Rural Areas Development that same year, policymakers forged a job-centered rural development policy to help struggling small towns. These programs aimed to create new employment through infrastructure projects, manufacturing, and the creation of a rural tourism economy. While these policies fought an uphill battle against larger economic forces and public policies that encouraged rural outmigration, they created a durable policy framework that shaped federal efforts to reverse rural decline through the 1970s.

Proponents of rural development hoped to do two things. At its most basic, rural development sought to replace jobs lost in traditional rural industries and, in the process, reverse rural outmigration through greater investments in jobs and infrastructure. Policymakers also hoped to realize a larger vision of development. While they wanted to restructure rural economies, many also hoped that the revitalization of small towns would decentralize industry and population. Many proponents of rural development questioned the concentration of the economy and population in urban areas. Moreover, they worried about

the poverty and poor quality of living in many cities that, by the mid-1960s, had sparked nationwide protests. Federal policymakers saw in rural development the opportunity to solve problems of urban congestion and poverty through a revitalization of the small town. New jobs in small towns would allow people to leave congested megacities for more livable rural communities. Central to this development vision, then, was a long standing rural-urban dichotomy that framed rural places as virtuous and central to the character of the republic, with cities standing in for danger and decadence. Policymakers ultimately hoped that rural development would create small towns with the amenities and jobs of urban areas with the smaller scales and scenic beauty of rural America.

Policymakers tried to achieve this vision of rural development through a public-private program that adhered to the federal structure of the U.S. government. Rural development policy pursued its goals through a system of federal loans and grants to local, county, and state governments, nonprofit development groups, and private businesses. These entities would create planning strategies to guide rural development in return for federal funds. While rural development aimed to improve social services and public infrastructure, its primary objective was to spur rural revival through private sector job growth. Policymakers did not want to create a top-down development program. Instead they wanted to leave significant room for local initiative and control. This structure reflected a firm belief in the importance of federalism as well as the limitations on state interventions imposed by Cold War anticommunism. Still, proponents of rural development pushed at the edges of this limit and advocated for a larger role for the federal government in solving economic problems. They argued that only the federal government had the power and finances to address nationwide rural decline.

Rural development emerged in a broader context of economic development policymaking at the federal level. By 1960, a “decade of development” had commenced that saw the federal government pursue a variety of overseas development projects. These projects built new infrastructure and industry, while also seeking to improve agricultural productivity in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. At the same time, through agencies like the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the federal government pursued a domestic development agenda. The ARC largely assumed that small towns in the region could not be saved, and it encouraged rural outmigration through highway construction and training programs that would prepare rural migrants for urban work. Domestic rural development flowered during the same period but followed a vision of development at odds with the large-scale industrialization characteristic of overseas ventures and with the ARC’s efforts to depopulate rural America. What emerged was a distinctive, domestic rural development project that sought to rebuild small towns with new infrastructure projects and create a new economic base in manufacturing and tourism.

Through an analysis of federal policymaking and rural development, this chapter also seeks to reframe our understanding of the Area Redevelopment Act, one of the central policies pursuing rural development. Historians have generally framed the program as a failure and a reflection of postwar liberalism’s limits. Gregory Wilson, for example, admits that the ARA looked back to the New Deal for inspiration, but argues that the postwar period’s moderate Keynesianism proved to be the more decisive influence. In contrast, this chapter suggests that proponents of the ARA far more self-consciously sought an alternative to moderate liberalism, and that New Deal influences were far more central to the ARA, and rural development more specifically. Moreover, the vision of rural development contained within the ARA has not been fully examined. More importantly, though, the ARA’s place

within a broader panoply of rural development programs has not been fully appreciated. The ARA's successor, the Economic Development Administration, also vigorously pursued rural development. The ARA was also complimented by a broad expansion of rural development at the USDA. This chapter will not necessarily contest the limitations of the ARA and rural development more broadly. Instead, it seeks to better understand postwar rural development policy and the ideas undergirding it.

Indeed, while federal policymakers crafted a program that aimed to cure structural problems in the rural economy, it had important limitations. The system of loans and grants that it created forced small towns to compete for limited funds, ensuring that many ailing rural communities would not receive much needed federal assistance. Moreover, the private sector could not create enough jobs to reverse widespread rural decline. For those communities that did receive funds, other problems emerged. Those communities were, first of all, overwhelmingly white. Rural development did little to address racial discrimination and inequality baked into rural economies, while also providing little funding for projects in rural areas not controlled by whites. Though rural development wanted to spur local initiative, federal rural development funds went primarily to local white elites in business and government who presided over the establishment of development groups in charge of planning and implementing job creation programs. Average rural people rarely participated. Finally, federal rural development policy accepted the dominance of the large-scale farm economy. By closing off the farm economy from reform, federal policy failed to address a major source of the rural crisis. Instead, development hoped to sidestep those issues by creating new jobs for rural people. Thus, while policymakers attempted to make a rural development program that could revive rural America, major oversights in terms of economic, political, and racial inequality limited its effectiveness.

This chapter analyzes the emergence and growth of rural development at the federal level. The particular focus is upon the programs created in the Commerce and Agriculture Departments, and policies passed by Congress during the 1960s. It analyzes the motivations and reasoning of federal policymakers for passing development legislation in the postwar period, with a particular emphasis on their understandings of rural decline and poverty, and the kinds of policies they believed would be necessary to solve those problems. However, these policies did not emerge from a sudden burst of policymaking in the 1960s. Instead, they took their inspiration in part from local industrial attraction programs and overseas development initiatives that began in the 1940s. Moreover, rural development programs were forged in a series of policymaking battles that played out over the course of the 1950s that, while ultimately leading to the creation of several development policies, had the effect of limiting their size and scope.

Though World War II has often been credited with bringing the U.S. out of the Great Depression, for many rural communities the economic collapse, which began in rural America in the 1920s, never really ended. Indeed, New Deal policies and wartime mobilization often exacerbated rural decline. Farm policy encouraged agricultural consolidation and pushed many off their farms. Wartime production jobs also pulled many people from the country to the city, leaving behind depopulated small towns. The prosperity of the postwar years also barely touched many rural communities. Resource exhaustion, mechanization, and declining demand devastated mining and timber economies while farm subsidy programs continued to transform the farm economy. For many small towns, depopulation and poverty seemed to be the only future.

While federal policymakers would ultimately create a nationwide framework for rural development policy in the early 1960s, they did little to solve the problem in the first decade after World War II. Instead, as policymakers pursued programs that exacerbated rural decline, such as federal highway construction, which made it even easier for people to do business outside their small towns, local and state governments stepped in. Many of the tools and strategies developed at the local and state level would eventually find their way into the rural development policies later passed by the federal government.

The Appalachian region emerged as an early site of postwar rural development activities. The region had long been home to low-income and subsistence farmers, many of whom began an exodus from their communities following World War II in search of better paying jobs in the northern industrial states. People from rural Appalachian mining and timber towns added to this stream of outmigration when mechanization and resource exhaustion threw them out of work in the late 1940s and early 1950s.¹⁵⁹ In the mid-1950s, Georgia and North Carolina formed some of the first state-wide economic development boards that helped their mountain counties create long-term development plans and attract new manufacturing in an effort to create jobs and retain population.¹⁶⁰ Kentucky built perhaps the most active economic development program. The Eastern Kentucky Regional Development Council, formed in September 1956, was emblematic of the approach taken in the state. Members of local Chambers of Commerce, as well as business owners and government officials formed the core of the Eastern Kentucky group.¹⁶¹ The council focused on pooling public and private capital in an attempt to bring new manufacturing jobs to a

¹⁵⁹ Ronald Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 20-9.

¹⁶⁰ Robert Korstad and James Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

¹⁶¹ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 46-7.

region hit hard by a depressed mining economy. In a pattern that would play itself out at the local level through the rest of the 1950s, however, these local rural developers had a difficult time attracting enough financial support to pursue the sorts of projects that might address unemployment and stem outmigration. Recognizing the limitations inherent in a locally financed approach, many of these development groups would become key supporters of 1960s area development legislation and would be further empowered by it.

As these local and state efforts got off the ground, two small federal programs emerged to help guide them. In 1955, the Department of Commerce launched the Office of Area Development (OAD), a precursor to the department's programs in the following decade.¹⁶² The program followed the governing philosophy best articulated by Herbert Hoover, Commerce secretary of the 1920s. Hoover put forth an "associational" vision of state intervention into markets. Instead of directly intervening, Hoover maintained that the state should conduct research and provide information to businesses so that they could better rationalize the market.¹⁶³ The OAD's purpose was simple: to help local economic development groups, public or private, find new sources of employment for their communities. However, OAD officials created a program that encouraged local initiative with little federal intervention. The OAD provided development groups with "self-help tools" such as the "Community Industrial Development Kit." This educational package taught communities how to make information packets about their town that would provide prospective industrialists with helpful information. The OAD also mailed a monthly bulletin to development groups that described the successful ventures of other communities in an

¹⁶² *Area Assistance Act of 1956: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, 84th Congress, 67, (1956)* (Statement of Frederick Mueller, Assistance Secretary of Commerce).

¹⁶³ Ellis Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an 'Associative State,' 1921-1928," *Journal of American History* 61, no. 1 (June 1974): 116-140.

effort to provide examples of how to attract new industry.¹⁶⁴ Instead of direct intervention, the Commerce Department's program acted as a sort of clearinghouse for development information that communities could use on their own initiative.

The methods of the OAD's work, as well as its limitations, can be seen in its cooperation with development groups in eastern Oklahoma. There, the office provided aid to a distressed coal-mining area part of the greater Ozarks region. In line with the OAD's emphasis on local self-help, it did not initiate contact with development groups, but instead waited for them to seek assistance. The OAD helped the Oklahoma state Planning and Resources Board conduct a survey of the area in cooperation with other government agencies. As a result of the survey's publication, the board reported that "several million dollars of road contracts" were released ahead of schedule, manufacturing firms expressed interest in the region, and local towns began looking into improving their recreation potential. Aside from the road contracts, which were already committed, little of concrete value resulted.¹⁶⁵ While it served as a precursor to later federal policy, the OAD ultimately had more in common with Hooverian conceptions of state activity common in the 1920s than the more strident vision of state intervention that would characterize later development programs.¹⁶⁶

Alongside the Commerce Department, the USDA created its own initiative known as the Rural Development Program (RDP) in 1956. In contrast to Commerce, the USDA put forth an analysis of rural decline and a vision of what a revived rural America might look like. The program's founding document, drafted by the agricultural economist Don

¹⁶⁴ Statement of Frederick Mueller (1956), 68.

¹⁶⁵ *Area Redevelopment: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 85th Congress*, 349-50, (1957) (Statement of Frederick Mueller, Assistant Secretary of Commerce).

¹⁶⁶ Ellis Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an 'Associative State,' 1921-1928," *Journal of American History* 61, no. 1 (June 1974): 116-140.

Paarlberg, framed rural problems primarily in terms of agriculture.¹⁶⁷ Paarlberg argued that the agricultural poverty and rural decline stemmed not from the individual or cultural deficiencies of farm people, but from their lack good land and machinery. While this analysis pointed toward a critique of capital distribution, it ignored the role of federal farm policy in establishing an unequal farm economy, to say nothing of the racial inequality baked into the structure of agriculture. In any case, Paarlberg did not call for a small farm aid program. Instead, like his colleagues in agricultural economics discussed in the previous chapter, Paarlberg's report approved of trends that saw farm size increasing and the number of total farmers declining and argued they needed to be accelerated. These larger farms operated more efficiently and achieved higher rates of productivity than their smaller counterparts. Agriculture Secretary Ezra Taft Benson agreed, and argued that the program reflected a need to adapt to a reality populated by "fewer and larger farms."¹⁶⁸ However, the RDP did not propose to depopulate rural America. Instead, the solution to the low-income farmer existed largely "outside commercial agriculture," particularly in manufacturing and service jobs in their hometowns.¹⁶⁹

The program's structure reflected USDA Secretary Ezra Taft Benson's strident support for "free enterprise" and resembled the OAD.¹⁷⁰ The program functioned by placing

¹⁶⁷ *Development of Agriculture's Human Resources: A Report on Problems of Low-Income Farmers* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955); see also *The Rural Development Program: With Emphasis on Extension's Responsibilities*, Series 1.4, Box 110, Folder: Rural Development Program Loans, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library, USDA Historical Collection, Beltsville, Maryland.

¹⁶⁸ *Message of the Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson to the Rural Development Program meeting in Lexington, Kentucky, 1957*, Series 1.4, Box 110, Folder: Rural Development Program Loans, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library, USDA Historical Collection.

¹⁶⁹ *Development of Agriculture's Human Resources*, iv; see also, *Major Manufacturing Industries as Potential Sources of Employment in Low-Income Farm Areas* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1957).

¹⁷⁰ For Benson's exhortations of the free market, see *Report of the Secretary of Agriculture* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956); see reports for 1957 and 1958 as well.

USDA extension workers in low-income counties who would then “help people survey their resources and make plans for long-range economic development.”¹⁷¹ While planning would be an important element of the RDP, it would be a thoroughly localized process, with success depending on “local participation and support.”¹⁷² Between 1956 and its termination in 1961, the program designated about 200 counties located in the southeast, the Appalachian region, and the Ozarks as “pilot demonstration” counties. In these places, state agriculture officials along with business and civic leaders formed “Rural Development Committees” that performed local surveys and engaged in industrial attraction efforts, all with extra technical assistance from USDA officials. The program had some success. During the program’s tenure, county development committees started some two hundred projects, some of which succeeded in attracting new industries and creating jobs.¹⁷³ Much like Commerce’s program, the USDA’s efforts had more in common with Hoover’s vision of state intervention than the policies that would emerge in the 1960s.

Just as bureaucrats in Commerce and Agriculture launched their programs, a group of liberal policymakers, intellectuals, planners, and labor activists emerged that attacked them as insufficient to the task at hand. Illinois Senator Paul Douglas, who would lead those efforts, no doubt spoke for many of these critics in a terse exchange with Assistant Commerce Secretary Frederick Mueller in 1957. Douglas remarked to Mueller that, when a community is in trouble, “you offer them a pamphlet.”¹⁷⁴ In contrast to the light-touch approach advocated for by figures like Mueller and Benson, over the course of the 1950s Douglas and liberals in and out of Congress would make the case that the federal government

¹⁷¹ *Rural Development Program Handbook* (Washington D.C., U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1959), 1.

¹⁷² *Rural Development Program Handbook*, 1.

¹⁷³ Paul Mehl, *Rural Development: Survey of 8 Southeastern States* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958); *Rural Development Program: 5th Annual Report of the Secretary of Agriculture* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1960).

needed to play a far larger role in financing and organizing development policy and, ultimately, ensuring that jobs and economic growth were spread more equitably across distressed regions in the U.S. These forces coalesced around Douglas's Area Redevelopment Act, which he introduced in Congress throughout the late 1950s. This bill aimed to create an independent economic development agency in the federal bureaucracy that would provide states, localities, and private businesses with loans and grants to spur investments in new infrastructure and jobs. However, President Eisenhower repeatedly vetoed Douglas's bill. Eisenhower's conservative allies attacked the ARA as an unnecessary expansion of federal power and pointed to the programs of Commerce and Agriculture as sufficient to the task. While Douglas would eventually succeed, the policies that he got were not necessarily those for which he had fought.

The person responsible for sending economic development legislation to Eisenhower's desk so many times was Illinois Senator Paul Douglas. Douglas's concern for economically distressed regions perhaps came from his own upbringing in a poor family in rural central Maine. He watched as his and other rural families struggled to make ends meet. Equally important in shaping his reformist ethos was his reading of the classics of muckraking journalism early in his life. From these readings he learned about the ways corporations and capitalists exploited average working people. Douglas took to studying economics as a way to learn about, and reform, society's problems. After studying at Bowdoin and then Columbia University, Douglas taught at the University of Illinois and Reed College before settling at the University of Chicago. On domestic politics, Douglas was a firm left-liberal. In 1931, he published a book entitled *The Coming of the New Party*, which argued for the intellectual

¹⁷⁴ Statement of Frederick Mueller (1957), 338.

bankruptcy of the Democratic and Republican Parties, and supported labor organizing, nationalizing some major industries, and a robust public housing program. He supported Norman Thomas in 1932, though he never joined the Socialist Party. While teaching at Chicago in the 1930s, Douglas played an important role in drafting laws to regulate utilities and establish a system of old-age pensions in the Illinois legislature.¹⁷⁵ Douglas carried on his political commitments into the U.S. Senate in 1948, where he would introduce a policy of federal support to distressed areas in every session of Congress from 1955 until its passage in 1961.¹⁷⁶

Douglas played a key role in shepherding the bill through Congress, but he could do so only because of a mass of support from key policymakers, labor unions, New Deal planners, and local development groups. Taken together, they reveal a set of actors far more committed to using the state to solve social and economic problems and illustrate the linkages between New Deal-style policymaking and postwar development legislation. While Douglas sponsored the bills in the Senate, he received help in conceptualizing and writing them from people with roots in the labor and planning circles of the 1930s. Solomon Barkin, who helped Douglas draft the bill, studied with the institutional economists Wesley Mitchell and J.M. Clark at Columbia University before joining the National Recovery Administration's Labor Advisory Board during the 1930s.¹⁷⁷ While working for the Textile

¹⁷⁵ Jonathan Bell, "The Changing Dynamics of American Liberalism: Paul Douglas and the Elections of 1948," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 96, no. 4 (Winter 2003/2004): 368-393; Roger Biles, "Paul H. Douglas, McCarthyism, and the Senatorial Election of 1954," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 95, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 52-67; Roger Biles *Crusading Liberal: Paul H. Douglas of Illinois* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002); Howard Shuman, "Portrait: Paul Howard Douglas," *Challenge* 22, no. 2 (July/August 1979): 59-63.

¹⁷⁶ For an account that more closely examines the legislative aspects of the ARA, see Sar Levitan, *Federal Aid to Depressed Areas: An Evaluation of the Area Redevelopment Administration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964); also, Wilson, *Communities Left Behind*, chapter 2.

¹⁷⁷ Donald Stabile, *Activist Unionism: The Institutional Economics of Solomon Barkin* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).

Workers, Barkin promoted unionization and expansive social welfare policies. During the Great Depression and World War II, William Batt, who would go on to serve as the director of the Area Redevelopment and Economic Development Administrations, served on a number of planning agencies. After the war, he led industrial development projects in Toledo, Ohio that would shape the way Douglas and others understood the process of economic development. William Miernyk, who also helped conceptualize the ARA, was a member of the National Planning Association, which promoted New Deal-style national planning. He penned an NPA report on depressed areas that called for extensive federal involvement in reversing economic decline.¹⁷⁸ These men were reflective of the larger support Douglas's bills received from a wide swath of the labor movement and local economic development groups.¹⁷⁹

In Congress, officials from hard hit regions, particularly Appalachia, the Ozarks, and the South, provided Douglas with critical support. In part, this support was pragmatic: their populations suffered from economic decline and poverty, and they believed that development policy promised a solution. Others, however, saw in economic development a way to build a more activist liberalism. For example, Estes Kefauver, a Tennessee Senator and strident New Deal liberal, partnered with Douglas to introduce his bill in the 1950s. Kefauver saw the bill as a way to counteract unemployment and poverty that continued to plague many

¹⁷⁸ Wilson, *Communities Left Behind*, 23-24, 38-40.

¹⁷⁹ From the labor movement, representatives from the AFL-CIO, both in the national and state-level offices, testified in favor of Douglas's bills throughout the 1950s. Representatives from particular unions appeared at Congressional hearings to register support as well, including the Textile Workers Union, the Transportation Workers Union, and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The National Farmers Union supported the rural development provisions in particular. For some examples, see *Area Redevelopment: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Senate, 84th Congress* (1956); *Area Assistance Act of 1956: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 84th Congress* (1956).

communities even after the depression ended.¹⁸⁰ Another major Congressional supporter was Senator Joseph Clark of Pennsylvania. Clark had experimented with development programs as mayor of Philadelphia in the 1950s and saw the ARA as a way to fortify and expand such efforts across the U.S.¹⁸¹ These liberals, with commitments far more in line with New Deal-style policy, played a major role in pushing economic development policy through Congress.

These groups represented an alternative to an emerging, but certainly not dominant, moderate strand of Keynesian economic thought. This group began to gain traction in the 1940s with the publication of Paul Samuelson's *Foundations of Economic Analysis* in 1946, and his widely used textbook, *Economics*, in 1948.¹⁸² Samuelson and others were defined in part by their attempt to merge Keynes's macroeconomics with the microeconomic assumptions of neoclassical economists. In general, these proponents of the neoclassical synthesis, as it came to be called, argued that Keynes's ideas about deficit spending could be used to stabilize an economy that they believed still functioned on the principles of neoclassical economics. This synthesis had important policy implications. These economists generally focused their attention on maintaining appropriate levels of aggregate demand so as not to encourage too much inflation or too much unemployment. They sought to "fine-tune" the economy with fiscal policy, while generally avoiding deeper interventions by the state. These prescriptions matched a largely positive view of U.S. capitalism, and an understanding of problems like poverty as manifestations of individual or cultural deficiencies.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ *Area Redevelopment: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Senate, 84th Congress, 202*, (1956) (Statement of Estes Kefauver, Senator from Tennessee), 42-3; see also, Richard McFadyen, "Estes Kefauver and the Tradition of Southern Progressivism," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 430-443.

¹⁸¹ On Clark's development policies in Philadelphia, see Guian McKee, *The Problem of Jobs: Liberalism, Race, and Deindustrialization in Philadelphia* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹⁸² Richard Parker, *John Kenneth Galbraith: His Life, His Politics, His Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 194.

¹⁸³ Theodore Rosenof, *Economics in the Long Run: New Deal Theorists and Their Legacies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Michael Bernstein, *A Perilous Progress*:

Those who rallied around Douglas's development policy also stood opposed to a popular postwar prescription for declining small towns. Looking at the restructuring of rural economies and the attendant population loss and poverty, many argued that the appropriate response to rural decline would be to encourage further outmigration. As discussed in the previous chapter, many agricultural economists, for example, argued that the federal government should help rural people relocate to cities and educate them for urban work. This view was not held solely by economists either. The liberal advocacy group Americans for Democratic Action also supported a program that encouraged rural outmigration. This perspective would become a part of government development policy in the mid-1960s through the Appalachian Regional Commission, which targeted the region's larger cities for investments and built highways that made it easier for people to leave small towns and do business in bigger ones.¹⁸⁴

In contrast, the forces that coalesced around Douglas created a development policy that sought to revive, not abandon, small rural towns. As a group, they held more structural understandings of postwar economic decline and a desire to use a more activist federal government to solve those problems than the moderate Keynesians. They looked back toward the New Deal for inspiration, particularly the role the state played in job creation and economic planning, and through agencies like the National Resources Planning Board. They argued that the scale of the problems facing small towns across the U.S. required a larger, federally driven effort reminiscent of the state activism of the 1930s. Federal officials and their supporters outside Congress suggest that the more activist "local liberalism" identified

Economists and Public Purpose in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Judith Russell, *Economics, Bureaucracy, and Race: How Keynesians Misguided the War on Poverty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

¹⁸⁴ Eller, *Uneven Ground*.

by Guian McKee in Philadelphia had an important counterpart at the national level.¹⁸⁵ While these more activist liberals may have held less power than they did during the 1930s, their role in shaping the ARA and other development policies illustrates their continued significance after World War II.

While the legacy of domestic policymaking during the New Deal inspired postwar policymakers, they also looked to contemporary economic development programs taking place overseas. Beginning in the 1930s, but ramping up in the postwar period, the U.S. government launched a series of rural development programs abroad. Foreign rural development programs were in general shaped by modernization theory. This theory posited a linear model of historical development that began with “primitive” communities and moved toward “modern” industrial societies on the order of the U.S. and Western Europe. These development programs sought to help “backward” peoples move farther along in the historical timeline, but the particular methods varied considerably. In some cases, land reform was sought, or the introduction of new agricultural techniques and implements, especially more productive seed varieties. Economic development was equally important. Inspired by the seeming success of the New Deal’s Tennessee Valley Authority, rural developers abroad sought to modernize the infrastructure of the countries in which they worked in order to lay the groundwork for industrial growth.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ McKee, *The Problem of Jobs*.

¹⁸⁶ For a sampling of this literature, see Robert Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World: Political Development Ideas in Foreign Aid and Social Science* (Princeton University Press, 1973); Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Harvard University Press, 2003); David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Harvard University Press, 2003); Odd Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America’s Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking*

Proponents of domestic economic development pointed to these programs to make the case for a more ambitious effort to solve unemployment and poverty at home, particularly the Point IV program launched by President Harry Truman. This program was designed to stunt the growth of communist movements in Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa by providing major investments in infrastructure and industry.¹⁸⁷ Supporters of rural development at home expressed indignation about the considerable federal dollars spent abroad while rural communities in the U.S. crumbled. Harry Boyer, president of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO argued that “it is time that this great and rich nation looks to its own areas of distress and shapes its own Point 4 program...”¹⁸⁸ Solomon Barkin, research director of the Textile Workers Union of America, similarly stated that if development is good enough “for our allies, it is good enough for our own people.”¹⁸⁹ Ultimately, these references to overseas development operated primarily on the level of rhetoric. Supporters of domestic development did not look to these programs to make the case that the U.S. needed to apply the ideas of modernization theory to the U.S. Instead, they pointed to these efforts to highlight the insufficient scale of the programs operated by the Commerce and Agriculture Departments in the 1950s, and the need for the U.S. to develop its own version of Point IV.

These calls for a development program inspired by the New Deal and overseas development rested in part on an argument that the U.S. economy was in far worse condition than either the Eisenhower administration or moderate Keynesians held. A common theme that emerged among supporters of development policy was an emphasis on structural, as opposed to individual or cultural, explanations of economic decline and poverty. Barkin, for

Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development (Harvard University Press, 2015); Nancy Kwak, *A World of Homeowners: American Power and the Politics of Housing Aid* (University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹⁸⁷ Wilson, *Communities Left Behind*, 32-3.

¹⁸⁸ Statement of Harry Boyer, ARA Hearings 1956, 447.

¹⁸⁹ Statement of Solomon Barker, AAA of 1956, 202.

example, explicitly framed postwar economic problems as “structural rather than superficial.”¹⁹⁰ He argued that economic decline might result from resource exhaustion or from trade and tariff policies that made it difficult for domestic businesses to compete against foreign competitors. Frank Graham, chairman of the National Sharecroppers Fund, went further, providing an explanation of farm poverty that linked economics with public policy. Graham argued that New Deal farm policy created an agricultural economy dominated by fewer, larger farms, greater agricultural inequality, and rural decline.¹⁹¹ Kefauver, on the other hand, questioned whether the U.S. was actually living through “a period of unparalleled prosperity,” pointing to the widespread unemployment from New England to the west coast.¹⁹² Proponents of Douglas’s bill challenged the idea that poverty and economic decline was a localized, let alone individual, issue. Far from pockets of poverty existing amid plenty, allies of the ARA painted a much darker picture of the postwar U.S. economy.

Though support for Douglas’s development bill often highlighted structural economic problems, their critiques overwhelmingly failed to incorporate race into their understanding of rural decline. This silence in part reflected Alabama Senator John Sparkman’s role in bringing rural problems into the development policy fold. Though Douglas hailed from a rural area, he did not originally include them in his bill. Douglas initially wanted a targeted economic development policy that would focus on economically distressed cities. However,

¹⁹⁰ *Area Assistance Act of 1956: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, 84th Congress*, 179, (1956) (Statement of Solomon Barkin, Director of Research, Textile Workers Union of America).

¹⁹¹ *Low-Income Families: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Low-Income Families of the Joint Committee on the Economic Report, House of Representatives, 84th Congress*, 389-9, 755, (1955) (Statement of Frank Graham, Chairman of the National Sharecroppers Fund).

¹⁹² *Area Redevelopment: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Senate, 84th Congress*, 202, (1956) (Statement of Estes Kefauver, Senator from Tennessee), 42; for a similar argument from Kentucky Representative Brent Spence, see *Area Assistance Act of 1956: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, 84th Congress*, 16 (1956) (Statement of Frederick Mueller, Assistant Secretary of Commerce).

Sparkman's power in the Senate, which involved the chairing of several committees, convinced Douglas he would need to include appropriations for rural areas if he wanted to secure his support. So, too, did the extent of rural poverty revealed in a series of hearings Sparkman led on the subject in 1955. Reports from rural experts showed, for example, that over 1.6 million farmers lived on less than \$1,000, and that rural mining and timber economies faced economic devastation.¹⁹³ Sparkman's sway in the Senate combined with a recognition of rural poverty's extent pushed Douglas to expand his bill. However, additional funds were not included, forcing the ARA to stretch its limited funds.

In regard to race, though, Sparkman's influence in the Senate limited the sorts of debates that could occur around racial inequality and the rural crisis.¹⁹⁴ Sparkman was a segregationist who signed the Southern Manifesto and vocally opposed civil rights legislation. It is not surprising, then, that the problems of black and brown farmers did not receive any attention during Sparkman's hearings. The structure of the development bill, which funneled federal funds to local and state governments, also comported well with the interests of Sparkman and other powerful southern policymakers. Midcentury southern local and state governments were invariably controlled by white elites with conservative racial politics.¹⁹⁵ By giving them control over development funds, Douglas's bill ensured that racial inequality as an aspect of the rural crisis would not receive significant attention.

¹⁹³ Wilson, *Communities Left Behind*, 36; *Low-Income Families: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Low-Income Families of the Joint Committee on the Economic Report, Congress*, 44 (1955) (Statement of Howard Bowen, President of Grinnell College); *Area Redevelopment: Committee on Banking and Currency, Executive Session, Senate*, (1958), 31-2, 39.

¹⁹⁴ On Sparkman's power in Congress, see Greta de Jong, *You Can't Eat Freedom: Southerners and Social Justice after the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), chapter 8; on the power of southern policymakers during the New Deal, see Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2014).

¹⁹⁵ Devin Caughey, *The Unsolid South: Southern Democrats in Congress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

Moreover, the political dimensions of rural decline, particularly in agriculture, received little attention outside of Graham's analysis. Silence on the question of agricultural policy reflected a broader tendency to not only ignore its role in reshaping many farm communities, but a general acceptance of it. Rural developers believed that New Deal farm policy produced a more rational agricultural economy. This oversight reflected in part the types of people and groups who supported Douglas's bill. Graham's group, the National Sharecropper Fund, came out of the multiracial sharecropper organizing of the 1930s and his analysis reflected that radical past. However, most of the people who talked about rural poverty and decline came from government or from the social sciences, particularly agricultural economics and rural sociology. The close links between those experts in particular and the farm policy establishment ensured that a major critique of agriculture programs would not be heard. It therefore became easier to see the solution to the rural crisis not in a new farm policy that would support small farmers and tenants, but in a program of rural development.

Despite these major holes in their analysis, calls for a rural development policy explicitly challenged the policy prescriptions of the neoclassical synthesis and Eisenhower conservatives. Rural developers particularly criticized the idea that economic growth would solve the rural crisis. Economic growth became almost an article of faith among postwar policymakers regardless of political persuasion. Prosperity depended upon it.¹⁹⁶ Kentucky Senator John Cooper, though, worried that impoverished states like his would not benefit. Cooper believed that economic growth, largely left in the hands of the private sector, would bypass small towns because business had little reason to invest in them.¹⁹⁷ H. Sonne,

¹⁹⁶ Robert Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁹⁷ *Area Redevelopment Act: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 86th Congress, 66-7 (1959)* (Testimony of Kentucky Senator John Cooper).

chairman of the National Planning Association, agreed, arguing that “economic growth is uneven by its very nature,” that it produced the very regional inequalities that its proponents hoped it could solve.¹⁹⁸ Douglas expressed similar sentiments, arguing that the private sector growth would do little to reverse long-term economic decline.¹⁹⁹ This is not to suggest that Douglas or his allies abandoned the call for economic growth. Instead, channeling Keynes’s call for a “socialization of investment,” Douglas and others believed the state would need to do more to achieve equitable growth by targeting specific declining areas for public and private investment.²⁰⁰ Thus, Douglas and others found the emerging liberal economic orthodoxy wanting, and looked back toward the New Deal, when the idea of greater state involvement in economic activity held more credence.

This more equitable distribution of growth would only occur with greater federal intervention in job creation and investment decisions. A finely tuned fiscal policy and a patchy welfare state alone would not work. Policymakers called for the federal government to channel investment to rural places that the private sector would likely ignore. Kentucky representative Brent Spence, for example, argued that many rural areas lacked the ability to deal with unemployment and decline on their own, and that only a federal agency could create new sources of work.²⁰¹ As others pointed out, these places often did not have the necessary infrastructure to attract new sources of employment and generally had lower tax rolls that could not support expanded public services. Without federal assistance, these places

¹⁹⁸ *Area Redevelopment: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 85th Congress*, 530, (1957) (Statement of H. Christian Sonne, President, South Ridge Corp., Chairman of the Board, National Planning Association).

¹⁹⁹ *Area Redevelopment Act: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 86th Congress*, 150 (1959) (Statement of Robert P. Lee, Finance Committee Secretary, Chamber of Commerce).

²⁰⁰ John Maynard Keynes, *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1936), 378.

would disappear.²⁰² This belief was reflected in the text of Douglas’s bill, which called for an independent agency to fund development. Only an agency existing outside established federal bureaucracies would be able to fully pursue to goal of economic development.²⁰³

What, ultimately, did supporters of development hope to achieve? Aside from bringing new jobs and infrastructure to struggling, they hoped it would give teeth to the 1946 Employment Act. Before being watered down by conservative opposition, the bill required the federal government to maintain full employment and framed jobs as a right guaranteed to all Americans. This position would have required extensive federal activity, particularly countercyclical public works, to make good on its commitments. Though these ideas were removed from the bill before passage, it still rhetorically committed the government to ensuring maximum employment. Douglas and Barkin explicitly framed the ARA as the creation of a “specific agency dedicated to the implementation of the Employment Act.”²⁰⁴ William Batt argued that the ARA would “plug an important loophole” in the act by forcing the federal government to look beyond aggregate statistics of employment and instead take a “worm’s eye” view of the depressed areas across the country.²⁰⁵ In contrast to the macro,

²⁰¹ *Area Assistance Act of 1956: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, 84th Congress, 35-6, 71-5 (1956)* (Statement of Frederick Mueller, Assistance Secretary of the Department of Commerce).

²⁰² *Area Assistance Act of 1956: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, 84th Congress, 255*, (Statement of Perry Shoemaker, Representative from the Chamber of Commerce); *Area Assistance Act of 1956: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, 84th Congress, 35-6, 71-5 (1956)* (Statement of Frederick Mueller, Assistance Secretary of the Department of Commerce).

²⁰³ *Area Redevelopment Act: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 86th Congress, 93*, (1959) (Statement of James Van Zandt, Representative in Congress from Pennsylvania).

²⁰⁴ For Douglas’s view, see *Area Redevelopment Act: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 86th Congress, 3* (1959) (Introduction to the Hearings by Illinois Senator Paul Douglas); for Barkin’s, see *Area Redevelopment: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 85th Congress, 718* (1957) (Statement of Solomon Barkin, Research Director for the Textile Workers Union of America).

²⁰⁵ *Area Assistance Act of 1956: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, 84th Congress, 130* (1956) (Statement of William Batt, Executive Secretary of the Toledo Industrial Development Council).

aggregate focus of moderate Keynesians, Batt believed that economic policy would need to focus on targeting particular areas. In this way, development would make good on the more expansive promises of the New Deal.

Second, supporters of the ARA wanted to create a different sort of rural development policy than the industrial attraction efforts that characterized the south. These efforts were largely funded by tax exemptions, secured low wage employment that was frequently “poached” from northern states, and did little to improve public infrastructure and social services.²⁰⁶ In contrast, the ARA contained a prohibition against the use of federal funds for projects that would simply relocate an industry from one region to another.²⁰⁷ The ARA’s purpose was not to move industry around but expand the overall productive capacity of the economy. More importantly, the ARA reflected a broader vision for rural development that contrasted sharply with the narrow efforts of southern states to “buy payroll.” While southern industrial attraction largely ignored the expansion of services, infrastructure, and public facilities, they made up a key element of the ARA’s attempt to develop declining areas more fully. Though Douglas and others did not want to create a top-down policy, development efforts would be funded in large part by the federal government and reflected a desire to expand its role in shaping the economy. This federal structure and the attempt to more fully develop small towns set it apart from the model of southern industrial attraction.

Third, proponents of rural development saw it as a way to not only shore up declining rural communities, but further stabilize the agricultural economy as well. Though New Deal farm policy had done a lot to raise farm incomes, periodic slumps and recessions driven by overproduction and low prices still impacted U.S. agriculture. At Sparkman’s hearings as

²⁰⁶ James Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

²⁰⁷ *Financing Area Development* (Department of Commerce: Area Redevelopment Administration, 1962), 8.

well as those for Douglas's legislation, rural experts put forth the common argument that the agricultural economy still had more farmers than it could support.²⁰⁸ Supporters of rural development assumed that the large farm was the most productive and efficient, but they did not want small farmers to leave rural America. Herschel Newsom of the National Grange put forth the solution: investments in rural development would help small farmers find new sources of work within their communities and, in the process, reduce agricultural output and lessen competition.²⁰⁹

Fourth, and most significantly, development would lay the basis for a new way to organize economic activity, not only in rural America, but in the country at large. While proponents of foreign economic development framed their work with the theoretical model of modernization, "decentralization" emerged as an important goal for domestic rural development. Within the framework of Douglas's legislation, this vision was articulated best by Victor Roterus, who worked as the primary economic adviser to the Area Redevelopment Administration. Roterus argued that market forces, left alone, tended to centralize economic activity. He considered centralization to be a largely negative outcome and argued that the "unfettered play of the market does not in reality produce an ideal pattern of maximized production..."²¹⁰ Economic centralization created congested cities and high levels of unemployment in outlying, particularly rural, areas. "The public mission," Roterus argued, "is to guide the pattern of economic growth." For Roterus, rural areas would be one of the

²⁰⁸ *Low-Income Families: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Low-Income Families of the Joint Committee on the Economic Report, House of Representatives, 84th Congress, 457, (1955)* (Statement of William Nichols, Professor of Economics, Vanderbilt University); *Low-Income Families: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Low-Income Families of the Joint Committee on the Economic Report, House of Representatives, 84th Congress, 427, (1955)* (Statement of Erven Long, Head, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, University of Tennessee).

²⁰⁹ *Area Redevelopment Act: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 86th Congress, 272, (1959)* (Statement of Herschel Newsom, Master, National Grange).

main beneficiaries of this new investment and would serve as key nodes in a decentralized economy.²¹¹ Roterus's ideas crystalized many of the main features of Douglas's bill, particularly its recognition that a hands-off approach to economic problems would only exacerbate them, and that a stronger federal hand would be required to reverse the rural crisis.

This call for a more robust federal policy, however, sparked considerable resistance and stalled the ARA's passage. Opponents of Douglas's bill disagreed with it over basic principles of political economy. The statements of Milton Lightner, a representative from the National Association of Manufacturers, exemplified many of the opposition's arguments. Lightner maintained that promising ventures did not need federal financing, and that businessmen would probably not base their location decisions on the availability of federal loans. Lightner also complained that the bill empowered the federal government to relocate businesses, thereby simply reshuffling economic problems from one area to another.²¹² The Chamber of Commerce also registered opposition. Robert P. Lee, the organization's finance secretary, argued that competition was part of a free enterprise economy, and that federal intervention picked sides and chose winners.²¹³ Perry Shoemaker, another Chamber representative, contended that enough private funds existed to meet the needs of distressed

²¹⁰ *Address by Victor Reeves*, 16 February 1965, Series 1.4, Box A-3, Folder: Rural-Urban Balance Symposiums, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²¹¹ *Address*, 13; for a similar argument, see Victor Roterus, "Centralization or Decentralization of the Economic Growth," *Ekistics* 20, no. 118 (September 1965, 121-123).

²¹² *Area Redevelopment Act: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 86th Congress*, 188, 195, (1959) (Statement of Milton Lightner, Representative from the National Association of Manufacturers).

²¹³ *Area Redevelopment Act: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency, Senate, 86th Congress*, 145, (1959) (Statement of Robert P. Lee, Finance Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce).

economies and that federal intervention undermined local initiative.²¹⁴ Connecticut Senator Prescott Bush believed that an ARA administrator could not possibly understand business or local conditions enough to make wise investment choices. Instead, the “savers of our country,” i.e., industrial leaders, should take the lead in reviving distressed areas.²¹⁵ While this opposition did not stop Congress from sending Douglas’s bill to President Eisenhower’s desk many times during the 1950s, the president’s basic agreement with them ensured that he would veto the bill at every opportunity.

The victory of John F. Kennedy in the 1960 presidential election signaled a coming victory for the ARA. During his campaign, Kennedy championed Douglas’s redevelopment legislation and promised to finally sign it into law if elected. The ARA also received a boost from Kennedy’s declaration of the 1960s as a “decade of development.”²¹⁶ Within its first year, the Kennedy administration created the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which helped to centralize the nation’s overseas development programs. That same year, the administration created the Peace Corps, headed Sargent Shriver, which sent idealistic young people abroad to work on development projects. The administration also launched the Alliance for Progress, a development initiative specifically devoted to Latin America.²¹⁷ While the ARA’s goals may not have lined up with the tenets of modernization theory, domestic rural development did form part of the Kennedy administration’s larger embrace of development policy.

²¹⁴ *Area Assistance Act of 1956: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, 84th Congress, 250-3*, (Statement of Perry Shoemaker, Representative from the Chamber of Commerce).

²¹⁵ *Area Redevelopment: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Banking and Currency Committee, Senate, 85th Congress, 611-617 (1957)* (Statement of Robert P. Lee, Chamber of Commerce Representative).

²¹⁶ Ekbladh, *Great American Mission*, chapter 6.

However, while the federal government created independent overseas development agencies and lavished them with billions of dollars, the ARA did not receive the same treatment. When Kennedy signed the Area Redevelopment Act into law in 1961, it did not have one key element that Douglas saw as essential: an independent economic development agency. Instead, the bill created the Area Redevelopment Agency within the Commerce Department. Though this department had a long history of experimenting with state-market relationships dating back to the 1920s under Herbert Hoover, the sort of federally driven policy envisioned by Douglas did not have a strong precedent. This compromise reflected the more conservative postwar mood, not only among Republicans but many moderate Democrats as well. While the U.S. might take on major, expensive development programs to fight communism abroad, fears about communism at home had a different effect. An independent economic development agency was far too close to the sorts of planning bodies created during the New Deal that, in the postwar era, seemed too reminiscent of the Soviet system.

In spite of this important setback, the ARA contained most of the provisions for which Douglas and others had advocated during the 1950s. The bill authorized over \$450 million (over \$3.8 billion in 2020 dollars) in federally financed loans and grants that would be spent on infrastructure projects and investments in new businesses. The bill set aside \$100 million for loans in rural areas that financed the construction of new factory buildings, the rehabilitation of old buildings, and the purchase and redevelopment of land and capital assets like machinery. Another \$100 million went to urban areas for the same purposes. Loans to private businesses covered 65% of project costs at 4% interest, while loans for infrastructure could cover the total cost of the project. The bill also set aside \$75 million for grants that

²¹⁷ Amy Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and*

would be used to build new infrastructure and public facilities. These grants could also cover the project's total cost.²¹⁸ The remainder of the bill's appropriations were used for programs to retrain workers and to help local and state governments establish planning agencies that would create and implement projects. William Batt, who had worked with planning agencies during the 1930s, served as the agency's director and represented a physical link between the New Deal and postwar development efforts.

Though couched in the Commerce Department, the ARA still functioned in much the same way as Douglas and others had hoped. The ARA would still use federal funds to direct investment and create new jobs. Batt had the power to declare towns and counties as "depressed" and therefore eligible for federal aid. Generally, the categorization of counties as depressed and the disbursement of federal aid followed a "worst first" policy, meaning the agency would target areas that had the highest unemployment for the longest period of time. However, Batt had the authority to declare any place depressed. The act also established a localized, but federally supported, planning apparatus. Projects originated at the local, county or state level, but needed to be approved by the ARA. In order to receive aid, a town needed to form a planning body that would survey resources and couch the specific project within a long range plan for economic development. In terms of infrastructure, the ARA funded roads, bridges, water and sewage facilities, airports, and industrial parks. For rural areas, job creation projects focused on manufacturing as well as the creation of a rural tourism economy that would take advantage of the uniqueness of rural cultures and landscapes. In contrast to the Community Action Agencies that would define the War on Poverty a few years later, these local planning bodies did not have any requirements about including the

Developmental States in the Americas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

²¹⁸ Taken from Wilson, *Communities Left Behind* and Sar Levitan, *Federal Aid to Depressed Areas: An Evaluation of the Area Redevelopment Administration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964).

poor or unemployed. As later chapters will make clear, local elites controlled development planning.

Within a year of the ARA's passage, over 900 small towns, counties, and cities had been declared in need of aid by Batt. This rapid rise in the number of eligible counties quickly strained the agency's budget, particularly the smaller appropriations for public works. In 1962, Congress passed an amendment to the Area Redevelopment Act, known as the Accelerated Public Works Act. The amendment added \$850 million dollars (over \$7.2 billion in 2020 dollars) in direct federal spending to states and localities. The amendment specifically funded public works projects and was designed to push the counties and states that oversaw those projects to directly hire the underemployed and unemployed. By 1963, the amendment expanded public works investments in 1,000 ARA-designated areas.²¹⁹

Set to expire in 1965, supporters of the ARA and rural development in Congress quickly set to work on passing a replacement bill known as the Public Works and Economic Development Act (EDA). The EDA formed an important, if underexamined, component of the burst of legislative activity that characterized the Great Society and War on Poverty during the Lyndon Johnson administration. In fact, supporters framed its emphasis on infrastructure projects and job creation as the best way to fight a war on poverty. William Miernyk lodged his support for the EDA because he saw its job creation component as the best way to achieve the War on Poverty's goal of providing "equal opportunity for all."²²⁰ Batt, whose directorship was carried over from the ARA to the EDA, saw the War on Poverty's training programs as preparation for the jobs that would be created by his agency. This linkage suggests that President Lyndon Johnson's famous veto of a jobs program for the

²¹⁹ *Annual Report on the Area Redevelopment Administration of the Department of Commerce in 1963* (Washington D.C.: Commerce Department, 1963), 2.

War on Poverty may not have been the final word on the subject. While it did not directly create jobs like the Works Progress Administration, the EDA functioned as the “jobs program” for the War on Poverty.

Debate over the EDA also occurred as urban unrest and African American protests ramped up in many U.S. cities. These protests responded to an urban crisis characterized by decades of deindustrialization, neglect, and racial discrimination. In the process, the urban crisis became inextricably linked to race.²²¹ In this context, the EDA was framed as a solution to interconnected rural and urban problems. As the last chapter made clear, many rural experts saw urban poverty and congestion as a product of rural decline and outmigration. This perspective filtered into the debates over the EDA.²²² When pitching their support for the EDA, some argued that development programs might be a way to stem racial unrest and ameliorate some problems of racial inequality. Hubert Humphrey, for example, implied that the Watts and other uprisings of 1960s made clear that rural to urban migration caused significant problems in U.S. cities. In this understanding, rural development, by creating new jobs outside of major cities, might ease problems created by urban congestion while also raising black employment levels. Unfortunately, discussions of urban uprising provoked some of the only occasions when proponents of rural development engaged

²²⁰ *Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965: Hearings before the Committee on Public Works, Senate, 89th Congress*, 329 (1965) (Statement of Dr. William Miernyk, Economics Professor and Director of the Bureau of Economic Research, University of Colorado).

²²¹ Wendell Pritchett, “Which Urban Crisis? Regionalism, Race, and Urban Poverty, 1960-1974,” *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 2 (January 2008): 266-286.

²²² Ross Davis, “A Look at Rural America,” *Economic Development* 4, no. 8 (August 1967), 2; “Creating Alternatives to Urban Migration,” *Economic Development* 5, no. 1 (January 1968), 6; *Rural Development: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Rural Development of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Senate, 92nd Congress*, 2 (1971) (Statement of Hubert Humphrey, U.S. Senator from Minnesota); *Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965: Hearings before the Committee on Public Works, Senate, 89th Congress*, 405 (1965) (Statement of Angus McDonald, Director of Research, National Farmers Union).

problems of racial inequality. Nonetheless, many agreed that urban problems made the need for further rural investment even more urgent.

Like debates over the ARA, the Public Works and Economic Development Act also saw renewed argument about industrial poaching and, in particular, the use of tax incentives to lure industry from one region to another. These debates highlight the distinctions between the developmental vision put forth by supporters of the EDA and the model of industrial attraction used in the south. Development proponents from organized labor argued that the use of tax incentive-based industrial attraction had actually undermined the ARA. By using tax exemptions to lure new industry, non-ARA areas not only contributed to the draining of industry from one region to another, but made it difficult for ARA-designated areas to attract manufacturers.²²³ The AFL-CIO's Andrew Biemiller developed a plan that would strengthen the EDA and the development vision behind it while simultaneously ending the model of southern industrial attraction. Biemiller revived a bill from 1954 that outlawed state and local governments from using tax-exempt bonds to construct industrial facilities. Though the bill passed the House it failed to make it through the Senate. Biemiller lobbied, unsuccessfully, for a similar provision to be included in the EDA. Had Biemiller succeeded, it would have reinforced federal rural development as the primary development policy. However, by 1965 thirty-eight states used those bonds to attract industry, and the proposal failed to gain traction.²²⁴

Nonetheless, the EDA passed in August 1965, with some changes to the ARA's development model. Spending levels increased in comparison to the ARA, but with an

²²³ Wilson, *Communities Left Behind*, 137-8.

²²⁴ *Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965: Hearings before the Committee on Public Works, House of Representatives, 89th Congress*, 61-61, (1965) (Statement of Andrew Biemiller, Director, Department of Legislation, AFL-CIO); for additional information on the spread of tax incentives and municipal bonds to lure industry, as well as opposition to it, see James Cobb,

enlarged focus on public works. The bill set aside \$500 million (over \$4.2 billion in 2020) per year for public works grants to states and localities, \$170 million (over \$1.4 billion in 2020) per year went toward loans for industrial projects and infrastructure, \$25 million per year could be used for technical assistance, and \$65 million went toward the creation of multi-county development districts with loans, grants, and technical assistance. As with the ARA, public works grants could cover the entire cost of the project. Loans for businesses, though, now covered only half the cost, not 65%.²²⁵ This shift perhaps reflected the popularity of the public works provisions of the ARA. Importantly, the act did not distinguish between urban and rural redevelopment centers. In practice, a majority of the act's funds went to rural areas throughout the 1960s and 1970s.²²⁶ Even more than the ARA, the EDA operated as primarily a rural development program.

The more important shift came in the EDA's focus on "growth centers" and regional planning. The EDA effectively abandoned the ARA's worst first policy in favor of one that supporters hoped would encourage better planned economic development. Growth centers, which had gained traction as a development concept in the 1960s, were those places that, because of pre-existing resources and location, could make the best use of federal investment. Though many believed that growth centers needed to be medium or large cities, the EDA operated from the principle that small towns could function as growth centers as well. The regional planning bodies created by the EDA would play an important role in determining which city would receive growth center status. These planning bodies would

The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

²²⁵ *Evaluation of Economic Development Programs, Hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Economic Development Programs, House of Representatives, 91st Congress, 5* (1969) (Statement of Robert Podesta, Assistant Secretary for Economic Development, Department of Commerce).

²²⁶ For the particulars of the bill, see Pub.L. 89-136. For spending totals, see the Economic Development Administration Annual Reports.

sometimes be multistate, as in the case of the Ozark Regional Commission, or composed of a few counties. Small growth centers would become centers of industrial and service sector employment, as well as regional sites for social services and post-secondary education. Despite these changes, the primary focus of rural development remained the same: rebuild small towns with new infrastructure and jobs.

While the Commerce Department became an important center of rural development activity during the 1960s, the USDA also moved in a similar direction under the leadership of former Minnesota governor Orville Freeman. Freeman, raised in Minneapolis and trained as a lawyer, was an odd choice to head up a bureaucracy with 96,000 employees working mostly on agricultural problems.²²⁷ For much of his career he was involved in Democratic Party politics. He had risen through the ranks of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party. The DFL's history provides important clues to Freeman's politics. The party resulted from the fusion of the state's Democratic Party and the left wing Farmer-Labor Party, formed in 1918. While a staunch liberal, Freeman, along with Hubert Humphrey, purged the DFL of many of its left-wing, especially communist, members. Though Douglas, too, had a strong anti-communist streak, Freeman did not have the same long history of left-liberal, social democratic policy commitments.²²⁸ Freeman's rise in the DFL's ranks led him to three terms as the state's governor. Though he lost his fourth bid, he believed his long dedication to Democratic politics would pay off with a cabinet appointment by Kennedy. Freeman initially

²²⁷ Pete Daniel, *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 3.

²²⁸ Jennifer Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal: Civil Rights and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 135; Jonathan Bell, *The Liberal State on Trial: The Cold War and American Politics in the Truman Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 137.

hoped that Kennedy would let him be Attorney General, but gladly accepted the position at the USDA when offered.²²⁹

Freeman's decidedly nonrural background shaped his tenure at the USDA. Though Freeman was a strong supporter of farm policy as it had developed since the New Deal, he had broader aspirations for the USDA. He wanted to turn it into an agency focused primarily on farming into a much broader department of "rural affairs."²³⁰ A major component of this expansion in the USDA's mission involved an embrace of rural development policy. Freeman saw rural development under Eisenhower as largely insufficient and wanted a bigger program. While his politics differed from Douglas's, Freeman's tenure at the USDA saw the creation of a rural development policy that had largely the same structure and goals as the program formulated by Douglas and operated out of the Commerce Department.

One of Freeman's earliest acts as Secretary of Agriculture was the creation of the Office of Rural Areas Development in 1961. The office replaced the meager Rural Development Program operated by President Eisenhower's agriculture secretary, Ezra Taft Benson. Much like the ARA and EDA, Freeman wanted his new program to reverse rural economic and population decline by providing federal loans and grants to ailing rural communities with the purpose of building new infrastructure and creating new jobs in manufacturing and tourism.²³¹ Aside from operating its own rural development program, the office was also linked to the development programs at the Commerce Department. The ARA and EDA both required rural development plans created at the local, county, and state level

²²⁹ Laura Kolar, "Conserving the Country in Postwar America: Federal Conservation Policy from Eisenhower to Nixon" (PhD Diss., University of Virginia, 2011), 85-7.

²³⁰ "Secretary Freeman Cites USDA's New Role in Behalf of Farm and Non-Farm Rural America," 22 March 1965, Series 1.4, Box 128, Folder: Rural Areas Development, January-March 1965, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²³¹ John Baker, "Rural-Urban Balance," 20 April 1967, Series 1.4, Box A-3, Folder: Rural-Urban Balance Symposiums, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

to be approved by the USDA.²³² The office also recommended rural communities for eligibility in the ARA/EDA and helped small towns understand and make use of the grants and loans coming from Commerce.²³³ This cooperation had several effects. First, it ensured that the USDA would continue to exercise significant oversight over rural programs and rural communities. At the same time, it prevented a centralized development authority from emerging by diffusing power over the operation of this policy area. Nonetheless, cooperation between Commerce and Agriculture further entrenched rural development as a policy goal.

New sources of funding supported the expansion of the USDA's rural development policy. In 1962, Congress passed the Food and Agriculture Act, which increased the money available to the Office of Rural Areas Development. This act gave the office the authority to support "rural renewal" projects through loans, grants, and technical assistance to local public agencies. One of the central aims of the Food and Agriculture Act was an expansion of recreational and tourism opportunities in rural communities. The act gave the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) the ability to give loans to farmers who sought to use some or all of their farmland for outdoor recreational purposes. Previously, that agency had only made loans to farmers making improvements on their homes or their land for the purposes of agriculture. Congress also increased the lending capacity of the FmHA and the Rural Electrification Administration, which itself had played a critical role in modernizing rural infrastructure since its creation in the 1930s. Increased funding for infrastructure was especially important for rural development projects because new manufacturing needed a

²³² To John Baker from Normal Clapp, 31 July 1962, Series 1.4, Box A-6, Folder: RAD Program, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²³³ To Walter Heller from Charles Murphy, 18 November 1963, Series 1.5, Box 36, Folder: Poverty and Rural Development, 1963, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; "Administration of Designated Rural Areas under Public Law 87-27," 1 June 1961, Series 1.4, Box A-6, Folder: History of Area Development, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; "Working Relationships between ARA and USDA on OEDPs and Project Proposals," 10 April 1964,

reliable source of power.²³⁴ Additional financial support came in the early 1970s. The most important policy here was the 1972 Rural Development Act. This bill reaffirmed the centrality of rural development to the USDA's mission while also providing new sources of funding for infrastructure projects, rural industrialization, and tourism.²³⁵

From the early 1960s into the 1970s, the assumptions and strategies behind the USDA's Office of Rural Areas Development lined up considerably with the ideas that undergirded the Commerce Department's programs. USDA programs, for example, operated from the assumption that rural poverty and decline stemmed from structural transformations in the rural economy. The increasingly productive and large scale farm economy, for example, pushed many farmers out of work. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture John Baker, who played a critical role in shaping and administering the USDA's rural development programs, put this fact most bluntly: "with the advancing technology in farming...there are not enough jobs in this field for all our rural people."²³⁶ Much like the proponents of the ARA and EDA, Baker and others presented these transformations without reference to the

Series 1.4, Box 128, Folder: RAD Board 1963-1964, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²³⁴ Orville Freeman, "Rural Areas Development: The Next Step, An Address before the National Advisory Committee on Rural Areas Development," 6 December 1962, Series 1.4, Box 128, Folder: Rural Areas Development 1961-2.

²³⁵ *Implementation of the Rural Development Act of 1972: Report of Subcommittee on Rural Development, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Senate, 93rd Congress* (1973); Anne Hammill, "A Rounding of Perspective on the Rural Development Act of 1972," *Rural Sociology* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 80-82; Gary Stanfield, "A Recritique and Reanalysis of the Rural Development Act of 1972," *Rural Sociology* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 75-79; Michael Nolan and William Heffernan, "The Rural Development Act of 1972: A Skeptical View," *Rural Sociology* 39, no. 4 (Winter 1974): 536-545.

²³⁶ John Baker, "Rural Prosperity and Parity: Address before the 1965 Rural Electrification Administration Field Conference," 14 June 1965, Series 1.4, Box 127, Folder: Rural Development 1969-72, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; John Baker, "Rural-Urban Balance," 20 April 1967, Series 1.4, Box A-3, Folder: Rural-Urban Balance Symposiums, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; for other examples, see E.T. York, "Need for, Scope, and Objectives of Rural Areas Development: Address before the Regional Extension Conference on Rural Areas Development, August 1961," Series 1.4, Box 127, Folder: Rural Development 1969-72, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; To Sargent Shriver

farm policies that they operated. Though the USDA's focus remained largely on agricultural problems, the agency clearly recognized that similar forces of mechanization and consolidation had impacted the mining and timber industries as well.²³⁷ These changes had resulted in widespread poverty and population decline that threatened rural America's viability.²³⁸

The solution to these major changes in traditional rural industries could be found in infrastructure projects and job creation in manufacturing and tourism. In terms of agriculture, USDA officials in charge of rural development accepted the dominance of the large-scale farm. Baker explicitly ruled out a small farm program, arguing that the USDA would not be advocating for a "a back-to-the-farm-movement."²³⁹ Indeed, rural developers within the USDA saw it as a way to reduce the number of farms by shifting marginal farmers out of agriculture.²⁴⁰ USDA officials placed particular emphasis upon supporting infrastructure. The rural crisis was about more than just the loss of jobs and population decline, but also about

from Howard Bertsch, undated, Series 1.4, Box 127, Folder: Rural Development 1969-72, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²³⁷ "Community Development: A Case Study," Folder, Community Development, Series 1.4/A-4, Special Collection of the National Agricultural Library; "Rural Poverty," 1964, Folder: Anti-Poverty Programs, Series 1.4/A-8, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²³⁸ "Address by Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman at Jackson's Mill, West Virginia," 20 July 1964, Folder: Rural Areas Development 1964, Series 1.4/128, Special Collections of the National Agriculture Library.

²³⁹ John Baker, "Rural Prosperity and Parity: Address before the 1965 Rural Electrification Administration Field Conference," 14 June 1965, Series 1.4, Box 127, Folder: Rural Development 1969-72, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; John Baker, "Rural-Urban Balance," 20 April 1967, Series 1.4, Box A-3, Folder: Rural-Urban Balance Symposiums, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; for other examples, see E.T. York, "Need for, Scope, and Objectives of Rural Areas Development: Address before the Regional Extension Conference on Rural Areas Development, August 1961," Series 1.4, Box 127, Folder: Rural Development 1969-72, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; To Sargent Shriver from Howard Bertsch, undated, Series 1.4, Box 127, Folder: Rural Development 1969-72, Special Collection of the National Agricultural Library.

²⁴⁰ "Rural Areas Development – United States Department of Agriculture," December 1961, Series 1.4, Box A-6, Folder: RAD Program, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

the dearth of adequate services and infrastructure in rural communities.²⁴¹ With a new base of infrastructure, the USDA hoped to encourage “rapid rural industrialization” and the establishment of tourism enterprises. Rural developers at the USDA saw tourism as an especially fruitful project. Not only would it transition marginal farmers out of agriculture, but it also promised to help the rugged mountainous communities in the Ozarks and Appalachia. There poverty was particularly deep, but the landscape made industrial development difficult. However, that landscape could also serve as a lucrative tourist attraction for affluent urbanites.²⁴²

Echoing the arguments of Victor Roterus and others in the ARA, Freeman and Baker hoped that this pursuit of new infrastructure and jobs in rural America would rebalance rural-urban relationships and lead to a decentralization of people and industry in small towns across the U.S. Freeman strongly criticized those who saw the solution to rural poverty in rural outmigration and the further concentration of people and jobs in cities.²⁴³ The way Freeman and Baker spoke about urban concentration, however, differed from Douglas and supporters of the ARA in several ways. Both men not only utilized far more romantic language when describing the rural past, but also hoped that rural development might lead to a new stage of historical development. Moreover, their formulations drew more readily from the Greenbelt Towns of the New Deal as well as the Garden Cities of early twentieth century England. Each of these predecessors sought to mix the best elements of urban and rural

²⁴¹ “Transcript of Meeting of National Advisory Committee on Rural Areas Development,” November 1964, Folder: National Advisory Committee on Rural Development, Series 1.4/A-5, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; “Address by Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman at Jackson’s Mill, West Virginia,” 20 July 1964, Folder: Rural Areas Development 1964, Series 1.4/128, Special Collections of the National Agriculture Library.

²⁴² Henry Nichols, “The Recreational Advisory Council,” November 1964, Folder: Rural Areas Development 1964, Series 1.4, Box 128, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

communities into a new synthesis.²⁴⁴ In a paean to the yeoman's republic of Thomas Jefferson, Baker, for example, believed that urbanization and industry threatened the "long held values of Western civilization." Rural development, Baker argued, emerged at a moment when the industrial revolution seemed to be reaching its "successful conclusion." The goal of rural development would be to lead the U.S. toward a "new, more advanced stage of civilization" that he called "the Rural Renaissance." This new epoch would synthesize the progress of the industrial era while seeking to maintain the "basic social values" and small scales of rural areas. Baker never fully articulated what aspects of industrial or rural values would define this new society, but it is clear that he hoped that rural development would make it possible for industry, on a smaller scale, and people to move back to more spacious, harmonious rural towns.²⁴⁵

Freeman offered his own name for this new era in history that he labelled the "Communities of Tomorrow." No longer would rural places simply provide food and fiber for bustling cities. Communities of Tomorrow would mix the best of both rural and urban areas by blending the economic and cultural potential of the city with the space and beauty of the country. These Communities of Tomorrow would be multicounty areas organized around either one large town or two smaller towns, with surrounding countryside used for recreation and farming. While Freeman's plan sought to retain the "maximum feasible number of small farms," he did not stress the need for a decentralized farm economy to accompany a decentralized population and manufacturing base. Indeed, a community of tomorrow could

²⁴³ Orville Freeman, "Address before the 18th Annual Convention of the Americans for Democratic Action," 3 April 1965, Series 1.4, Box 128, Folder: Rural Areas Development, April-May 1965, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²⁴⁴ Kolar, "Conserving the Country," 221-4.

²⁴⁵ John Baker, "Some Basic Principles of Rural Community Development," October 1968, Series 1.4, Box A-6, Folder: Technical Action Panels, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

comfortably about a large-scale mechanized farm.²⁴⁶ Though Baker and Freeman affixed catchy names to their plans, the Rural Renaissance and the Communities of Tomorrow largely matched the visions of decentralized economic activity put forth by the ARA and EDA. These plans highlighted a vision of rural renewal that stood in sharp contrast to those who advocated for rural depopulation, as well as the modernization that the U.S. pursued abroad.

Rural development officials at the USDA believed that reaching the Rural Renaissance or creating Communities of Tomorrow would require extensive state intervention and planning. USDA's rural development initiatives followed the Commerce programs in their belief that the federal government would need to play a much larger role in planning and funding rural development, while still allowing space for local initiative and control over the development and implementation of projects. Unlike Commerce, however, the USDA had a long tradition of planning that postwar bureaucrats could draw upon. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration, for example, brought together social scientists, farmers, and the USDA in an effort to reduce agricultural overproduction. In the late 1930s, some of the key formulators of New Deal farm policy, including M.L. Wilson and Henry Wallace, pushed this idea of planning further to encompass tenure security, soil conservation, and other reforms. By the early 1940s over 200,000 rural people participated in this planning program.²⁴⁷ Though it would be cut in the early 1940s, the planning model lived on in the USDA's rural development program.

²⁴⁶ *Communities of Tomorrow: Agriculture/2000* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1967), 6; see also, Orville Freeman, "Toward More Desirable Communities of Tomorrow," 8 January 1968, Series 1.4, Box A-3, Folder: Communities of Tomorrow, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²⁴⁷ Jess Gilbert, *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

When discussing their rural development program, USDA officials constantly referenced the need for planning in order to shift the economic structure of rural America toward manufacturing and tourism.²⁴⁸ Sounding not unlike Douglas, Freeman maintained that the federal government had the “power to direct economic growth” in such a way that rural decline could be reversed.²⁴⁹ However, following in the footsteps of Wilson and Wallace, Freeman did not want to establish a planning apparatus dominated by USDA officials. Instead, he created a planning program that, in his words, put “local initiative and leadership” at the center.²⁵⁰ Toward that end, the USDA helped local and county governments establish “Rural Areas Development Committees.” These committees would be responsible for developing local projects that would be funded by the federal government. The USDA also created “Technical Action Panels,” which formed layer between local committees and the USDA. Their purpose was to transmit USDA development goals to local committees and provide assistance in developing projects.

While this planning structure ensured that some measure of local participation would find its way into rural development, it also created some important problems. The structure,

²⁴⁸ For some examples, see John Baker, “Rural-Urban Balance,” 20 April 1967, Series 1.4, Box A-3, Folder: Rural-Urban Balance Symposiums, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; “Proposals for Improving Rural Life,” 7 December 1966, Series 1.4, Box A-4, Folder: Community Development, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; To John Baker from Howard Bertsch, 9 August 1966, Series 1.4, Box A-6, Folder: Appraisals of TAP; see “Rural Areas Development,” 14 February 1963, Series 1.4, Box A-6, Folder: Rural Areas Development, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; “Annual Plan of Operation – State Rural Development Committee, ca. 1971, Series 1.5, Box 36, Folder: MISC: 1955-1982, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; “Rural Development Policy Study,” 7 September 1977, Series 1.5, Box 36, Folder: Need for Rural Development, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²⁴⁹ “Toward More Desirable Communities of Tomorrow,” January 1968, Folder: Communities of Tomorrow, Series 1.4/A-3.

²⁵⁰ “Statement by Orville Freeman at Press Conference,” 2 November 1962, Series 1.4, Box 128, Folder: Rural Areas Development 1961-2, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; for other references to the importance of local initiative, see Orville Freeman, “Address to Annual Meeting of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association,” 22 February 1967, Series 1.4, Box 127, Folder: Rural Development, 1969-1972, Special Collections of the National

for example, was rather complicated and created multiple sources of power. It also raised the question of who would get to participate in the local planning process. Much like the programs operated by the Commerce Department, the development committees and the technical panels were operated by local and state level elites. Rural development USDA-style would hardly be a site for grassroots, participatory democracy. Baker, probably unknowingly, gave voice to this tension in the localized planning apparatus. Calling rural development a “folk movement,” Baker argued that it must reflect the “attitudes, the traditions, the values, the beliefs, and, yes, the aspirations, opinions, biases, prejudices, and ideals of local people.”²⁵¹ While some locals would have the opportunity to participate in planning, rural development also tended to bolster the biases and prejudices of local power structures.

These tensions within the planning structure of the USDA’s Office of Rural Areas Development reflected a broader blind spot that it shared with the programs operated by the Commerce Department. The USDA, much like Commerce, largely ignored the relationship between race and the rural crisis. While Freeman sometimes pitched rural development as a way to help impoverished black men and women living in cities find work in the countryside, rural development at the USDA was a largely white affair.²⁵² This whiteness is perhaps not surprising given the personnel and history of discrimination at the USDA. Under Freeman, nearly all USDA employees were white. With the exception of the Negro Extension Service, almost all black employees at the USDA worked in custodial roles. Moreover, men made up all supervisory and leadership roles at the USDA. While Freeman had promised to end

Agricultural Library; John Baker, “Rural Prosperity and Parity,” 14 June 1965, Series 1.4, Box 127, Folder: Rural Development, 1969-1972, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²⁵¹ Baker, “Some Principles of Rural Community Development,” Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

discriminatory policies at the USDA, he failed. From the agency's beginnings through the twentieth century, USDA programs regularly ignored black farmers, while New Deal-era farm policies actively dispossessed thousands of southern black farmers of their land. For those black farmers that did receive assistance from the USDA, local officials regularly cut off access to the agency if that farmer engaged in civil rights organizing.²⁵³ The rural development policy pursued by the USDA continued this pattern of behavior. It ignored the racial elements of the rural crisis and, much like the ARA and EDA, provided assistance primarily to white rural communities.

Any proper evaluation of rural development policy must examine how it played out at the local level, where policymakers envisioned the most dramatic changes occurring. Local implementation will be the subject of later chapters. Here, though, it will be useful to provide a broader overview of the impact of the rural development policies pursued by the Agriculture and Commerce Departments. A few conclusions can be drawn from this initial outline. The rural development programs created in the postwar period had some measure of success in creating a decentralized planning apparatus that brought together federal, state, county, and local governments. Moreover, these localized planning units followed similar development paths: in rural communities across the U.S., they pursued infrastructure, manufacturing jobs, and rural tourism to replace jobs lost in traditional rural industries. As a result of the efforts of Douglas and others, a rural development policy emerged in the U.S. during the 1960s. However, the federal funding behind this policy could not meet the enormity of the postwar rural crisis. Moreover, the development programs of the Commerce

²⁵² Orville Freeman, "Draft of Comprehensive Speech on Rural-Urban Balance," 15 July 1968, Series 1.4, Box A-3, Folder: Development of Concept, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²⁵³ Daniel, *Dispossession*.

and Agriculture departments forced small towns to compete for limited federal funds as well as private sector jobs, ensuring that many small towns would simply lose out. This competition also undermined the larger vision undergirding rural development of a more decentralized economy and population.

By the mid-1960s, a planning network devoted to rural development had blanketed the nation's rural communities. The USDA's Rural Areas Development program, for example, had established 2,293 planning committees with a total membership of 105,224 people between 1961 and 1965.²⁵⁴ In California, Georgia, and Missouri, the states that will be examined in more detail in the following chapters, the numbers are as follows: California had one RAD committee, Georgia had one hundred twenty-five, and Missouri had forty-three.²⁵⁵ Within the first year of the ARA's existence, over 900 communities established planning groups.²⁵⁶ The EDA also saw some success in establishing multicounty planning groups organized around small growth centers. By 1967, twenty-five multicounty groups had been established. Some comprised as little as four counties, while others contained fourteen counties stretching across three states.²⁵⁷ Some of these local planning groups undoubtedly formed to attract federal investment without any attachment to the broader vision of rural development. Not all did, however, as the following chapters will show. These groups embraced rural development as a way to reverse the population and economic decline that they faced in the process rebuild their communities.

²⁵⁴ "Resume of RAD Activity," March 1965, Series 1.4, Box 128, Folder: Rural Areas Development January-March 1965, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²⁵⁵ "Resume of RAD Activity," March 1965, Series 1.4, Box 128, Folder: Rural Areas Development January-March 1965, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library; for a breakdown for other states, see "Statistical Summary: Rural Areas Development and Area Redevelopment Quarterly Progress Report," October 1965, Series 1.5, Box 36, Folder: RAD Reporting System, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²⁵⁶ *Annual Report on the Area Redevelopment Administration of the Department of Commerce in 1962*, 3.

While these localized planning groups exercised significant control over their projects, they followed a development script laid out by the Commerce and Agriculture Departments. They focused their efforts on new infrastructure, in the form roads, bridges, airports, housing, hospitals, community colleges, industrial parks, as well as manufacturing plants and tourism enterprises. In 1965, local Rural Areas Development committees were involved in 8,300 projects in either the planning or implementation stages. The type of projects committees engaged in varied from the establishment of a junior college in the Missouri Ozarks to the construction of a hunting and fishing area in Georgia.²⁵⁸ Between 1960 and 1966, the FmHA helped fund the construction of 1,500 new rural water and sewer systems.²⁵⁹ During the ARA's existence, it provided loans to 329 private sector rural industrial and commercial ventures.²⁶⁰ One report estimated that the ARA created 117,000 jobs during its tenure, a mixture of jobs created directly by ARA loans and grants, and jobs indirectly created by the stimulation of new investment.²⁶¹ The average yearly salary for workers employed at industrial plants developed with ARA funds was \$4,000.²⁶² The Accelerated Public Works provision of the ARA provided grants to 4,365 infrastructure projects in rural communities.²⁶³ The EDA built on this record. Between 1965 and 1980, it funded nearly 7,000 infrastructure projects and almost 1,200 private sector industrial and

²⁵⁷ *Annual Report of the Economic Development Administration* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1967), 17.

²⁵⁸ "Resume of RAD Activity," March 1965, Series 1.4, Box 128, Folder: Rural Areas Development January-March 1965, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

²⁵⁹ "Background Information on the Farmers' Home Administration's Program of Assistance to Rural Water Supply and Waste Disposal Systems," ca. 1965, Series 1.4, Box A-4, FHA Loans.

²⁶⁰ *Creating New and Permanent Employment: Annual and Final Report of the Area Redevelopment Administration of the United States Department of Commerce* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1965), 12.

²⁶¹ *The EDA Experience in the Evolution of Policy: A Brief History, September 1965-June 1973* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1974), 4.

²⁶² *Creating New and Permanent Employment*, 4.

²⁶³ *Accelerated Public Works Program: Directory of Approved Projects* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1964), 8-10.

commercial ventures.²⁶⁴ The spread of these planning groups and new infrastructure and jobs across the U.S. suggests that the attempt by federal policymakers to establish a rural development project found some success.

These new jobs contributed, in however small a way, to a short economic and demographic reversal in rural communities during the late 1960s and 1970s. Research by USDA economist Claude Haren revealed the extent to which gains in manufacturing employment went to rural areas. Haren found that, between 1962 and 1969, over thirty percent of new manufacturing jobs were in rural places. While over sixty percent of new manufacturing positions were created in metro areas, many were at the urban fringe and easily accessible by rural people because of transportation infrastructure improvements.²⁶⁵ Haren's later research found that rural areas in the 1960s gained new manufacturing jobs at a rate of 4.6%, double that of metropolitan areas.²⁶⁶ Outmigration also reversed during this period. The farm population alone between 1945 and 1970 declined from 30 million to 9 million.²⁶⁷ However, research performed by Calvin Beale, a USDA economist, demonstrated that, by the mid-1960s, rural population decline had slowed and, more importantly, had begun to reverse in many areas. Beale found that the most dramatic reversals occurred in the region from St. Louis to Dallas. This region encompassed the Ozarks, and Beale pointed in particular to the role played by investments in recreation and tourist development occurring

²⁶⁴ *Creating Jobs: Economic Development Administration Annual Report, 1980* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1980), 22, 32.

²⁶⁵ Claude Haren, "Rural Industrial Growth in the 1960s," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 52, no. 3 (August 1970), 432.

²⁶⁶ Claude Haren, "Current Spatial Organization of Industrial Production and Activity," in *Rural Industrialization: Prospects, Problems, and Methods. A Series of Papers Compiled by the Subcommittee on Rural Development of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Senate, 93rd Congress*, 1974.

²⁶⁷ "Rural Development Policy Study," Series 1.5, Box 36, Folder: Need for Rural Development, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library.

there.²⁶⁸ By the early to mid-1970s, Beale found that rural population increased at a rate of 5.6%, compared to only 3.4% in metropolitan areas.²⁶⁹

However, the postwar rural development project was far from successful in reversing the rural crisis. A major reason for this failure was insufficient funding. While many postwar policymakers had understood the structural problems facing small town communities, spending limitations prevented them from being adequately addressed. The FmHA, for example, might spend \$112 million on financing water and sewer systems in 1966, but this money was not only insufficient to the task, but also came primarily in the form of loans that did not cover the entirety of a project's cost.²⁷⁰ The ARA also suffered from limited funding. The four-year appropriation for the agency was \$451 million, but only \$352 million was spent by 1965. ARA funding was also spread quite thin. By 1965, 1,120 areas qualified for ARA assistance.²⁷¹ The ARA's special public works program spent considerably more, but suffered from similar problems: with locally provided matching funds, and with money from other federal agencies, the total investment from the government came to \$1.7 billion (over \$14 billion in 2020).²⁷² Between 1965 and 1980, the EDA spent \$2.2 billion in grants and loans on infrastructure projects (\$18 billion in 2020) and \$761 million (\$2.3 billion in 2020) on private sector industrial and commercial ventures.²⁷³ Though the sums spent by Commerce and Agriculture created new jobs and built much-needed infrastructure, the need far outstripped available resources.

²⁶⁸ Calvin Beale, *The Revival of Population Growth in Nonmetropolitan America* (Washington D.C.: Department of Agriculture, 1975), 4-5.

²⁶⁹ Calvin Beale, "A Further Look at Nonmetropolitan Population Growth since 1970," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 58, no. 5 (December 1976), 953.

²⁷⁰ "Contribution of the Farmers' Home Administration to Rural Areas Development since 1961," 11 August 1966, Series 1.4, Box A-6, Folder: Appraisals of RAD.

²⁷¹ *Creating New and Permanent Employment*, 4.

²⁷² *Creating New and Permanent Employment*, 13.

²⁷³ *Creating Jobs*, 22, 32.

These policies also needed to combat internal restraints and external forces. Thousands of declining small towns fought over relatively meager federal funds and private sector jobs. This competition was built into the rural development structure created by the Commerce and Agriculture Departments. Similarly, the localized planning structure that their programs established made it virtually impossible to build the communities of tomorrow. The decentralization of population and industry advocated for by officials in Commerce and Agriculture could not be achieved when rural development planning was spread out among so many different groups. Perhaps even more importantly, these policies had to compete with many other federal ventures that contributed to rural outmigration. The USDA's farm policies, for example, ensured that many people would be forced to leave farming and perhaps even their rural communities. The rural development programs of the USDA and Commerce could not provide enough jobs to keep people in their small towns. Federal highway policy and the boom in defense-related production jobs also drew millions of people to cities stretching from the southeast all the way to California. These powerful, countervailing forces set up major barriers to the development of rural America.

Nonetheless, the period of rural revival, no matter how checkered, had its origins in the federal policies of this period that pursued a relatively coherent vision of job creation as the solution to the rural crisis. A collection of federal policymakers and a wide range of supporters outside the government lobbied for a stronger role for government investment in declining rural areas. Supporters of rural development bucked the trend of the more limited economic policies promoted by mainstream liberals. For Douglas and others, the crisis faced by rural areas across the U.S. was structural and required a major commitment not just from the federal government, but state and local governments and the private sector as well. The contours of rural development policy, as well as its limitations and oversights, will be further

examined the following two chapters on industrial development and rural tourism projects in California, Missouri, and Georgia.

Chapter Three

If You Build it, They Might Not Come: Rural Development through Infrastructure and Industrial Attraction

Federal policymakers and social scientists shaped how the rural crisis would be understood and the framework through which it would be addressed. They saw rural America's decline as a product of dramatic economic restructuring, and they proposed federal investments to help shift the rural economic base away from farming, mining, and timber, and toward manufacturing and the service sector. However, policymakers created a rural development framework in the 1950s and 1960s that, by design, put the focal point of rural revival at the local level. There, town leaders would put federal funds to work along with state, local, and private sector money. A better understanding of the ideas undergirding rural development, how it functioned, and its relative impact on reversing the rural crisis can only be grasped by examining the ways development worked at the local level. This chapter examines how critical pieces of rural development, infrastructure and industrial attraction, played out in three distinct rural locations: the border town of Calexico, located in Imperial County in inland southern California; Ava, in the Missouri Ozarks; and the small southeast Georgia town of Alma. Though these towns had distinct populations and rural histories, their leaders embraced rural development as a way to solve the rural crisis.

Examining the local implementation of rural infrastructure projects and industrial attraction shows first of all the centrality of federal aid in rural development. Policymakers in the 1950s and 1960s wanted to create a rural development apparatus that was both public-private and decentralized, and which did not dictate the course of local development efforts. As projects in Missouri, California, and Georgia show, they largely succeeded in building that machinery. Though rural development programs set aside funds especially for rural

infrastructure and industrialization, local, county, and state governments, as well as nongovernmental groups composed of businessmen and civic leaders alike, decided what sort of projects would be pursued and how. Regardless of who received federal funds, private sector expansion served as the primary goal of rural development policy. Despite this decentralization and public-private structure, federal aid proved to be the decisive factor in ensuring project success. Small towns struggled to get projects off the ground until federal aid arrived, and the town that saw the greatest success, Alma, received millions more in federal investment than other towns like it.

Though the federal government gave great leeway in local control of development projects, it did not ensure widespread community participation. An assessment of rural development projects on the ground reveals that, in practice, local business and civic elites exercised control of the planning and implementation of rural development projects. Sometimes local elites created new agencies within government, while in other cases local elites formed nongovernmental development groups. At best, ordinary rural people might participate in surveys that elicited their feelings on rural development subjects. Decision making authority remained largely outside their grasp. By laying the power of development in the hands of local elites, rural development bolstered their position in a time of uncertainty and decline, and they readily embraced the promise of federal investments in infrastructure and new jobs.

Following the fate of local development projects also illustrates the transformations that the rural economy, as well as ideas about rural America, underwent. Federal policymakers and local elites did not want to urbanize rural communities, nor did they look backward to a pastoral past. Instead, both wanted to build a new rural economic base by replacing jobs lost in traditional rural sectors with work on infrastructure projects and new

manufacturing employment. The end goal was a broader decentralization of people and industry in smaller rural “growth centers.” In order to attract new private sector industry, though, small towns needed to make themselves attractive to prospective investors. In the pursuit of this goal, rural developers reaffirmed some traditional or stereotypical aspects of rural identity while jettisoning others. The aspects of rurality that would help achieve that goal would be elevated, while those that did not would be downplayed.

The centering of development power in the hands of local elites and the need to attract private sector jobs point toward some of the key limitations of postwar rural development policy. One of its major problems revolved around race and the rural crisis. Rural development as conceived at the federal level and implemented at the local was thoroughly white. As we saw in chapter two, white federal policymakers rarely considered the problems specific to black and brown rural communities, nor did they see racial discrimination and exploitation as a feature of the rural crisis. While they proposed major economic restructuring of rural communities, they did not propose a similar program for rural racial equality. These oversights would have been less significant had the distribution of development funds proceeded on a more equitable basis. In practice, rural development money went overwhelmingly toward white rural communities or was controlled by white elites.

Even in these white rural communities, development did not play out as its proponents imagined. On the infrastructure side, the rural communities examined here experienced improvement, though results did vary. New roads were built; water and sewer lines were constructed or modernized; schools, hospitals, community service centers, and industrial parks were erected; and many new homes were assembled. In terms of attracting manufacturing jobs, results were far more mixed. Some towns managed to attract new

industry, while many others did not. Many of the jobs that did arrive in small towns often paid less than the high-wage jobs rural towns desired. While federal policymakers envisioned a decentralized nation with reconstructed rural communities at its center, the policy apparatus they constructed could not serve those ends. Rural development policy exacerbated competition for industry among rural towns and, while it might help rural communities rebuild their infrastructure, it could not guarantee them private sector employment. In spite of their limits, these local efforts represented an important element of postwar social policy that sought to revive rural places and helped to redefine what rural America might look like in the face of dramatic decline.

Before examining how local leaders tried to reimagine their towns through new infrastructure and manufacturing, it will be useful to explicate the way the rural crisis specifically impacted the Missouri Ozarks, Alma, and Calexico. In Calexico, a small town at California's border with Mexico, the rural crisis stemmed from the particular structure of California agriculture. The agricultural economy of the Imperial Valley, of which Calexico is a part, had since the early twentieth century been dominated by large-scale farms, typically owned by whites.²⁷⁴ Though farms in Calexico, and California more broadly, tended to much larger than farms in the rest of the country, the postwar period saw a dramatic expansion of the Imperial Valley's farm economy. In 1954, the average farm was 380 acres. By 1974, that number reached 666 acres.²⁷⁵ Most of Calexico's residents worked on the large farms of the Imperial Valley, as did a steady stream of Mexican labor from across the border. Regardless of their origins, farmworkers in the Imperial Valley earned low wages and enjoyed few of the workplace

²⁷⁴ Benny Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940* (Texas A&M University Press, 2014); Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2011), 22-5.

regulations characteristic of the industrial economy. As a result, many workers lived below the poverty line. In 1970, twenty percent of Calexico's residents earned less than \$3,000, while five percent earned less than \$1,000. Given the seasonal character of employment, many also experienced regular bouts of unemployment.²⁷⁶ Many of these workers also had few prospects for climbing the agricultural tenure ladder. Low wages coupled with the high costs of acquiring California farmland and the technology and machinery required to operate it ensured many workers would remain landless. Moreover, as farmers increasingly adopted labor-saving technologies, many in Calexico worried that work on the farm would be harder to come by, and the barrier to landownership would only grow higher.²⁷⁷ Agriculture in Calexico, stratified along lines of race and class, produced an agricultural bounty as well as many landless and poor farmworkers with few opportunities for advancement.

In the Missouri Ozarks, the rural crisis appeared quite a bit different. In contrast to the large farms of California, farms in the Missouri Ozarks were typically much smaller. Moreover, farmland was less concentrated with many more people owning, as well as renting, small farms. However, while farming had been a major livelihood in the Ozarks for much of the twentieth century, farmers in that region found it increasingly difficult to earn a living. Farms in the Ozarks generally remained small, low-tech affairs, while farms in other areas of the state grew and capitalized. With the help of federal farm policy, these farms

²⁷⁵ USDA, *1954 Farm Census, California*; USDA, *1974 Farm Census, California*.

²⁷⁶ Rural Development Corporation, *Calexico's Economic Development: A Preliminary Report* (Los Angeles, 1970), I-5.

²⁷⁷ Rural Development Corporation, *An Application to the Office of Economic Opportunity*, Papers of the California State Office of Economic Opportunity, California State Archives, Sacramento; For discussions of new farm technology in the California context, see Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (University of California Press, 1939); Linda and Theo Majka, *Farm Workers, Agribusiness, and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Steven Stoll, *The Fruits of Natural Advantage: Making the Industrial Countryside in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Christopher Henke, *Cultivating Science, Harvesting Power: Science and Industrial Agriculture in Industrial California* (MIT Press, 2008).

captured a larger portion of the state's farm income. In 1959, for example, farmers in the Ozarks earned less than \$2,500 a year.²⁷⁸ Further, while the average capital investment in farms nationally hovered around \$33,000 in 1959, the figure was only \$12,000 in the Ozarks.²⁷⁹ Low incomes coupled with the inability to compete in the new agricultural economy pushed many out of farming altogether. In Douglas County, where Ava is located, the inability of low-income farmers to earn a living pushed many to sell their land, and the county saw the number of farms dwindle throughout the period.²⁸⁰

In Bacon County, Georgia, where Alma is located, a similar pattern played out. Between 1950 and 1968, the number of farms in the county declined from 1,128 to 590 as many small farmers found it difficult to compete in the large-scale farm economy.²⁸¹ Those farmers who stayed on the land rarely earned a sufficient income from it. In the mid-1960s, three-fourths of Bacon County farmers lived below the poverty line.²⁸² In contrast to the Missouri Ozarks, Bacon had a sizeable population of black farmers, many of whom did not own their own land and worked instead as sharecroppers or daily farm laborers. These

²⁷⁸ John Kuehn, *Employment Growth in the Ozarks States 1960-1970, Agricultural Economic Report no. 269* (Columbia: University of Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station, 1974), 18.

²⁷⁹ Max Jordan and Lloyd Bender, *An Economic Survey of the Ozark Region, Agricultural Experiment Report no. 97* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, 1966), 27, 30; see also Ronald Bird, Frank Miller, and Samuel Turner, *Resources and Levels of Income of Farm and Nonfarm Households in Eastern Ozarks Missouri, Research Bulletin 661* (Columbia: University of Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station, 1958).

²⁸⁰ Because of changes in farm classification in the 1950s, the exact magnitude of the farm decline is difficult to determine. Nonetheless, it seems safe to say that between 1950 and 1978, Douglas County lost roughly half its farms, declining from somewhere around 2,400 to 1,100. See, USDA, *1950 Agricultural Census*, Missouri, 151; and USDA, *1978 Agricultural Census*, 383. "Revival of Ava," 1976, Folder 19, Box 3, Papers of the University of Missouri Department of Community Development, University Archives, Columbia Missouri; "A Report of Community Development Activities in Douglas, Ozark, and Wright Counties, Missouri," June 1965, Folder: U of MO CDP, Box 3, Arthur Hugh Denney Papers, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

²⁸¹ Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission, *Second Year Planning Statement, Comprehensive Model Cities Program, Alma-Bacon County, Georgia* (Alma, Georgia: Model Cities Commission, 1971), II-5; see also Robert Nipp, *The Alma-Bacon County Story: A Model for Rural America* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1972), 3.

²⁸² *Second Year Planning Statement*, II-6.

farmers earned even less than those who owned land in Bacon County, while also experiencing racial discrimination in politics and the economy.²⁸³ In the words of local rural developers in Alma, both Southeast Georgia and the Missouri Ozarks experienced a “disrupting transition” as the agricultural economy provided a sustainable livelihood to fewer and fewer people.²⁸⁴

While agriculture played a major role in spurring the rural crisis, other rural industries suffered as well. While Bacon County and Calxico relied mostly on farming, mining played a major role in the Ozarks economy. Mining had long been an important element of the Ozarks economy. The first settlement in the Eastern Missouri Ozarks, for example, was a French mining colony.²⁸⁵ Lead extraction formed the core of the Ozarks mining economy, with zinc and iron playing smaller, but still significant parts in the region. By mid-century, a mixture of declining demand and the mechanization of key production processes reduced the number of mining jobs in the state. Lead mining had effectively ceased by the 1950s, while zinc and iron made up only one to two percent of the region’s economic base by the 1960s.²⁸⁶

Bacon and Douglas Counties saw their populations drop in response to these economic shifts. Douglas’s decline was part of a broader Ozark depopulation stimulated by disappearing farm and mining jobs, especially among high school graduates and young

²⁸³ Slash Pine Area Planning and Development Commission, *Overall Economic Development Plan for Slash Pine Area* (Waycross, Georgia: Slash Pine Area Planning and Development Commission, 1967), 24; Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission, *Planning Grant Application by the city of Alma, Bacon County, Georgia, to Plan a Model City* (Alma, Georgia, Model Cities Commission, 1968), 42.

²⁸⁴ *Planning Grant Application*, 106.

²⁸⁵ Ronald Bird, Frank Miller, and Samuel Turner, *Resources and Levels of Income of Farm and Rural Nonfarm Households in Eastern Ozarks of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station, 1956), 12.

²⁸⁶ “Missouri and Important Missourians,” *The Daily Journal* 17 February 1961; “Missouri Lead Mining History by County,” Missouri Department of Natural Resources, accessed 26 January 2017, <https://dnr.mo.gov/env/hwp/sfund/lead-mo-history-more.htm#tristate>; *Employment Growth in the Ozark States*, 16; “Mine, Mill at Bonne Terre to be Closed by St. Joe; Shut Down to Cover Three Month Period,” *The Daily Journal*, 27 June 1961; for an overview of mining in the Ozarks, see

workers.²⁸⁷ The south central Missouri Ozark district, of which Douglas County is a part, had a population of 111,637 in 1940, but only 87,297 in 1960.²⁸⁸ In Bacon, twenty five percent of its roughly 8,500 people left between 1950 and 1960.²⁸⁹ Alma saw some population growth, but this mostly came from a rise in the elderly population.²⁹⁰ The combination of population declines, a shrinking pool of working age people, and a rise in poverty and unemployment raised significant hurdles to rural prosperity.

Poverty and population decline spelled trouble for the rural commercial sector as well. Local merchants depended on the trade generated by farmers and other rural workers. Not only did rural poverty undermine local businesses, so too did the improvement of shopping options in nearby larger towns. Many retailers in larger towns had better selections and prices that made the commute from the smaller rural community worth the time.²⁹¹ In Calxico, merchants faced a more specific problem shaped by the area's seasonal and migratory labor. Local leaders feared that foreign, migratory labor would create a "surplus in the labor market" by taking jobs that might otherwise go to domestic workers who would, in turn, find themselves unable to patronize local shops. Moreover, Calxico's business leaders maintained that the money foreign workers earned was often not being spent in Calxico, but across the border.²⁹²

Milton Rafferty, *The Ozarks: Land and Life* (Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, 2001), chapter 9.

²⁸⁷ Hugh Denney, "Changing Patterns in Missouri," 29 June 1967, Folder: U of MO CDP, Box 3, Denney Papers.

²⁸⁸ Hollis and Miller, Architects and Engineers, *Master Development Plan, Planned Progress Park, Howell County Missouri* (Overland Park, KS: Hollis and Miller, 1971), 10; In Douglas County, the population declined from 16,000 to 10,000 between 1940 and 1960. See, Colin Miller, "ARA Program Helped Stop Decline in Douglas County," *The Springfield News-Leader*, 27 June 1963.

²⁸⁹ Nipp, *The Alma-Bacon County Story*, 19.

²⁹⁰ Slash Pine Area Planning and Development Commission, *Area Wide Economic Base and Population Study* (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Community Development, 1975), 45; *Second Year Planning Statement*, II-5.

²⁹¹ Nipp, *The Alma-Bacon County Story*, 20.

²⁹² Kenneth Reich, "Mexico's Farm Commuters Stir Bitter Dispute," *Los Angeles Times* 4 June 1967; Kenneth Reich, "Mexican-Americans Alert to Political Opportunities," *Los Angeles Times*

As these farm communities struggled with poverty and a shifting agricultural economy, finding a way out solely through local means seemed impossible. L.W. Taylor, the county manager for Bacon's energy cooperative, articulated this view best. Taylor argued that places like Bacon County simply did not have the public or private capital necessary to spur economic development. In Bacon, for example, much of the existing capital stock was tied up in farming.²⁹³ Bacon County farmers primarily planted corn and tobacco, products that Taylor argued were "poor users of capital" that paid little in returns and made new investment difficult.²⁹⁴ However, attempting to redirect existing capital investments threatened to undermine an already weak economic base: redirecting farm capital would cause farm bankruptcies, which would in turn hurt merchants and reduce bank deposits. Taylor quipped that Bacon was a "classic example of why it takes money to make money. Clearly, what is needed to reverse the painful trend of economic disintegration is a new source of capital for investment in businesses and industries that can grow with the economy of the region and the nation."²⁹⁵ As we shall see, for Taylor and other local rural developers, only public capital from the federal government could break this cycle. Despite the generally depressed economic conditions of rural Missouri, California, and Georgia, proponents of development saw opportunities for revival.

Federal lawmakers and local elites alike stressed that this rural revival would be planned.

8 June 1967; on the opposition of some domestic farmworkers to foreign migrant labor, see Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2011); Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (University of California Press, 2014).

²⁹³ Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission, *Mid-Planning Statement, Comprehensive Model Cities Program, Alma-Bacon County, Georgia* (Alma, Georgia: Model Cities Commission, 1969), 33.

²⁹⁴ Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission, *First Year Action Plan: Comprehensive City Demonstration Program, Alma, Bacon, County, Georgia* (Alma, Georgia: Model Cities Commission, 1970), IV-3.

Both groups warned against haphazardly pursuing new industry or infrastructure and argued instead for a coordinated response to rural decline. Surveys formed a major element of that planning process. In order to receive federal development funds, small towns were expected to create surveys of their existing resources and how those might be used for development. Much like the broader rural development state, survey making was thoroughly public-private. The local development groups conducting the surveys, whether located inside or outside the government, had members from the civic and business communities. Oftentimes, these development groups received planning grants from the USDA or the Economic Development Administration. The surveys conducted with these funds cataloged many aspects of the rural community, including labor market composition, available land, its history of industry, statistics about income levels and unemployment, and possibilities for further development. Survey findings not only helped local communities organize for development. They also served as an introduction to the community that could be easily digested by potential investors.

Surveys not only helped initiate the development process, they also acted as a site for the redefinition of rurality. Surveys elevated notions of rurality that favored rural development, while downplaying or challenging those that did not. Rural surveys, for example, helped cultivate a conception of rurality that emphasized cheap, docile labor as one of its central features. The Ozark Regional Commission, one of the five large commissions established by the EDA to oversee planning in especially troubled regions, funded a study that inquired into the possibilities for auto-parts manufacturing in the region. The commission contracted the study out to the St. Louis Regional Industrial Development Corporation, made up of business, civic, and labor leaders in the city. This survey

²⁹⁵ *First Year Action Plan*, II-14.

emphasized the relatively cheap cost of labor. Not only was Ozark labor cheap, but its rural workers did not have a tradition of labor organizing. One chart compared the low levels of work stoppages in the Ozarks to places where the major auto manufacturers had their plants.²⁹⁶ This argument suggests a tension inherent in postwar rural development. While federal policymakers may have framed rural development as a liberal policy, its local implementation seemed to require the abandonment of some key liberal causes, namely labor organizing and high wages. The arguments made by the Ozark Regional Commission were replicated in many other similar surveys.²⁹⁷

Surveys also highlighted land and natural beauty as major elements of rurality that made rural places conducive to development. In Callexico, surveys underlined the large amount of industrially zoned land ready for development.²⁹⁸ Alma and Bacon County officials similarly stressed the ease with which potential industrialists could find accessible land on which they could locate new factories.²⁹⁹ In these small towns and others like it, surveys portrayed the rural landscape as largely empty, waiting to be cultivated by potential industrialists. In the Ozarks, surveys approached the region's land from a different angle. While Callexico and Bacon's landscapes were largely flat, the Ozarks contained rivers, lakes, forests, and hills. For decades, this variegated terrain had been seen as an impediment to economic growth. Rural development surveys, though, challenged this view. Now, this

²⁹⁶ St. Louis Regional Industrial Development Corporation, *Auto-Parts Manufacturing Opportunities in the Ozarks Region* (St. Louis: St. Louis Regional Industrial Development Corporation, 1970), 48.

²⁹⁷ For additional examples, see G. Nehman, P. Snider, L. Bower, and C. Minshall, *Final Report on Industrial Development Trends in the Coastal Plains Region to the Coastal Plains Regional Commission* (Columbus, Ohio: Battelle Columbus Laboratories, 1976); *A Report on the Initial Action Planning Program of the Coastal Plains Regional Commission* (Washington D.C.: Coastal Plains Regional Commission, 1968); *Regional Plan of the Coastal Plains Regional Commission* (Washington D.C.: Coastal Plains Regional Commission, 1968); *Ozarks Region: An Opportunity for Growth* (Washington D.C.: Ozarks Regional Commission, 1968).

²⁹⁸ *Callexico's Economic Development*, II-28.

scenic terrain could provide managers and workers at new industrial firms with a higher quality of life. Surveys contrasted this rural quality of life with the congested, smog-choked city.³⁰⁰ Regardless of the perspective from which surveys came, the rural landscape became another resource in the process of rural development.

Rural development surveys also challenged the notion of rural isolation, one of the more longstanding and widely held assumptions about rural America. This idea had long influenced popular and social scientific thought on rural communities and was seen as a barrier to development. Rural places and people were characterized as physically and culturally “isolated” from the mainstream economy and society in ways that raised hurdles to development. Proponents of the isolation thesis, for example, saw small towns as too distant from the main engines of commerce to make them viable for development.³⁰¹ For rural developers, the notion of physical rural isolation simply made no sense, particularly in an era of improved transportation infrastructure. A survey of Calexico emphasized its many linkages to the non-rural world, listing its several common freight carriers, warehouses, railroad services, the airport, and highways that connected people to San Diego, Los Angeles, and the rest of the U.S.³⁰² Similarly, the Ozarks auto-parts study detailed the transportation networks that linked the region to major urban centers in the Midwest and South, as did an EDA funded study of Bacon County.³⁰³ Following many of the rural sociologists discussed in chapter one, rural surveys saw modern infrastructure as essentially erasing physical isolation.

²⁹⁹ *An Economic Profile of Bacon County, Georgia* (Atlanta: Bureau of State Planning and Community Affairs, 1971), i.

³⁰⁰ *Master Development Plan, Planned Progress Park*, 13.

³⁰¹ Thomas Kiffmeyer, “We are Ordered to do Everything”: The National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, American Social Thought, and the War on Poverty,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 107, no. 3 (Summer 2009); Robert Weise, “New Towns for Red Bird, Kentucky: Isolation and Civic Society in Twentieth Century Discussions of Appalachian Poverty,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2001).

³⁰² RDC, *Calexico’s Economic Development*, II-21-2.

Rural surveys also took on the cultural element of the isolation thesis. This element of the isolation concept in particular framed rural people as “backwards,” and saw their social and economic problems as stemming from that backwardness. Rural developers challenged this thesis from multiple perspectives. In Calexico, for example, local developers saw the town’s rural heritage as a draw, an argument that will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter. Calexico’s developers argued that the region’s Mexican farmworker heritage, for example, was a “great cultural asset which attracts people to the border...The cultural asset then becomes an economic asset.”³⁰⁴ In the Ozarks, rural developers also embraced the traits created by rural culture. While Ozarkers had long been characterized as backwards people insulated from the outside world, one survey flipped this argument on its head and argued that Ozarks culture produced a hard-working people well suited for industry.³⁰⁵ Rural culture presented different problems in southeast Georgia. There, Bacon County developers had to contend with what they called “tradition bound southern rural culture.” They defined this culture as informed by religious fundamentalism, racism, and an “obsession” with the outcome of the Civil War. Rural developers in Bacon claimed that this culture no longer permeated their county, and that the people of Bacon were ready to embrace, and be embraced by, modern society.³⁰⁶

Perhaps the biggest challenge rural developers needed to overcome was the argument that rural towns were stagnant or declining. With populations declining and poverty levels high, did investing in rural places even make sense? This argument received no small amount of support in the postwar period, even among proponents of economic development. The Appalachian Regional Commission represented one major institutional bastion of support for

³⁰³ *Auto-Parts Manufacturing Opportunities*, vi; Slash Pine Area Planning and Development Commission, *An Economic Profile of Bacon County, Georgia*, i.

³⁰⁴ RDC, *Calexico’s Economic Development*, II-34.

³⁰⁵ *Master Development Plan, Planned Progress Park*, 16.

this argument. Much like rural development policy, the ARC came out of the mid-1960s and saw investment in infrastructure and jobs as solutions to rural poverty and decline. However, the ARC's policy focused on helping people leave failing rural communities and find work in "growth centers," or those places where investments might make an appreciable impact because of pre-existing economic and human resources.³⁰⁷

Rural developers and the surveys they created took on the language of growth centers but shifted and expanded its meaning. Proponents of growth centers, rural or otherwise, never agreed on their optimal size. Rural developers, though, argued that strategically located small towns make good use of new investments. The rural qualities discussed above – affordable labor, plentiful land, and beautiful scenery – would be a good base for new investments. More significantly, rural developers framed investment in rural growth centers as a tool for solving not only rural issues, but urban ones as well. Surveys framed rural growth centers as potential nodes of employment, services, and population that could decongest crowded, poverty-stricken cities. Developers in Calexico, for example, framed their intervention into rural California as a way to stem rural to urban migration so that the rural poor "do not become tomorrow's slum dwellers." They wanted to stop the "trend toward massive concentration of people" in cities.³⁰⁸ In Bacon, rural developers similarly argued that the problems of cities could be "controlled only by fragmentation." Policy should help effect a "redistribution of industry from metropolitan urban centers" to rural growth centers.³⁰⁹ The stakes were high: if something was not done soon, the population "will be jammed into

³⁰⁶ 1967 *Planning Grant Application*, II-5

³⁰⁷ For a critique of the growth center concept, see Ronald Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (University of Kentucky Press, 2008); For an influential explication of the idea, see Hansen, *Rural Poverty and the Urban Crisis*; for a discussion of small towns as potential growth centers, see chapter two.

³⁰⁸ RDC, *An Application to the Office of Economic Opportunity*.

³⁰⁹ 1968 *Planning Grant Application*, 2A-3.

monstrous urban complexes that will be virtually unable to support life.”³¹⁰ Though reformulating declining rural towns as potential growth centers tried to redefine conceptions of rural America, it also reinforced others. Talk of rural America as an antidote to “concentration” and “monstrous urban complexes” evoked and upheld a centuries old dichotomization of rural and urban that saw the former as idyllic and pure, while the latter contained society’s evils. Nonetheless, surveys allowed small towns to begin the planning process, create a blueprint for rural revival, and redefine rurality. However, many of their best laid plans met an unforgiving landscape that threw up significant barriers to rural development in California, Georgia, and Missouri.

Though rural development took place all across Missouri, a major focus of postwar efforts revolved around the Ozarks. Located roughly in the bottom half of the state but stretching into Arkansas and other surrounding states as well, the Missouri Ozarks experienced some of the deepest poverty in the state. Small towns throughout the region tried to take advantage of the rural development programs of the Commerce and Agriculture Departments in an attempt to revive their flagging economies. Rural development activity in Ava, Douglas County, near the border with Arkansas, demonstrates key features of the process. Ava, the only town in Douglas County with more than fifty people, experienced rural decline and poverty as a changes in mining and agriculture yielded fewer jobs in these key rural industries³¹¹ Local business and civic elites followed a pattern that played out in small towns across the U.S. After trying to attract new industry on their own, they turned to the USDA and Commerce Department for financial and technical assistance. By the end of the 1960s, Ava had received

³¹⁰ *First Year Action Plan*, IV-1.

³¹¹ L. Dale Hagerman and Curtis Braschler, *The Impact of Industrialization on a Small Town Economy: A Case Study of Ava, Missouri, Research Bulletin 910* (Columbia: University of Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station, 1966), 14.

a string of public investments that helped shift its job base away from farming and mining and toward manufacturing.

Local business and civic leaders in Ava embraced a future of manufacturing employment soon after the end of World War II. Ava had long served as the primary center for trade and business in its region of the Ozarks. As people left the Ozarks in search of better opportunities elsewhere, Ava began slipping into economic decline.³¹² Surveying these troubling economic and demographic problems in the summer of 1946, Ava's mayor argued that his town stood at "the crossroads of progress [and] stagnation."³¹³ Opting for progress, Ava's Chamber of Commerce followed the mayor's lead and declared that securing industry for Ava would be one of its primary functions and began planning for industrial attraction. It adopted the slogan "Get a Factory This Year," and partnered with the Missouri State Resources and Development Commission to labor market survey and contact industrialists about expanding into Ava. Despite the chamber's "Get a Factory This Year" slogan, it had little success in that endeavor until the mid-1950s when the federal public assistance became available.³¹⁴

Ava's fortunes began to turn around in 1955 when local business and government leaders partnered together to form the Ava Industrial Development Corporation (AIDC), a nonprofit development group.³¹⁵ Ralph Kerr, the owner of a Chevrolet dealership in Ava, served as president of the AIDC, with chamber members and civic leaders filling out the rest

³¹² L. Dale Hagerman and Curtis Braschler, *The Impact of Industrialization on a Small Town Economy: A Case Study of Ava, Missouri, Research Bulletin 910* (Columbia: University of Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station, 1966), 14.

³¹³ O.L. Claxton and Hugh Denney, *The Story of an Ozark Community at Work, 1944-1964* (Columbia: University of Missouri Extension Division, 1964), 3

³¹⁴ *The Story of an Ozark Community*, 3-5, 21-2

³¹⁵ *The Story of an Ozark Community*, 4.

of the board of directors.³¹⁶ The AIDC's mandate was clear: it would serve as Ava's central power for pursuing new industries. Its incorporation as a non-profit allowed it to raise funds for those efforts, as well as purchase land on which industrial development could take place. The AIDC's first major act was to begin raising funds through donations and the selling of stock in the corporation. By July 1955, \$15,800 in stock had been raised, while various individuals and businesses pledged \$64,000 by December. In February of 1956, the AIDC purchased a thirty-five-acre tract of undeveloped land in Ava for \$24,000 as a site for an industrial park to house new manufacturers.³¹⁷ It aimed to either sell or lease plots of land to prospective industrialists, who would then build new factories.

While better organizing among business and civic leaders proved to be a crucial component of reigniting rural development in Ava, financial and technical assistance from the federal government had the biggest impact in laying the groundwork for new investment. The first federal intervention came from the USDA's Rural Development Program, established in 1955. The RDP provided financial and technical support to designated "pilot counties" to help them offset job loss and population decline through manufacturing. The program also established a state level Rural Development Committee that oversaw program activities in the state headed by the Dean of the School of Agriculture at the University of Missouri, Elmer Kiehl. Along with Kiehl, the committee was composed of forty-two people from business, agriculture, and government. The committee primarily reviewed and approved projects developed at the local and county level.³¹⁸ Ava's business community lobbied the

³¹⁶ "Local Industrial Development Group Works Wonders at Ava, Missouri," *Albany Ledger*, 26 November 1959; "An Ava, Mo. Factory Site," *The Kansas City Times*, 11 February 1956; Paul Barker and Kenneth Brown, "History of Ava's Auto Dealerships – Part 1," *Journal of Douglas Co. Hist. and Gen. Society* (Winter 2006): 37.

³¹⁷ *The Story of an Ozark Community*, 6.

³¹⁸ *The Rural Development Program: With Emphasis on Extension's Responsibilities*, 1957, Folder: Rural Development Program Loans, Box 110, Series 1.4, , Special Collections of the National

USDA to receive a designation as a pilot county, which it was granted in August 1956. Soon after, USDA rural development support began flowing to Douglas County.³¹⁹

One of the RDP's primary contribution to Ava came in the form of a development specialist. In Missouri, the RDP partnered with the University of Missouri's Department of Community Development which, as chapter one showed, trained people in the idea and practice of rural development. Development agents primarily helped local officials craft rural development projects and navigate government bureaucracy. O.L. Claxton worked as Douglas County's development specialist beginning in 1957. Many such specialists in Missouri had rural backgrounds, and Claxton was no different. Claxton grew up in a small Missouri town and cultivated an expertise in farm issues. From the 1920s to the 1950s, Claxton taught a variety of agriculture classes at vocational schools across Missouri. As Claxton traveled the state, he witnessed firsthand how economic restructuring had undermined many small towns, and he embraced rural development as the solution.³²⁰ When Claxton arrived in Ava, he began working with the AIDC to help make the most of the industrial land it had recently purchased.³²¹

One major hurdle Claxton helped the AIDC clear revolved around good roads and access to the planned industrial park. Around the time Douglas County joined the USDA development program, Rawlings, a sporting goods manufacturing company based in St. Louis, expressed interest in opening a new plant in Ava. Talks stalled between the AIDC and

Agricultural Library, USDA Historical Collection, Beltsville, Maryland; "Grundy Recommended for Redevelopment Aid," *The Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune*, 25 September 1961.

³¹⁹ "Taney, Douglas Farm Aid 'Pilots,'" *Springfield Leader and Press*, 27 August 1956; "\$2000 Income Need in Douglas County," *The Springfield News-Leader*, 11 October 1956.

³²⁰ "Fremont News," *The Current Local*, 11 September 1958; "How One Town Gained New Industry," *The St. Clair Chronicle*, 26 November 1959; "Upswing Seen for Three South Central Counties," *The Springfield News-Leader*, 5 December 1970; "Retiring Development Specialist is Honored," *The Springfield News-Leader*, 12 April 1973.

Rawlings when the company maintained that the dearth of good roads would “give us a transportation problem.”³²² In the midst of these talks, the Missouri State Highway Commission had been planning to build a state highway through the rural Ozarks. The initial plan, however, did not have the highway going through Ava or Douglas County. Claxton and members of the state rural development committee then lobbied the highway commission on the AIDC’s behalf.³²³ In late 1957, the commission agreed to Claxton’s proposal. With assurances of new roads, Rawlings finalized plans with the AIDC to open its new plant in Ava³²⁴ Scholars of postwar Appalachian history have rightly lamented the role highway development played in bypassing and undermining small communities buried in mountain hollows.³²⁵ In Ava, however, highway expansion helped to lay the ground for rural industrial attraction.

Claxton also helped the AIDC raise funds to support the construction of a 55,000 square foot building that Rawlings would occupy. Estimates from the AIDC and Rawlings suggested that the plant would employ between 250 and 300 workers making golf bags and football equipment. In cooperation with Claxton, the AIDC launched a fundraising campaign at the end of 1959.³²⁶ On October 30th, businesses in Ava closed down and members of the Chamber of Commerce, AIDC, and the state rural development committee went door to door selling AIDC stock. By December, the AIDC raised \$233,000 from 1,018 people. Residents

³²¹ *The Impact of Industrialization on a Small Town Economy*, 10-11; “Operation of the Community Development Program of the University of Missouri in a Community,” ca. 1965, Folder: Budget, Box 1, Denney Papers.

³²² “How Long? In Ava...” *RAD Newsletter*, May 1964, Folder 5927, Papers of John Dalton, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia.

³²³ “How Long? In Ava...” *RAD Newsletter*; *The Impact of Industrialization on a Small Town Economy*, 32.

³²⁴ “Local Industrial Development Group Works Wonders at Ava, Missouri,” *Albany Ledger*, 26 November 1959.

³²⁵ Eller, *Uneven Ground*; Thomas Kiffmeyer, *Reformers to Radicals: The Appalachian Volunteers and the War on Poverty* (University of Kentucky Press 2008).

of Douglas contributed most of the money, but people as far away as Washington State, California, and Hawaii also purchased stock. The Citizens Bank of Ava made the largest purchases, however, and became the AIDC's largest shareholder.³²⁷ At the same time, Ava voters overwhelmingly passed a \$225,000 bond to finance water and sewer expansion to the industrial park.³²⁸ By August 1960, the plant opened, but employment levels were considerably lower than expected.³²⁹ Over 400 people applied for jobs, but the company only hired around 160.³³⁰

The AIDC and Rawlings turned to federal assistance to fund additional factory construction to make room for more employees. In 1961, the Department of Commerce, which housed the Area Redevelopment Administration, designated Douglas County a "redevelopment county," which made it eligible for its program of loans and grants. In order to hire more people Rawlings wanted a 34,000 square foot expansion of their plant that it claimed would allow for the hiring of 170 more workers. With assistance from Claxton and the AIDC, Rawlings developed a business loan request in the amount of \$135,000 loan from the ARA.³³¹ The plan first had to be approved by the state rural development committee, which quickly gave its approval and sent it to the ARA. Given the great demand for its funds, the ARA supplied only \$81,250 for the loan. Rawlings took out an additional loan with the

³²⁶ "Local Industrial Development Group Works Wonders at Ava, Missouri," *Albany Ledger*, 26 November 1959;

³²⁷ "Ava 'Tickled to Death,'" *The Springfield News-Leader*, 31 Oct 1959; "Ava Displays Civic Spirit," *Stanberry Headlight*, 26 Nov 1959; "Ava Displays Spectacular Community Spirit," *Gasconade County Republican*, 3 Dec 1959; "Ava Goes All Out to Get New Industry," *The Windsor Review*, 28 January 1960.

³²⁸ *The Impact of Industrialization on a Small Town Economy*, 31, 51.

³²⁹ "Resources Group Will Honor Ava," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 23 Oct 1960.

³³⁰ *The Impact of Industrialization on a Small Town Economy*, 35.

³³¹ "Grundy Recommended for Redevelopment Aid," *The Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune*, 25 September 1961.

Citizens Bank of Ava and First National Bank in St. Louis to finance the rest of the costs.³³²

While some employment expansion occurred as a result of the factory expansion, the Rawlings plant never employed more than 240 people at a time between 1961 and 1965.³³³

Though Rawlings and the new highway represented important elements of Ava's modest rural revival, development activities occurred throughout the 1960s and early 1970s that further cemented its new industrial economic base. This new development activity occurred in both the public and private sectors. Douglas County received several public facilities grants from the ARA and its successor agency, the Economic Development Administration. A \$190,000 grant from the ARA's Accelerated Public Works division funded building construction and repair on five structures, as well as a land treatment program.³³⁴ The EDA also awarded Douglas a \$53,000 matching grant in 1967 for the construction of a county airport. In 1969, the EDA provided Ava with a grant of \$35,000 to improve road access to its industrial park and upgraded water and sewer facilities within the park and in the community at large.³³⁵ Another water and sewer grant from the EDA arrived in 1971, totaling \$145,000 in 1971.³³⁶ This infrastructure improvement laid the groundwork for new job growth. The AIDC sold a small parcel of the industrial park to a wood treatment firm, but the company only employed fifteen people.³³⁷ An antitrust lawsuit forced Spalding, the parent company of Rawlings, to sell the Rawlings division of its firm. This settlement had a somewhat positive impact on job growth in Ava. Instead of shutting down its operation,

³³² "Plant Expansion Loan Approved for Ava Firm," *The Springfield News-Leader*, 29 December 1961.

³³³ *The Impact of Industrialization on a Small Town Economy*, 37.

³³⁴ *Accelerated Public Works Program: Directory of Approved Projects as of July 1, 1964* (Washington D.C.: Area Redevelopment Administration, 1964), 92.

³³⁵ "Airport Aid Gains Okay," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 1 June 1967; *Annual Report of the Economic Development Administration, 1970* (Washington D.C.: Economic Development Administration, 1970), 107.

³³⁶ "Funds Allotted for Doniphan Vo-Tech School," *The Daily Standard*, 5 October 1971.

Spalding utilized the extra factory capacity at the industrial park to take over production of golf bags. Rawlings stayed on in Ava as well and focused on football equipment. Each firm employed 150 people at the end of the decade.³³⁸ Following this division of Spalding and Rawlings, however, no new firms joined the park in the 1970s.

Though the AIDC did not lease or sell as much of its industrial land as its leaders may have hoped, the overall set of development projects nonetheless helped to shift Ava's economy away from a reliance on farming and toward manufacturing. It is difficult to know how many of the farmers who gave up on agriculture during this period of rural development did so because of Ava's industrialization, but the presence of new factories undoubtedly made the decision easier. As Ava industrialized, the number of farmers declined, while average land size increased, suggesting ownership of farmland concentrated.³³⁹ Many farmers were perhaps enticed by Spalding's weekly pay rate of just over \$66, more than many small farmers earned. Moreover, as Ava attracted new industry, new service sector businesses started in town as well, which helped to bolster the struggling town center. Ava's population increased also during this period, though the precise relationship between this growth and new industry is difficult to determine because Ava also annexed new territory.³⁴⁰

In Calexico, California, rural development played out in ways not unlike the experience in Ava. Federal funds proved to be decisive in getting development projects off the ground, and local rural developers focused on new public infrastructure and jobs. However, the particularities of Calexico's agricultural economy and population reveals distinct features of the development process. Luis Legaspi and Alex Campillo, two Mexican American

³³⁷ "Local Industrial Development Group Works Wonders at Ava, Missouri," *Albany Ledger*, 26 November 1959; *The Story of an Ozark Community at Work*, 8.

³³⁸ *The Impact of Industrialization on a Small Town Economy*, 38, 55.

³³⁹ *1964 Census of Agriculture, Missouri, County Tables, Table 1.*

merchants, drove the rural development process in Calexico. These men responded to a farm economy that produced extensive poverty among Calexico's mostly Mexican American population. Their goals, new housing and manufacturing jobs, sought to provide an exit from the migratory, low-wage farm economy. Moreover, Ava was a decidedly white rural community. Its local elite had little trouble attracting rural development funding. Campillo and Legaspi, on the other hand, struggled in those areas until white financial interests backed their projects. However, this financial support also shifted the focus of development in Calexico and the two men lost some control over their program's direction.

Calexico's rural development began in October 1967, when Campillo and Legaspi organized the Calexico Community Action Council (CCAC). Campillo and Legaspi hoped that their organization could be used to build desperately needed affordable housing. However, they also saw it as a vehicle that might reform some elements of the local power structure dominated by large farmers. The two men saw this farm economy as a barrier to economic advancement and the attraction of new manufacturing jobs. Their early efforts revolved around two main goals. They first joined a growing chorus of voices within California's farmworker movement and Mexican American activist groups against the use of Mexican labor on Imperial Valley farms. The two men argued that their use not only limited the ability of domestic workers to get jobs, they also maintained that the wages those migrant workers earned went toward businesses in Mexico, not Calexico. As a result, the small town's economy suffered.³⁴⁰ Campillo and Legaspi also tried to reform the Imperial Irrigation District (IID). The IID controlled the distribution of energy in the valley, and large growers were overrepresented on its board. Legaspi argued that growers allocated energy in

³⁴⁰ *The Impact of Industrialization on a Small Town Economy*, 43-56.

³⁴¹ Kenneth Reich, "Mexico's Farm Commuters Stir Bitter Dispute," *Los Angeles Times* 4 June 1967; Kenneth Reich, "Mexican-Americans Alert to Political Opportunities," *Los Angeles Times* 8 June 1967.

such a way that favored large-scale agriculture and discouraged industries from locating in the valley. The two men also wanted to get more representation on the IID from non-agricultural sources. Reform would allow people like Campillo and Legaspi “to augment our economy” by attracting new industries with lower rates.³⁴² Throughout 1967, these campaigns failed to gather much traction.

Campillo and Legaspi saw some of their failures to challenge grower power as a product of their lack of local political power. To better pursue their agenda, Campillo and Legaspi ran for mayor and a city council seat, respectively, in 1968. The two men used the CCAC to conduct a voter registration drive that focused specifically on bringing Mexican Americans into the political process, many for the first time. Their efforts worked, and the two men took office that year.³⁴³ However, they quickly found that local political power did not kickstart their rural development program. They continued to push for reform of the IID but failed to gain broader support. Even less reformist projects, particularly their housing program, could not attract funding or support.³⁴⁴

Their fortunes changed in the spring of 1968 after partnering with the Rural Development Corporation (RDC), a group of lawyers, businessmen, bankers, and land developers based primarily in California. The two men were introduced to the RDC by Bert Corona, who they had worked with on their earlier reform campaigns and who had helped found the Mexican American Political Association, a major civil rights organization. The RDC’s main purpose was to help local development groups in California plan their projects and secure the financial resources they required. The Campillo and Legaspi welcomed the

³⁴² Ken Overaker, “City Users Assail Electric Rated in Imperial District,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1968.

³⁴³ Mercedes Lynn de Uriarte, “Land Reform U.S. Style: Calexico Celebrates 10 Years of Novel Project,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 November 1983.

³⁴⁴ Ken Overaker, “City Users Assail Electric Rated in Imperial District,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1968.

RDC, its assistance shifted the two men's focus. Rural development in Calexico turned away from political mobilizations and reforms of Imperial Valley farming and focused more on their housing and manufacturing projects. More importantly, the RDC took over as the primary planner of Calexico's development.

The RDC's constituent members contrasted sharply with Campillo and Legaspi's small town, small business roots. The RDC incorporated as a private nonprofit corporation in California on December 30, 1966 and received its initial funding from the War on Poverty's Office of Economic Opportunity.³⁴⁵ Its first executive director, Maxwell E. Greenberg, was senior partner at the Los Angeles law firm Greenberg, Shafton, and Bernhard, and chairman of the Greater Arizona Savings and Loan. Other members included Ned Eichler, a southern California land developer and vice president of the Crown Corporation of Chicago; Steven Farrand and Alan Schwartz, both developers and attorneys; and George Lefcoe, a law professor at the University of Southern California and expert on land law and construction financing. Also represented were two architects and a member of the AFL-CIO's carpenters union. Though the OEO required the "maximum feasible participation" of the poor, only one man, Hector de la Rosa, came from the "poverty community."³⁴⁶ Even more so than in Ava, private sector elites took control of rural development in Calexico

In line with the broader rural development agenda established at the federal level, the RDC put forth a set of development objectives for Calexico focused on industry, infrastructure, and housing. With funds from the Economic Development Administration, the RDC drafted a study of Calexico's potential for development. The survey stressed that Calexico's renewal depended on attracting new manufacturing jobs that would be enticed by the town's cheap land and labor. The survey also proposed tapping into nearby underground

³⁴⁵ RDC, *Accomplishments and Progress*, II-11.

steam deposits that would not only power industry but create new jobs in extraction and processing. Finally, new housing would address Calexico's poor housing stock while simultaneously employing people in construction. The focus in particular would be on modular or prefabricated homes, and the RDC hoped that Calexico might become a regional producer of such homes.³⁴⁷ Absent from the RDC's agenda was the critique of Imperial Valley agriculture made by Campillo and Legaspi. The report nonetheless presented Calexico with a wide-ranging plan for rural revival. However, the RDC's agenda ultimately faltered when set against regional, national, and international political and economic forces.

In contrast to the more domestic and localized plans for industrial renewal in Ava, the RDC shaped Calexico's industrial development program around the increasingly interconnected North American economy, particularly between the U.S. and Mexico. Specifically, the RDC wanted to position Calexico to benefit from the 1966 "Twin Plants Program." This program, a joint U.S.-Mexico policy, involved support for U.S. firms relocating parts of their operations to Mexico, while keeping other portions stateside. Under the plan, initial manufacturing would occur in Mexico, while the assembly, warehousing, and distribution would happen in the U.S.³⁴⁸ Sitting across the border from Mexicali, a burgeoning industrial city, Calexico seemed primed to take advantage of the program.³⁴⁹ While historians have shown how plant relocation across the border has been disastrous for many local economies, some postwar rural developers looked for ways to make an international economy work in their favor. Moreover, the plan reveals just how much the RDC had shifted the priorities first laid out by Campillo and Legaspi. While the two men

³⁴⁶ RDC, *An Application to the OEO*.

³⁴⁷ RDC, *Calexico's Economic Development*.

³⁴⁸ "Commerce Department's Promotion of Mexico's Twin Plant Program: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Economic Stabilization." 1986.

³⁴⁹ "Calexico's Economy a Bright Spot: Border City Grows, But Change Brings Housing, Job Problems," *San Diego Union*, 24 January 1971.

embraced a protectionist argument against Mexican labor, the RDC pushed Calexico to embrace cross-border flows of people and capital.

While the RDC touted Calexico as a place with abundant land for industrial development, cheap, but motivated laborers, and a variety of transportation and communication networks to facilitate industrial development, not a single firm decided to base any of its twin plant operations across the border from Mexicali. By 1971, forty-two U.S. firms had relocated to Mexicali under the auspices of the Twin Plants Program.³⁵⁰ Instead of small towns like Calexico, the joint facilities mostly relocated to the burgeoning cities of Los Angeles, Denver and Phoenix.³⁵¹ In its analysis of why Calexico failed to attract twin plants, the RDC was forced to admit that Los Angeles and other major cities benefited from the program because they had better resources and connections than the small town.³⁵² Calexico's failure also underscores how the competitive character of rural development and its focus on the private sector hindered a widespread rural revival. Rural development policy saw private sector growth as the key to rural renewal. However, Calexico had to compete not only with other small towns for new employment, but cities with far more resources as well. Calexico was far from the only town, in rural California or otherwise, attempting to attract manufacturers.

The RDC's industrial ambitions did not hinge solely on the Twin Plants program. Even more ambitious, but perhaps more far flung, was the RDC's interest in geothermal energy as a source of cheap and abundant power. The RDC framed the exploitation of this energy source as a way to fuel manufacturing expansion but create new industrial jobs in extraction and processing as well. According to geological surveys, vast underground steam

³⁵⁰ Doug MacMillan, "Calexico 'Forgotten' by Border Factories," *San Diego Union*, 25 January 1971.

³⁵¹ RDC, *Calexico's Economic Development*, IV-22, 24.

³⁵² RDC, *Calexico's Economic Development*, IV-23.

deposits permeated a patch of land just five miles north of Calexico.³⁵³ According to Robert Rex, a geology professor at the University of California, Riverside who surveyed the deposits, they had the potential to “restructure the economy” of the southwest.³⁵⁴ Rex estimated that these steam deposits could produce 20,000 megawatts of electrical energy (fifteen times more than the Hoover Dam) and five to seven million acre-feet of water, roughly half of what the Colorado River provided the valley each year.³⁵⁵ It is unsurprising, then, that the RDC thought Calexico should give “every kind of support and assistance” to steam extraction.³⁵⁶ These deposits offered a way to assist both agriculture and industry, and turn Calexico into a center of energy production for the region.

Much like the Twin Plants Program, the RDC’s energy revolution failed to materialize. Environmental concerns raised a number of initial barriers. While touted as a “clean” source of energy, research revealed that use of geothermal steam created a highly saline and mineralized water byproduct. No safe storage spaces for that byproduct existed. Some proposed pumping it underground, but a geothermal plant constructed in northern California in the 1950s showed that this method released high levels of boron and ammonia that killed off wildlife.³⁵⁷ Issues of land control also blocked geothermal development. Union and Standard Oil Companies, Southern Pacific Land Company, and Magma Energy owned roughly seventy percent of the land thought to contain the richest deposits of geothermal

³⁵³ Ken Overaker, “City Users Assail Electric Rated in Imperial District,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1968; RDC, *Calexico’s Economic Development*, II-2; Joe Brooks, “State Aid Seen on ‘Hot Ocean’ Power Project,” *San Diego Union*, 6 August 1970; Staff Reporter, “Seven New Geothermal Fields Discovered in California; High Power Potential Seen,” *Wall Street Journal*, 6 August 1970.

³⁵⁴ Brooks, “State Aid Seen on ‘Hot Ocean’ Power Project.”

³⁵⁵ Staff Reporter, “Seven New Geothermal Fields Discovered in California; High Power Potential Seen,” *Wall Street Journal*, 6 August 1970.

³⁵⁶ RDC, *Calexico’s Economic Development*, IV-19.

³⁵⁷ Philip Fradkin, “Ecologists Look to Geothermal Energy, May be Disappointed,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 November 1970.

steam in the valley.³⁵⁸ Union's geothermal division manager believed steam had potential, but his company refused to develop it because the company did not have the resources to make exploitation feasible.³⁵⁹ Charles Baldwin, a consultant to the Senate Committee on Governmental Organization, painted a more nefarious picture, and argued that the oil companies conspired to halt the development of alternative energy.³⁶⁰ Probably the simplest explanation for the failure of steam energy to develop can be found in the structure of rural development policy. A project of such magnitude required institutions and funding beyond the scope of the policies established in Congress and the USDA. Though exploitation of geothermal energy may have helped industrialize Calexico, the resources to realize such a project did not exist within the framework of localized rural development.

Though new jobs in manufacturing and geothermal energy failed to materialize, the RDC eventually found success in its housing projects. The group's efforts resulted in the early 1970s in the construction of a new housing project with nearly 300 modular homes known as Kennedy Gardens. For Calexico's developers, new homes appeared as a way to not only address the town's substantial substandard housing problems, but to also stimulate job creation in housing construction. The group, however, presented conflicting views about how effective housing development could be in shifting Calexico's fortunes. At times, it put forth housing as the catalyst for Calexico's renewal: "As a local industry, construction and house building creates new jobs and markets."³⁶¹ Elsewhere, the RDC suggested that the economic benefits of home construction would provide stimulus only during the construction phase and

³⁵⁸ "Oil Firms Accused of Not Developing Geothermal Lands," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 1974.

³⁵⁹ "Seven New Geothermal Fields Discovered in California," *Wall Street Journal*.

³⁶⁰ "Oil Firms Accused of Not Developing Geothermal Lands," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 1974.

³⁶¹ Testimony of Paul Laos, Executive Director of the RDC, Economic Opportunity Amendments, 1971.

would not remedy “fundamental deficiencies in the local economy.”³⁶² Rural renewal depended upon the performance of a number of variables, and housing alone would not suffice. The outcome ultimately reflected the latter assessment. Kennedy Gardens became the sole legacy of rural development in Calexico.

Launching a housing development on the scale of Kennedy Gardens required overcoming major financial and physical barriers. Acquiring funds sufficient to purchase land and plan a housing development eluded Campillo and Legaspi. The personal connections the RDC had with people in the banking and finance worlds facilitated private sector investment, and the group called on its “friends in the Los Angeles area” for help. These friends worked at First Western Bank, which loaned the RDC \$5.4 million to cover initial construction costs. Early funding also came from the OEO, which granted the RDC \$570,000, the largest housing grant in OEO history.³⁶³ Staffing costs used some of this money, but most went toward the purchase of a plot of land just north of Calexico’s primary settlement. This land, however, stood on the other side of the All-American Canal. Built in 1934, the canal brought water from the Colorado River to the Imperial Valley, but it also blocked Calexico’s water and sewage lines from reaching the new homes. Connecting the homes promised to be expensive. To defray the costs, the Department of Housing and Urban Development granted the RDC \$112,000, which it used to contract with the Salton City firm Desert Pipeline to bring water and sewage pipes to the homes.³⁶⁴

State and federal housing policy also cleared the way for a modular home project. The RDC planned to use prefabricated units as a way to construct homes quickly and affordably. However, many localities around the state had restricted their use. In 1970,

³⁶² Rural Development Corporation, *Annual Report*, II-24.

³⁶³ To Theron Bell from Judith Coleman Richards 29 May 1968, Folder: Rural Community Development, 1965-1968, Papers of the State OEO; RDC, *The RDC: Accomplishments and Progress, 1970-1972* (Rural Development Corporation, 1972), II-11.

though, the state government passed the California Uniform Housing Act. This law overrode local objections to modular homes and allowed them to be built anywhere in the state, as long as they met certain standards set by the new law.³⁶⁵ The financing of these modular homes received assistance from new federal housing law. Most important in this regard was section 235 of the 1968 Housing Act. This added loan and mortgage support for low-income families to the Federal Housing Administration, which since the 1930s had provided such assistance to the nation's middle and upper income families.³⁶⁶ Section 235 financed almost all of the 299 homes in Kennedy Gardens. The federal government also funded the hiring of workers to build the homes. The JOBS 70 program, instituted in 1968, subsidized the costs of labor by transferring federal funds to private businesses. The law was intended to encourage the private sector to employ what it called the "hardcore unemployed" by covering expenses involved in hiring, training, and offering supportive services.³⁶⁷

The RDC contracted with American Home Industries, a modular housing firm in Bakersfield, California to design the homes, oversee construction, and hire workers. In 1970, the firm took over an abandoned cotton gin factory on the outskirts of Calxico to begin building homes. American Home Industries developed an assembly line production method for the homes. Each home would be constructed on a track. At each end of the track, workers poured two concrete slabs, one for each half of the house. Workers rolled the concrete slabs from one end of the track to the other, and in the process assembled the homes. When the two slabs met in the middle, workers bolted the house together.³⁶⁸ With one important exception,

³⁶⁴ RDC, *Accomplishments and Progress*, III-4-7; Paul Laos Testimony.

³⁶⁵ "Modular Homes Discussed," *Progress Bulletin*, 27 June 1971.

³⁶⁶ Lawrence Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Harvard University Press, 2007); Kevin Gotham, "Separate and Unequal: The Housing Act of 1968 and the Section 235 Program." *Sociological Forum* 15, no. 1 (March 2000).

³⁶⁷ RDC, *Accomplishments and Progress*, III-25; Turpin, "Nation's Largest Tract of Factory-Built Dwellings Taking Shape Near Calxico."

³⁶⁸ RDC, *Accomplishments and Progress*, III-9.

this system worked well. When a crane lifted the first house for transportation, the fasteners connecting the halves gave way and the house crumbled. From then on, the houses were built on top of seven inches of poured concrete.³⁶⁹ At its height, Calexico's housing factory employed one hundred fifty-five people at an average hourly wage of \$2.68 per hour.³⁷⁰ Most were Mexican American workers from Calexico. Of that number, JOBS 70 paid for the wages and training of twenty. By the middle of 1971, though, as home construction wound down, the factory laid off almost half the workers.³⁷¹

While the homes were constructed with low-income people in mind, the pricing excluded many of Calexico's poorest residents. To be sure, the finished product was cheaper than the average home in California in 1970, which sold for \$23,100.³⁷² A standard two-bedroom in Kennedy Gardens cost \$14,500 dollars, while a four-bedroom cost \$18,500.³⁷³ Excluded from this price, however, were air conditioning, carports, and carpeting, all of which raised the price. Because the FHA subsidized all but one percent of the monthly interest payments on the mortgage, the average monthly mortgage payment for each family totaled between sixty and eighty-five dollars.³⁷⁴ Even with the lower price point and subsidies, these homes were out of reach for those families hovering around the poverty line of \$3,000. The average income for a family in Calexico at this time was \$2,300, but the FHA required an income of \$3,800 to receive assistance from section 235.³⁷⁵ The tenants who

³⁶⁹ de Uriarte, "Land Reform U.S. Style."

³⁷⁰ RDC, *Accomplishments and Progress*, III-9.

³⁷¹ RDC, *Annual Report*, II-18.

³⁷² <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/values.html>.

³⁷³ RDC, *Accomplishments and Progress*, III-14; Turpin, "Nation's Largest Tract of Factory-Built Dwellings Taking Shape Near Calexico."

³⁷⁴ Vasquez, "'Chicano Power' Brings Calexico New Housing;" RDC, *Accomplishments and Progress*, III-14.

³⁷⁵ Vasquez, "'Chicano Power' Brings Calexico New Housing;" RDC, *Accomplishments and Progress*, III-15.

would eventually occupy Kennedy Gardens had an average family income of \$5,700.³⁷⁶ Over six hundred families applied for only 299 units. The RDC received help in the review and selection of tenants from a private mortgage company. The company studied each applicants' employment record, history with welfare agencies, marriage status, and credit information. Most applicants were rejected because they lacked sufficient income or bad credit scores.³⁷⁷ The large number of applicants allowed the RDC to pick those that appeared most capable of paying back the FHA loan, which excluded families with spotty employment records and those who had used welfare programs. Though market rules were exclusionary, by the end of 1973 most of the homes in Kennedy Gardens had owners.

If the homes quickly filled with families, the project failed to act as a stimulant for further economic development. In spite of the RDC's hopes, Calexico did not become a center of prefabricated home construction. American Home Industries ran into financial trouble soon after it completed its Calexico project and the RDC failed to attract other similar manufacturers to Calexico.³⁷⁸ The RDC also set aside 3.8 acres in Kennedy Gardens for the development of a retail center with shops that could serve the needs of residents and, hopefully, be owned by them.³⁷⁹ A barber shop, shoe repair shop, grocery store, and coin operated laundry were all proposed as potential businesses.³⁸⁰ Calexico's residents, however, never got the chance to become business owners. Funding appears to be the main culprit. Developing this land for retail purposes required further loans. The RDC reached out to the Small Business Administration loan department for this purpose, and the SBA interviewed potential retail tenants to see if they satisfied "SBA standards." The SBA deemed the

³⁷⁶ Economic Research Associates, *Feasibility Study of a Neighborhood Shopping Center in Kennedy Gardens, Calexico, California* (Economic Research Associates: Los Angeles, 1970).

³⁷⁷ RDC, *Accomplishments and Progress*, III-15.

³⁷⁸ de Uriarte, "Land Reform U.S. Style."

³⁷⁹ RDC, *Annual Report*, II-26.

³⁸⁰ RDC, *Annual Report*, II-13-17.

interviewees a “risky” investment and decided not to extend loans to them.³⁸¹ Thus, the efforts of Campillo, Legaspi, and the other members of the RDC resulted primarily in the construction of housing for moderate income families. A full revitalization grounded in industrial development ultimately eluded Calexico.

Rural development found its fullest and most successful expression in the small southeast Georgia town of Alma. Federal officials agreed. In 1972, Robert Nipp of the USDA’s Farmers Home Administration called the changes in Alma’s infrastructure, industrial capacity, and housing a “model for rural America.”³⁸² Hubert Humphrey called Alma’s development projects a “revelation...that needs to be known throughout the entire nation.”³⁸³ In many ways, though, Alma followed the same script as the Ozarks and Calexico: federally financed, but locally controlled, investments in infrastructure and jobs. What distinguished Alma from the pack was the extent of federal funding and public sector expansion. Rural development still unfolded along public-private lines, but Alma benefited from large sums of grants and loans not just from the EDA and the USDA, but from HUD’s Model Cities program as well. Alma’s relative success also came in no small part from the public sector. While proponents of development saw private sector job growth as critical to rural revival, Alma’s growth relied on an expansion of publicly run social services, including a hospital and public housing. This public sector expansion provided Alma with a more durable rural development outcome.

Efforts to revive Alma began in the mid-1950s when the city council created the

³⁸¹ RDC, *Annual Report*, II-11, 13, 17.

³⁸² Robert Nipp, *The Alma-Bacon County Story: A Model for Rural America* (Washington D.C.: Department of Agriculture, 1972).

³⁸³ *Rural Development: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Rural Development of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Senate, 92nd Congress, 856, (1971)* (Statement of Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey).

Alma Planning Commission. Alma had tried its hand at industrial attraction in the past, but the new planning commission hoped to be more successful by developing and following through on long-range economic development plans.³⁸⁴ The mayor and council members formed the core of the commission, but local experts played a role as well. Malcom Little, a professor of city planning at the Georgia Institute of Technology, and Pattathamoger Bhagwandas Rai, a graduate student in planning from India at the same school, both aided the commission. Alongside the commission, Bacon County businessmen formed the Bacon County Industrial Development Association to help finance economic development.³⁸⁵ As with Ava and Calxico, however, the planning commission struggled to leverage meager local finances into a meaningful development program. Soon after, the commission fell to the wayside.

The year 1966 proved to be a turning point for Alma and Bacon County. In the winter of that year, the EDA designated Bacon County as eligible for federal economic development aid.³⁸⁶ Alma also received the first of what would be many grants over the course of the next ten years from HUD's urban renewal program, which it would use to clear substandard homes and build public housing.³⁸⁷ Even more important for the development of Alma, HUD's Model Cities program revised its rules to permit its funds to be expended on places with a population lower than 100,000. Over the next decade, Model Cities would become the primary funder of Alma's rural development. Alma's civic and business leaders immediately organized the Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission to take advantage of funds

³⁸⁴ Alma City Planning Commission, *Planning for Alma: A Report to the People* (Atlanta: Georgia Institute of Technology, 1957), 1.

³⁸⁵ *An Economic Profile of Bacon County*, 18.

³⁸⁶ *1967 Planning Grant Application*, III-34; "OEDP Program Committees to Meet Here Friday, Feb. 25," *The Alma Times*, 17 Feb 1966.

³⁸⁷ "\$370,000 is Approved for Urban Renewal Project in City of Alma," *The Alma Times* 7 March 1966.

from HUD and EDA.³⁸⁸ L.W. Taylor, the manager of the county's electric cooperative, developed the group's application to Model Cities and led the commission.³⁸⁹ The commission's proposal focused on the attraction of high-wage industrial jobs, improved social services and public infrastructure, and new housing. Model Cities approved Alma's application in 1968.³⁹⁰ Henry Bishop, Alma's mayor and owner of a local insurance company, framed Model Cities' involvement in Alma as its "last chance of becoming a growth area." Without new jobs, Alma would be "dead in ten years."³⁹¹

To ensure the survival of its community, the commission placed new manufacturing jobs and expanded social services at the center of its efforts. Like development in other rural communities, the commission saw manufacturing, not farming, as the future of Alma. An industrial park formed the centerpiece of its industrial attraction efforts. The commission also planned to build a new social services center that would bring all the county's social programs under one roof. Services in Alma and Bacon were decentralized and uncoordinated, and the commission hoped that by centralizing them, residents would be able to make use of programs they never utilized.³⁹² Smaller, satellite service centers would also be built in Bacon's outlying communities.³⁹³ Finally, the commission wanted to improve upon the local hospital. Medicare and Medicaid allowed many to get hospital care that never had before, but the existing hospital's capacity was inadequate.³⁹⁴ The emergency room could assist only one person at a time, and the hospital frequently admitted more people than its twenty-eight-bed

³⁸⁸ *Mid-Planning Statement*, 1-2; *1967 Planning Grant Application*, III-47

³⁸⁹ *First Year Action Plan*, III-11, XIII-2; *Mid-Planning Statement*, 1-2; *1967 Planning Grant Application*, III-45.

³⁹⁰ Nipp, *The Story of Alma-Bacon County*, 11.

³⁹¹ Nipp, *The Alma-Bacon County Story*, 27; "Alma Working to Improve Itself," *The Alma Times*, 27 June 1968.

³⁹² *First Year Action Plan*, II-27,8, VI-1; "Center for Human Resources," 16.

³⁹³ Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission, *Community Facilities Plan for Alma and Bacon County Georgia* (Atlanta: Bureau of State Planning and Community Affairs, 1972), 9.

³⁹⁴ *1967 Planning Grant Application*, III-10; *1968 Planning Grant Application*, 3B-1.

capacity could hold.³⁹⁵ The commission's focus, then, centered on expanding the hospital size and quality.³⁹⁶

Housing development formed the other major plank of the commission's planned rural revival. Taylor argued that poor housing conditions had handicapped its development efforts in the past.³⁹⁷ The housing situation deterred new investors, and discouraged skilled workers from seeing Alma as a desirable place to live.³⁹⁸ To remedy these deficiencies, the commission aimed to build public housing, with the goal that such housing made up twenty five percent of Alma's housing stock.³⁹⁹ The commission hoped that some of this housing would remedy the poor living conditions and housing discrimination faced by the town's black residents. It never provided hard numbers, but the commission aimed to set aside some of this new public housing for Alma's black residents.⁴⁰⁰ The commission looked to the expansion of private sector housing as well. Taylor and the commission hoped to leverage their town's new social services and jobs to attract housing developers. Like Calexico, Taylor saw section 235 loans, as well as loans from the FmHA, as potential funding sources.⁴⁰¹ As with the rest of its plan, then, housing problems would be solved on a thoroughly public-private basis.

Taylor positioned this proposal for rural development against the kinds of industrial attraction efforts that had long characterized the south: the wooing of low-wage, low-skill industries without a focus on broader community investments. Having attracted such

³⁹⁵ Nipp, *The Alma-Bacon County Story*, 24, 43.

³⁹⁶ *1968 Planning Grant Application*, 3B: 1-24.

³⁹⁷ *Mid-Planning Statement*, 11.

³⁹⁸ *Second Year Planning Statement*, iii.

³⁹⁹ *1967 Planning Grant Application*, II-6-8; *1968 Planning Grant Application*, 3B-47.

⁴⁰⁰ *Second Year Planning Statement*, II-39.

⁴⁰¹ *1968 Planning Grant Application*, 3B-47; *Second Year Planning Statement*, II-44.

industries in the past, Alma's leaders knew their limitations firsthand.⁴⁰² While factories meant paychecks for families, Taylor lamented the effects they had on the town and county's coffers. Taylor critiqued them as "unplanned" and too reliant on tax exemptions that undermined the ability of Alma and Bacon to provide social services.⁴⁰³ In contrast to the southern model, Alma's leaders put forth a vision far more in line with the New Deal and FDR's Four Freedoms: "everyone has a job...that [pays] enough for the work that you do so you have a nice home, food to eat, clothes to wear, and extra spending money."⁴⁰⁴ The commission repudiated the basic model that had characterized southern industrial development for decades and instead sought permanent, high-wage jobs, as well as investments in housing, infrastructure, and social services.

Taylor hoped that better employers would not only fill Alma's coffers but solve what he saw as a family and gender crisis as well. Taylor wanted rural development to bolster the male breadwinning model that the rural crisis seemed to be undermining. In general, male labor force participation in the area declined through the 1950s and 1960s as the farm economy experienced major transformations.⁴⁰⁵ Low-wage employers exacerbated this problem because they mostly hired women, who they believed did not need to be paid as much as men, in an attempt to lower payrolls. In Bacon, the three garment manufacturers employed mostly women.⁴⁰⁶ Taylor believed such disparities had consequences: without a sufficient expansion of "jobs for males," Alma and Bacon County faced "family problems and even...family breakdown."⁴⁰⁷ Rural development, then, would not only have to go

⁴⁰² Clyde Harris, *Analysis of Manufacturing Activity: Slash Pine Area, Georgia* (Atlanta: Bureau of State Planning and Programming, 1968), 40-1; *Mid-Planning Statement*, 20.

⁴⁰³ *First Year Action Plan*, II-17.

⁴⁰⁴ "Model City Report," *The Alma Times*, 15 January 1970.

⁴⁰⁵ *Overall Economic Development Plan for Slash Pine Area*, 1.

⁴⁰⁶ *Overall Economic Development Plan for Slash Pine Area*, 24; *1967 Planning Grant Application*, II-8.

⁴⁰⁷ *1968 Planning Grant Application*, 3A-7.

beyond merely buying payroll in Bacon, but solve a gender and family crisis as well.

Taylor and the Model Cities Commission thus laid out one of the most thoroughgoing plans for rural development. The commission was careful, however, to propose a plan that erased Alma's rural identity. The Model Cities Commission did not want to urbanize Alma, but it did want to distance the town from some features of its rural past. For example, in the fall of 1968 the commission led a local tour of its development efforts. The tour guides pointed at that the "thousands of chickens" that populated Alma would be replaced by "symmetrical streets with curbs, gutters, and sidewalks." Certain agricultural, rural modes of living would thus be replaced by a more orderly pattern.⁴⁰⁸ A similar rural-urban contrast appeared in a survey conducted by the commission and Georgia Department of Health. The survey functioned almost as promotional material for the commission's development agenda. The report included photographs of many of Alma's more substandard structures. One picture showed what the report called a "typical *rural* individual solid waste storage and disposal practice."⁴⁰⁹ In other words, an open-air pit privy. The report also contained images of dilapidated homes, unsecured water supplies, and front yards collecting trash and old cars. The report concluded with images of newly constructed public housing, touted as clean and modern.

However, the commission did not seek to abandon all or even most things typically associated with rurality. Its public housing plans, for example, sharply diverged from those found in cities. While major urban areas across the U.S. constructed large, densely populated public housing towers, Alma stayed closer to the ground. Though Alma's planned public housing may not have outdoor privies, it would maintain a sense of space far more in line with small town and country housing. The commission's plans called for the construction of

⁴⁰⁸ "Urban Renewal Effort Shown to Group Here," *The Alma Times*, 26 September 1968.

dispersed, single family units settled on relatively spacious lots. Alma's commission members sought to transform the town's traditional rurality, while maintaining some aspects of it.

The first target for transformation was Alma's lackluster community social services. The commission planned to construct a new 18,000 square foot service center in east Alma that would consolidate under one roof the following agencies: the Divisions of Manpower and Economic Development, the Early Childhood Development Program, the Department of Family and Children's Services, the Social Security Administration, the Veterans Administration, and the Employment Service.⁴¹⁰ To coordinate the services, a new county-level Division of Community Services was created. The new division provided a transportation service to and from the center and managed an "emergency assistance fund" that provided aid to people who needed immediate assistance.⁴¹¹ Work on the new service center began in 1970. HUD supplied all the funding for the project, including for the smaller satellite projects in remote Bacon communities. HUD's Neighborhood Facilities Program supplied Alma with a \$346,406 grant, while the Model Cities Program provided a \$451,000 grant.⁴¹² Construction got off to a late start when the commission realized its original plans for the building would not be big enough to house all the service agencies, but by 1972 construction on the project ended.⁴¹³ The smaller satellite centers in the Louisville Community in east Bacon County and the Taylor Community of Northwest Bacon also

⁴⁰⁹ Georgia Department of Public Health, *Community Environment Analysis: Alma-Bacon County, Georgia* (Atlanta: Department of Public Health, 1970), 46.

⁴¹⁰ *Second Year Planning Statement*, VI-4.

⁴¹¹ *Second Year Planning Statement*, I-6.

⁴¹² *First Year Action Plan*, VI-1; "\$451,000 Service Center is Approved for Bacon Co., *The Alma Times*, 28 May 1970; "Over Half Million Scheduled for Construction in County, *The Alma Times*, 26 November 1970; "Community Development Center One of Major Construction Projects Here, *The Alma Times*, 8 July 1971.

⁴¹³ Nipp, *The Alma-Bacon County Story*, 41.

opened that year.⁴¹⁴

The community service centers provided a source of both temporary and permanent jobs. Construction on the community service centers provided a boost, however temporary, to local employment.⁴¹⁵ Construction on the larger centralized community service center required over sixty workers, the majority of whom were local residents.⁴¹⁶ The satellite centers were constructed by a local construction firm and employed thirty-one people.⁴¹⁷ Though the construction jobs disappeared once the projects ended, the service centers provided new sources of local, public sector employment. For example, the new Division of Community Services hired only Bacon County residents to staff its various offices.⁴¹⁸ While private sector job creation may have been the primary goal of rural development, an expansion of the public sector also built an important foundation for new rural employment.

The construction of a new hospital occurred alongside that of the community center. Like the latter, the hospital relied upon funds from Model Cities and temporarily boosted local construction employment. Alma officials initially asked for \$390,000 from HUD's program to fund hospital construction.⁴¹⁹ HUD ultimately provided Alma with \$300,000, with the rest of the funds to be made up by the selling of revenue bonds by the Alma Hospital Authority.⁴²⁰ An additional \$94,992 grant from Model Cities was used to purchase new

⁴¹⁴ *Community Facilities Plan*, 9; "Radar Site Converted to Service Center," *The Alma Times*, 20 January 1972.

⁴¹⁵ "Over Half Million Scheduled for Construction in County."

⁴¹⁶ "Community Development Center One of Major Construction Projects Here"; *Second Year Planning Statement*, XXII-20.

⁴¹⁷ "Radar Site Converted to Service Center"; *Second Year Planning Statement*, XXII-19.

⁴¹⁸ *Second Year Planning Statement*, VI-21-22.

⁴¹⁹ "Model Cities Gets Request for \$390,000 Hospital Aid," *The Alma Times*, 18 May 1972; "Hospital Plan is Adopted by MC," *The Alma Times*, 25 May 1972.

⁴²⁰ "514,989 Contract Let for Hospital Construction," *The Alma Times*, 15 June 1972; "\$500,000 for Lake, \$50,000 for Industrial Park Refused," *The Alma Times*, 19 April 1973.

hospital equipment and medical supplies.⁴²¹ The contract for construction went to Barnard and Sewell, a construction firm in Waycross County, located just south of Bacon.⁴²² Construction, which ended in 1975, increased the number of beds from twenty eight to fifty, built a new operating room, new storage and holding rooms, and an expanded emergency room.⁴²³ Given the scarcity of rural health care during this period, the work of the commission in securing new hospital care for Bacon residents represented a major achievement.

While social services and a new hospital figured prominently in the commission's plans to remake Alma, housing occupied an even more central position. Over the course a decade, Alma and Bacon County launched several new housing projects. The first major housing venture began in East Alma, one of the poorest parts of town. East Alma also had the largest concentration of black families in the county. Roughly three hundred families lived in that section of town, and nearly two hundred were black.⁴²⁴ The Alma Housing Authority received a \$370,000 grant in March 1966 to begin demolishing east Alma's large concentration of substandard homes and replace them with new public housing.⁴²⁵ Shortly after the housing authority received the grant, it began work on a fifty-two-unit housing project for the elderly in east Alma with additional assistance from HUD.⁴²⁶ While funded by the federal government, the Alma Housing Authority owned and operated the project, which

⁴²¹ "126,656 Hospital Equipment, \$85,000 Survey Gets Approval," *The Alma Times*, 5 June 1975.

⁴²² "514,989 Contract Let for Hospital Construction."

⁴²³ "Hospital Wing Opened," *The Alma Times*, 9 August 1973; "Model Cities Boosts Local Economy," *The Alma Times*, 23 February 1978; "Model Cities Improved Hospital," *The Alma Times*, 23 February 1978.

⁴²⁴ *1967 Planning Grant Application*, II-6.

⁴²⁵ "\$370,000 is Approved for Urban Renewal Project in City of Alma," *The Alma Times* 7 March 1966.

⁴²⁶ *First Year Action Plan*, VII-2; *Adequacy of Federal Response to Housing Needs of Older Americans: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Housing for the Elderly of the Special Committee on*

consisted of two different types of units. Twelve units were standard one- or two-bedroom homes. The other forty, however, offered “congregate” style housing, which provided elderly residents with meals in addition to a one- or two-bedroom unit. The housing authority rented the apartments only to relatively low-income elderly people: the income cap for an individual was \$4,250, and \$4,875 for a couple.⁴²⁷

The housing authority’s primary focus, however, centered on the construction of single-family public housing units in east Alma. The project, known as Sun City Terrace, began in 1969 with a \$471,893 loan from HUD to the Alma Housing Authority for thirty-one units of low-cost public housing.⁴²⁸ HUD funds flowed through the housing authority to Vidalia Builders, Inc., a housing construction firm located just north of Alma in Vidalia. Within a year Vidalia had finished the project. Following Sun City’s completion, east Alma saw nearly constant public housing construction for the next decade. By the end of the 1970s, east Alma contained two hundred eleven public housing units. With additional grants and loans from HUD, as well as an over \$1 million grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, the housing authority outfitted east Alma’s housing projects with a new waste-water treatment plant, trunk sewer lines, lift stations, force mains, and water lines.⁴²⁹ On top of this public housing construction, new private sector units went up between 1972 and 1978. By the

Aging, Senate, 94th Congress, 939-40 (1975) (Appendix 1: Letters and Statements from Individuals and Organizations).

⁴²⁷ “Sun City Courts Offers New Concept,” *The Alma Times*, 8 July 1971; “First Congregate Housing Project in Nation in Alma,” *The Alma Times*, 20 January 1968; Tom Greene, “Alma Working to Improve Itself,” *The Alma Times*, 27 June 1968; *1968 Planning Grant Application*, 3B-116.

⁴²⁸ “Huge Project Announced for Northeast Alma Area,” *The Alma Times*, 26 June 1969.

⁴²⁹ “\$130,115 Grant Approved for Housing Authority,” *The Alma Times*, 21 June 1973; *1980 Census, Georgia*, Table 39, 12-122; “Alma Gets Grant, Loan to Build City Projects,” *The Alma Times*, 21 June 1973; 38 “Over \$1-Million Grant to City for Disposal Plant,” *The Alma Times*, 5 July 1973; Jeffrey Ball, “Little Farm Town Becomes a Big Public Housing Mess,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 April 1972.

end of the decade, nearly one hundred new private homes had been built.⁴³⁰ These new units, public and private, stood in stark contrast to the substandard shacks that dotted east Alma before 1970.

Like similar projects in the nation's cities, black residents bore the brunt of renewal efforts in Alma. In total, contractors took down one hundred forty-seven structures, primarily homes, but six businesses and six churches as well. Forty-seven black families and eleven black individuals were displaced, but only twenty-eight white families and ten white individuals were affected. During the duration of construction, the housing authority provided families and individuals with temporary homes.⁴³¹ It seems, however, that the clearance of land and homes in east Alma did not permanently displace black residents. In 1970, black residents made up thirteen percent of Alma's population. In 1980, after the end of the urban renewal and Model Cities projects, African Americans comprised twenty two percent of the population.⁴³²

While an expanded public sector formed a key component of Alma's rural renewal, local leaders also looked to new private sector jobs to bolster the small southern town. Over the course of the late 1960s and 1970s, Alma's business and civic leaders developed an industrial park they hoped to fill with twenty manufacturers employing over 1,200 people.⁴³³ The Model Cities Commission planned industrial attraction for Alma and funded the purchase of industrial land, but the Bacon Industrial Building Authority, a county agency, owned and operated the land.⁴³⁴ In reality, virtually the same people populated both agencies.

⁴³⁰ "Loan Approved for Thirty Housing Units," *The Alma Times*, 2 March 1972; Mittie Vaughan, "Substandard Section Transformed," *The Alma Times*, 23 February 1978.

⁴³¹ "\$2-Million Urban Renewal Develop 60 Acres in Alma," *The Alma Times*, 2 December 1971; "Model Subdivision Project, Phase II," *The Alma Times*, 25 September 1972.

⁴³² *Second Year Planning Statement*, II-.

⁴³³ *Second Year Planning Statement*, IV-27.

⁴³⁴ "Alma Working to Improve Itself," *The Alma Times*, 27 June 1968; *First Year Action Plan*, IV-16; *Second Year Planning Statement*, I-6.

Valene Bennet, Albert Pitts, mayor Henry Bishop, Wesley Johnson, and Leroy Teston served on the building authority, and all but Teston served on the Model Cities Commission.⁴³⁵

Like all projects in Alma, the industrial park relied on extensive support from the federal government. Indeed, such support was especially critical because of the poor condition of the land sought by the commission, and because it was not connected to the town by adequate roads or through its water and sewer lines. A study of the land by the USDA's Soil Conservation Service in 1967 found it to be unsuitable for industrial development without the land first being drained, and then equipped with surface and subsurface drainage facilities to prevent future flooding.⁴³⁶ The commission received a \$343,200 grant from the EDA, and a supplemental grant of \$120,000 from Model Cities in November 1971.⁴³⁷ These initial grants helped to clear the land, construct a 350,000 gallon water tank, and begin construction on roads and water and sewer lines.⁴³⁸ An \$80,000 grant from the FmHA covered some road paving costs, with an additional \$26,000 coming from a Community Development Block Grant to cover the rest.⁴³⁹ The park itself was not fully completed until 1977, but manufacturers arrived before that date.

The first major industrial activity occurred midway through the construction process in July 1973. The building authority sold thirty acres of industrial park land to Patillo Construction Company, which *The Alma Times* described as "one of the state's major

⁴³⁵ "200 Acre Industrial Site Acquired, Open Space Land Grants for 117 Acre Site," *The Alma Times*, 8 July 1971; "Bacon Industrial Group Active in County Growth," *The Alma Times*, 27 November 1969; Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission, *Public Improvements Program and Capital Budget for Alma and Bacon County* (Atlanta: Bureau of State Planning and Community Affairs, 1972), 1.

⁴³⁶ Slash Pine Area Planning and Development Commission, *Community Facilities in an Industrial Park* (Atlanta: Bureau of State Planning and Community Affairs, 1967), 3.

⁴³⁷ "Grant for Industrial Park Received Here," *The Alma Times*, 25 November 1971.

⁴³⁸ "Grant for Industrial Park Received Here"; "Local Projects to Boost Economy of Bacon County," *The Alma Times*, 3 February 1972; "Ground Breaking Ceremonies for Industrial Park," *The Alma Times*, 9 November 1972.

industrial promoters and developers.” The firm planned to build two 32,000 square foot “speculative buildings,” a type of structure not designed specifically for any one type of industry, but one that could be easily retooled to fit any industry.⁴⁴⁰ While the paper believed the construction of a speculative building reflected Patillo Construction’s faith in Alma’s future, the easily refashioned buildings could also have reflected the transient character of many industries operating in the south.

While Patillo Construction built easily adaptable factories, the industrial park did not experience a sudden rush of new manufacturing tenants. TDM Industries, Inc., the first major tenant, bought a parcel of land and began manufacturing outerwear in August 1975. TDM was a subsidiary of a pre-existing garment manufacturer in Alma, and the new shop planned to hire thirty people initially, and potentially expand to ninety. The following month Oak Park Manufacturing leased space to employ seventy people in the making of outerwear as well. The firm had two other plants in South Georgia. In September 1978, G.F. York Industries bought TDM’s land and building and began manufacturing shirts for men and boys.⁴⁴¹ TDM’s workers were transferred to G.F. York, and the company hired additional people for its finishing and shipping departments. November 1978 saw the final growth of industrial activity during the period under examination here. In that month, construction began on a 1,400 square foot building for Aire-o-Lite, a manufacturer of lenses for eye glasses; a 30,000 square foot building for an egg processing plant scheduled to employ fifty people; and a food processing firm, Richmond Baking Company, began operations that

⁴³⁹ “\$80,000 Grant Approved for Paving,” *The Alma Times*, 29 April 1975; “Ground Breaking in Industrial Park,” *The Alma Times*, 10 February 1977.

⁴⁴⁰ John Graham, “A Step in the Right Direction,” *The Alma Times*, 19 July 1973; “Building Sites are Sold in Industrial Park Area,” *The Alma Times*, 12 July 1973.

⁴⁴¹ “TDM Industries Opens Plant in Industrial Park,” *The Alma Times*, 14 August 1975; “New Plant to Open in Industrial Park,” *The Alma Times*, 11 September 1975.

month as well.⁴⁴²

Infrastructure and industrial attraction left a largely mixed legacy in rural communities across the U.S. To some degree, federal rural development policy produced some positive outcomes. In Calexico, residents of Kennedy Gardens felt a special attachment to their homes. One resident, Joe Garcia, said that his new home allowed him to live “*agusto*,” at ease and with comfort. Garcia stated that “Just by being a homeowner you have roots, a feeling like you’re contributing to the community.”⁴⁴³ In Ava, hundreds of new jobs were created that played a decisive role in remaking the economic base of that small rural town. Rural development proved most impressive in Alma and Bacon County. By the end of the 1970s, the federal government spent twenty-two million dollars in this small town. This money paid for the redevelopment of east Alma, a new hospital and social service center, and an industrial park that, however tardy, became an important center of industry.⁴⁴⁴ Moreover, both Alma and Ava saw population increases throughout the 1970s. In Bacon County, population levels actually grew throughout the decade, and in Ava the population nearly doubled to 3,000 people by 1975.⁴⁴⁵

Alma and Bacon County’s success, however, also points to some of rural development’s larger, structural limitations. Federal support proved to be absolutely critical for that small town’s development success, but policymakers, forced into compromises with opponents of economic development policy, failed to provide ailing small towns with enough

⁴⁴² “Bacon Industrial Growth Reported,” *The Alma Times*, 23 November 1978; “New Manufacturer in Industrial Park,” *The Alma Times*, 21 September 1978; “Plans Finalized on Egg Plant,” *The Alma Times*, 7 June 1979.

⁴⁴³ de Uriarte, “Land Reform U.S. Style.”

⁴⁴⁴ P.J. Evans, “The Alma-Bacon Story: Did \$22 Million Federal Dollars Turn South Georgia Town into ‘Model’ for Rural America...?” *The Alma Times*, 1 January 1981.

⁴⁴⁵ “Southeast Ga. Area Population Increase,” *The Alma Times*, 12 January 1978; “Revival of Ava.”

federal funds to support a more widespread rural revival. Not all problems, though, could be placed at the feet of development's opponents. The structure of rural development policy created at the federal level relied too heavily on competition for both limited federal funds and private sector employment. Some deserving small towns no doubt lost out in the struggle to get limited federal aid. Small towns also needed to compete for scarce private sector industries, who could hardly be counted on to open plants in every ailing small town. Even for those places that managed to build new infrastructure and attract new employers, the new situation hardly lived up to development's ideals. Despite Alma's desire to move beyond garments and food processing, by the end of the 1970s the town had largely only been able to attract those kinds of industries. Alma's Model Cities Commission also created far fewer jobs than hoped. Further, while unemployment remained low in Alma throughout the tough economic times of the 1970s, it was not wholly immune to larger economic shifts: By February 1981, in the midst of a deep economic recession, Alma's unemployment level, like that of many small rural communities throughout the U.S., hit eleven percent, the highest in the state.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁶ "Area Unemployment Rate Tops in State," *The Alma Times*, 12 February 1981.

Chapter Four

From Farm to Tourist Trap: Tourism as Rural Development

In order to reverse the job loss, poverty, and population decline that plagued rural communities in the postwar period, proponents of rural development sought to remake the economic base of rural America. Small towns and federal lawmakers alike turned to manufacturing jobs and new rural infrastructure as essential pieces of a development policy focused on restoring rural towns. Policymakers at the federal level also encouraged another form of rural development, one that made more direct use of the resources many small towns already had at hand: their scenic environments, cultural practices, and history. Alongside the establishment of a rural manufacturing sector, postwar rural development also encouraged the creation of a rural service sector rooted in tourism. As jobs in timber, agriculture, and mining disappeared, rural development policy pushed small towns to reevaluate the resources in front of them to take advantage of a burgeoning tourism market. This chapter continues the story of federal rural development by examining the creation of a rural tourism economy in Georgia, Missouri, and California. Much like rural infrastructure and manufacturing projects, rural tourism highlights the centrality of federal aid to the development process, its thoroughly public-private character, the control exercised by local elites over rural development, and its focus on creating a new economic structure in rural America.

Though rural tourism projects reflect the broader structure of postwar rural development policy, rural tourism relied upon, and helped perpetuate, idyllic visions of the rural past and rural identity in a way unseen in projects revolving around manufacturing and infrastructure. While local businessmen and civic leaders boasted about the features of their small towns and their suitability for industrial expansion, tourism encouraged a different sort of engagement with rurality. Tourism projects often put a romanticized picture of rural life at

their center. In essence, tourism as rural development asked rural Americans to sell a “rural lifestyle” to nonrural people. Communities that no longer had prosperous farm economies, for example, might offer a “rural” experience to urban and suburban travelers looking for a taste of farm life. In a moment when many worried about a disappearing “rural” America, tourism bolstered a sense of rural identity, but often in a highly idealized way. This sanitization was particularly clear in regard to race. As projects in rural Missouri suggest, tourism as rural development encouraged a whitewashing of rural and agricultural history. In general, tourism projects reflected a distinct image of rural progress rooted in sanitized visions of the past. Tourism commodified rural history, lifestyles, and landscapes as a rural development strategy and, when they succeeded, turned towns into tourist attractions. Though it promised development, tourism tethered rural towns to the past.

More so than manufacturing and infrastructure, rural tourism opens a window onto tensions between the environment and rural development. These tensions highlight in part the manufactured-ness of the vision of rurality mobilized by developers. Rural developers hoped that rural landscapes and environmental features would be a major boon to the development of a small town tourist economy. The environment developers sought to mobilize was often more idealized or imagined than real. For example, proponents of rural tourism would come to see dams, especially their ability to create lakes for outdoor recreation, as major elements of tourism development. While rural boosters hoped to mobilize the supposed healing properties of traditional rural environments to create a tourism economy, these dams and their lakes represented a manufactured rural environment. Tourism also highlights the lack of attention developers gave to environmental health. Not only did they express little concern for the environmental impact of the large scale farming practices they embraced, their embrace a set dams would prove to be detrimental to the rural places they sought to help. As

we will see in Georgia, some opponents of rural development mobilized the growing environmental movement to halt dam construction. These people developed methods that later environmental activists would use to halt dam construction and other seemingly detrimental projects in other towns throughout the U.S.

These environmental concerns point to broader limitations with tourism as a rural development strategy. In many cases tourism projects did not succeed, and when they did the gap between promise and reality was rather large. Rural tourism projects suffered in part from both opposition and ambivalence. Many rural Americans did not support tourism projects and fought against the vision of rural development contained within them. These people should not be seen as backward-looking, anti-modern Americans clinging to an old way of life. Instead, they questioned the efficacy of grounding their economies in tourism. In many ways, their concerns proved to be well-founded. As critics pointed out, tourism provided relatively few employment opportunities, particularly when compared to factories that might offer hundreds of jobs at a single plant. While creating jobs served as development's primary purpose, the tourism projects that did succeed often fell short. Many proved difficult to implement and functioned in a significantly reduced capacity. Moreover, tourism projects had to contend with the whims of nature and, as this chapter will show, the environment could devastate tourism-based economies.

Bureaucrats in the Department of Agriculture, particularly Secretary Orville Freeman and Assistant Secretary John Baker, played an essential role in defining the function of tourism as a rural development strategy. To Freeman and Baker, tourism appeared as a way to help solve both urban and rural problems. Focusing primarily on farm communities, Baker and Freeman framed the rural crisis as in part a problem of too many farmers. New machinery

and highly productive farms rendered many farmers unnecessary.⁴⁴⁷ Freeman, for example, wrote that “American cropland is producing more food and fiber than we can consume, export...or use effectively in the Food for Peace program.”⁴⁴⁸ This glut of farmers and farm products depressed prices and made it harder for farmers to eke out a living. At least in regard to rural tourism development, the two men framed urban problems much more narrowly. They saw the nonrural middle class as stifled by their jobs and homes. They had few outlets for leisure or the sorts of experiences that rural environs could provide.⁴⁴⁹ Instead of depopulating rural communities, Freeman and Baker argued that “surplus” farmers might be turn their farms into tourism experiences for nonrural people. Baker believed these experiences should cater to the “needs and desires” of the nonrural middle class and provide “a congenial natural environment” in which “mind, body, and spirit” could be rejuvenated.⁴⁵⁰ For Baker, serving the needs of nonrural could turn rural tourism into “one of our best cash crops.”⁴⁵¹ Rural tourist development would not shift resources away from rural America but make better use of them in order to wrench the most productivity from rural land.

By envisioning rural tourism as a solution to urban ills, Baker and Freeman tapped into, and helped buttress, the rural-urban dichotomy. As we saw in chapter one, rural sociologists conceptualized rural and urban communities as unique spheres that produced distinctive cultures. In the midst of major demographic and population change, however, they

⁴⁴⁷ John Baker, “Rural Prosperity and Parity,” 14 June 1965, Folder: RD 1969, Box 127, Series 1.4, Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library, USDA Historical Collection, Beltsville, Maryland.

⁴⁴⁸ Orville Freeman, “Address before the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference,” 6 March 1963, Folder: Rural Areas Development 1963, Box 128, Series 1.4, National Agricultural Library.

⁴⁴⁹ John Baker, “Address before the Second Outdoor Recreation Congress,” 1 April 1965, Folder: Rural Areas Development, April-May 1965, Box 128, Series 1.4, National Agricultural Library.

⁴⁵⁰ John Baker, “Some Basic Principles of Rural Community Development,” September 1968, Folder: Technical Action Panels, Box A-6, Series 1.4, National Agricultural Library.

⁴⁵¹ Baker, “Rural Prosperity and Parity.”

wondered whether such a sharp distinction still held explanatory value. While many sociologists argued that they did not, others believed rural-urban differences existed on a continuum. Rural tourism as conceptualized at the USDA weighed in on this question. Freeman and Baker made use of a longstanding set of ideas in U.S. history that positioned decadent cities against the revitalizing rural environment. In their formulation, urban workers, who found themselves cooped up in factories or offices all day, needed a respite only rural towns could provide. When many social scientists worried about the disappearance of a distinctively rural sphere, development policy ensured that at least some aspects of rural identity, however mythologized, lived on.

When the USDA tried to spread its ideas about rural tourism development to farmers, it turned to the same methods used to spread information about the latest techniques in agricultural production: research bulletins. While agricultural bulletins might tell farmers about the benefits that might accrue by utilizing the latest fertilizer, the USDA's information on tourism revealed a burgeoning marketplace for rural tourism of which entrepreneurial farmers could take advantage. In *Rural Recreation Enterprises for Profit*, for example, the USDA cited statistics from the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, created by Congress to study trends in recreation and tourism. The commission projected an upswing in outdoor tourism. Its report stated that over 130 million people took part in seventeen different outdoor activities and spent close to ten billion dollars in the summer of 1960. By the year 2,000, the commission projected that Americans would spend over forty-five billion dollars.⁴⁵² To the hard-pressed low-income farmers reading this bulletin, these numbers might have been particularly enticing.

⁴⁵² *Rural Recreation Enterprises for Profit: An Aid to Rural Areas Development*, 3-5, October 1963, Folder: Rural Areas Development 1963, Box 128, Series 1.4, National Agricultural Library.

Moreover, while farm bulletins advised farmers on cultivating the perfect crop, USDA tourism pamphlets instructed them in nurturing an effective tourism experience. To capitalize on seemingly lucrative tourism trends, farmers and others needed to appeal above all to urbanites and suburbanites alienated from fresh, open rural space. Rural tourism sites should be designed to allow them to escape from “the pressures of crowded city life” and to “relive in some small way” the rural past.⁴⁵³ Farmers, for example, might turn portions of their farm into a bed and breakfast that would provide visitors with “simple country living,” an opportunity to partake in outdoor activities characteristic of rural life like hunting and fishing, or even be given the chance to harvest crops.⁴⁵⁴ They should further work as hard as possible to “keep the natural beauty and character of the rural landscape.”⁴⁵⁵ If their land did not meet these standards, the USDA encouraged farmers to refashion their landscapes to meet that expectation. These ideas for rural tourist development reflected less the reality of rural life, which could be just as physically and psychologically taxing as urban life, than in a romanticized version of it. In the process, the USDA’s advice to farmers helped maintained a sharp rural-urban dichotomy.

The Area Redevelopment and Economic Development Administrations, housed in the Department of Commerce, also framed tourism development as “an alternative for depressed areas.”⁴⁵⁶ The Area Redevelopment Administration (ARA), for example, encouraged rural areas to reimagine their resources in a new light. In the Ozarks, this re-envisioning focused on the region’s remarkable landscape. In the past, that landscape, known for its “isolation, mountainous terrain, river gorges, and variegated flora and fauna,” had been a barrier to economic development. Now, the ARA maintained, it should be seen instead as a stimulant

⁴⁵³ *Rural Recreation Enterprises for Profit*, 5-6.

⁴⁵⁴ *Rural Recreation Enterprises for Profit*, 1.

⁴⁵⁵ *Rural Recreation Enterprises for Profit*, 6.

⁴⁵⁶ *Recreation and Tourist Development through Federal Programs*, 25.

for rural tourism development.⁴⁵⁷ The unique Ozark environment would be a draw to urban and suburban tourists looking for a rural vacation.

The ARA's successor agency, the Economic Development Administration (EDA), built on the ARA's emphasis on tourism and the transformation of rurality into a commodity in its promotion of rural handicrafts. An EDA-funded study by Charles Counts, the craft consultant for the Smithsonian National Collection of Fine Arts, articulated the reasons why the EDA should support handicrafts. Counts defined a handicraft product as an "authentic expression" of a "rich cultural heritage" that reflected the "time, the place, the man, and the method by which it was made." Rural communities had a long history of handicraft production, but it had yet to be fully integrated into the wider consumer marketplace. He argued that middle class tourists, who wanted to purchase items unique to the places they visited, could fuel a growing marketplace for handicrafts. Counts believed handicrafts could be particularly marketable because, in a mass production and consumption society, they allowed the affluent consumer to "express his own individuality."⁴⁵⁸ Moreover, Counts argued that handicrafts could be adapted to a variety of "different circumstances and economic settings."⁴⁵⁹ Handicrafts offered a flexible, but lucrative way, to revive rural economies by commodifying rural culture.

The Commerce and Agriculture Departments ultimately framed tourism projects as one tool that rural communities might use to recover from the rural crisis. By encouraging small towns to view their surroundings and skills in a new way, tourism projects positioned the future economic progress of rural towns in relation to the consumer tastes of the burgeoning tourist marketplace. Desperate to improve their economies, many local business

⁴⁵⁷ *More Jobs Where Most Needed: Annual Report of the Area Redevelopment Administration* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1964), 31.

⁴⁵⁸ Charles Counts, *Encouraging American Handicrafts: What Role in Economic Development?* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1965), 20.

and civic officials in Georgia, California, and Missouri embraced tourism projects. Their experiences suggest, however, that those projects rarely played out as federal program administrators or local rural developers hoped.

The Ozarks had long been a destination for travelers and tourists, but tourist interest in the region expanded significantly after the 1940s. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people visited the Ozarks' natural springs, both for their beauty and supposed health benefits.⁴⁶⁰ When major dam construction got underway in the 1930s, new possibilities appeared for Ozark tourism. New dams yielded several large, man-made lakes in the region, and a major element of postwar rural development policy in Missouri revolved around helping rural people take advantage of the possibilities those lakes created. In 1931, the Union Electric and Power Company constructed the Bagnell Dam on the Osage River for the generation of hydroelectric power. The dam, the biggest in the Ozarks, yielded one of the largest man-made lakes in the U.S., known as the Lake of the Ozarks. In 1951, the Army Corps of Engineers also constructed the Bull Shoals Dam, which created Bull Shoals Lake, and seven years later it finished the Table Rock Dam, which yielded Lake Taneycomo.⁴⁶¹ Taken together, these dam projects laid the groundwork for the Ozark's transformation into the site of major tourist activity it would become by the end of the century and, more broadly, signaled a deep transformation in rural Missouri.

⁴⁵⁹ Counts, *Encouraging American Handicrafts*, 10, 21.

⁴⁶⁰ Milton Rafferty, *The Ozarks: Land and Life* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001), 199-209; Lynn Morrow and Linda Myers-Phinney, *Shepherds of the Hills Country: Tourism Transforms the Ozarks, 1880s-1930s* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999).

⁴⁶¹ Hugh Denney, John Remmert, Mary Jean Remmert, and James Milne, *Lakes Country Regional Profile* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Department of Regional and Community Affairs, 1975), 7; Leland Payton and Crystal Payton, *Damming the Osage: The Conflicted Story of Lake of the Ozarks and Truman Reservoir* (Springfield, Mo.: Lens and Pen Press, 2012).

Table Rock provides a clear example of what the dams meant for the future of rural life in the Ozarks. The dam, constructed near the border between Missouri and Arkansas, created a 43,000-acre reservoir designed to help the surrounding area with flood control and power generation.⁴⁶² Many farmers who owned rich agricultural land needed by the Corps to construct the dam sold their farms immediately. Others, however, resisted what seemed to them the end of their way of life and fought the Corps in court.⁴⁶³ Proponents of the dam formed the Table Rock Booster's Association and framed their support in terms of development. They chastised farmers who refused to sell their land as clinging to an old way of life in opposition to progress. For them, the dam benefited the common good, reflected the "changing times," and served as a "death rattle of a passing age." They especially wanted the dam because it would bolster recreation prospects for the area.⁴⁶⁴ Dam supporters were ultimately on the winning side of history. When completed, the dam contributed to the declining prominence of traditional rural industries, particularly agriculture, in the Ozarks. It was within this context of a rapidly changing economic landscape that tourism projects took shape in the southern Missouri Ozarks.

Community development agents from the University of Missouri played a major role in helping distressed Ozark communities create rural tourism projects. The work of Don Thacker and Wayne Thomas, both born in small Missouri towns, illustrate the role these experts played. Thacker received his Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture from the University of Missouri in 1943 and worked for an automotive parts distributor after graduation. In 1956 he joined the USDA's newly created Rural Development Program (RDP), as Taney County's community development agent helping local officials implement

⁴⁶² John Hensley, "In the Shadow of Table Rock Dam: The Army Corps of Engineering, Civil Engineers, and Local Communities," *Missouri Historical Review* 80, no. 3 (April 1986), 256-7.

⁴⁶³ Hensley, "In the Shadow of Table Rock Dam," 267-8.

⁴⁶⁴ Hensley, "In the Shadow of Table Rock Dam," 269.

development projects to offset declines in farm employment.⁴⁶⁵ Thomas also graduated from the University of Missouri with a degree in agriculture. Upon graduation, he worked on his family's farm and then joined the RDP in 1956.⁴⁶⁶ As part of their jobs as community development agents, Thacker and Thomas served as intermediaries between local elites and the broader rural community. In a limited way, the two men tried to integrate the opinions of ordinary Ozarkers into the development process. Toward that end, Thacker and Thomas conducted a series of surveys throughout the Ozarks in 1962 designed to elicit community feelings on a variety of rural development issues.

On this topic, the men found some support for tourism development in the region. One resort owner in Reed Springs, a town near Table Rock Dam, believed his hometown should "concentrate on becoming a resort town with plenty of tourist attractions... This is Reeds Spring's chance to grow...or forever stay behind."⁴⁶⁷ While this business owner wanted to leave the past behind, others saw Ozark history as key to Reed Spring's tourism development. One resident believed the town could do more to meet tourist expectations and capitalize on "its only asset," its image as an Ozark town. This resident told the agents that the tourist hopes to meet a "sure 'nuf hillbilly" but often left disappointed because "all the town folks duded-up, hoping they'll be taken for tourists, rather than natives."⁴⁶⁸ This Ozarker's call to embrace their hillbilly heritage reflected the same sort of idealized engagement with the rural past found in pamphlets created by the USDA or the EDA. The cultivation of rural stereotypes as a tool for tourism development could be found at both the federal and local level.

⁴⁶⁵ "Associate Agent to Taney County," *Springfield News-Leader*, 18 November 1956.

⁴⁶⁶ "Thomas Named to Extension Post," *The Clinton Eye*, 6 December 1956.

⁴⁶⁷ "Reeds Spring Survey, 1962," Folder 14, Box 6, Papers of the University of Missouri Department of Community Development.

⁴⁶⁸ "Reeds Spring Survey, 1962."

Yet the residents of Reeds Spring who “duded-up” suggested that many resisted the notion of becoming a tourist commodity. Indeed, residents of the Missouri Ozarks gave a variety of reasons for opposing tourism. Thacker and Thomas, for example, asked Reed Spring’s residents whether or not they supported remodeling their downtowns to make it look as it did in 1880. Such remodeling efforts might attract urban and suburban visitors looking to experience small-town life from a different era. Only thirty percent supported the idea. One resident stated that the town has to cater to more than just tourists: “We still have the local people to think about – it is not the tourist trade entirely that keeps Reed Spring going.” Another resident agreed, telling Thacker and Thomas that “we need more industry and attractive buildings...we don’t need 1880, we need 1962.”⁴⁶⁹ These residents clearly disliked the idea of shaping their community to serve the needs of tourists, particularly if that involved turning to the past in order to commodify rural stereotypes. Though the USDA and Commerce Departments framed tourism as a development strategy, these Ozarkers saw it more as a development straight jacket, forever confining them to the past.

Ozark residents rejected tourist development for economic reasons as well. Many Branson residents surveyed supported “industry or more employment at a living wage” and believed tourism would provide neither.⁴⁷⁰ According to one resident, “industrial development would provide steady year-round income...[the] tourist trade is seasonal [and] fluctuates according to the national prosperity.”⁴⁷¹ Another resident also expressed dismay with the seasonality of tourism and its low wages. At the same time, however, this person did not want to turn the clock back toward the era when small, low-income and marginal farmers populated the region. Instead, this person wanted jobs for Ozarkers that could “increase their purchasing power...[and] give the ambitious younger people a chance to stay here and obtain

⁴⁶⁹ “Reeds Spring Survey, 1962.”

the standard of living which they can earn in a larger city.”⁴⁷² Though Ozarkers had a popular reputation as backward looking rural people, their opposition to tourism suggests something subtler. These Ozarkers had an economic vision of steady, high wage jobs that allowed them to stay in their communities. They believed their towns could be both rural and modern. Ultimately, though many Ozarkers may have felt uneasy about tourism’s potential for reviving rural America, those projects became established features of the region’s rural development.

One early Ozark rural development project anticipated the USDA’s suggestion that farmers could use their land to supply rural experiences for tourists. In 1959, Thacker and Richard Prewitt, also a rural development agent, developed a deer hunting program for farmers in Taney County that would help them turn farmland into a hunting ground.⁴⁷³ In their plan, farmers would rent their land to individuals or hunting clubs, and potentially provide camping grounds or other lodgings. Thacker and Prewitt hoped the program would help farmers boost their yearly income by turning marginal farmland into more productive hunting land. They argued it would also complement the resort economy at nearby Table Rock Lake. Deer hunting season fell in the fall and winter months when Missourians would not be looking for water-based recreation. Thacker and Prewitt believed the program would stimulate offseason tourism by bringing hunters to Taney, while also helping farmers who might not otherwise benefit from tourism.⁴⁷⁴

The program, however, proved to be less than effective at boosting the incomes of farmers. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the program transformed between 13,000 and

⁴⁷⁰ “Summary Report: Branson Survey, 1962, 20.”

⁴⁷¹ “Summary Report: Branson Survey, 1962, 38.”

⁴⁷² “Summary Report: Branson Survey, 1962, 37.”

⁴⁷³ “Outdoors in the Ozarks,” *Daily Capital News*, 9 October 1959.

30,000 acres of land, depending on the year. At its height, it turned a space just over twice the size of Manhattan into a deer hunting zone in the Ozarks.⁴⁷⁵ Farmers typically charged ten to twelve dollars per person, and most farmers participating in the program leased land to anywhere between eight to twenty hunters per season.⁴⁷⁶ In 1961, the program expanded to include an experiment in attracting more deer to Taney County. Farmer Clell Smithson offered two, two-acre plots of land as the “demonstration” plot. In cooperation with the local agricultural experiment station and the rural development agents, Smithson plowed, seeded, and fenced his land to attract more deer and in turn more hunters.⁴⁷⁷ The experiment and the larger program fizzled out the following year, however, likely because they offered farmers little in return for their troubles. Nonetheless, the program reflects the way postwar rural development envisioned a new rural economy and could transform, even if only temporarily, farmland into tourist land.

Thacker found more success in organizing an Ozark handicraft league in 1959. Known as the League of Ozark Mountain Arts and Crafts (LOMAC), the group had its origins in the work of Leonard Shelton, who moved to Reeds Spring from Iowa in the 1930s. Shelton enjoyed the Ozark tradition of “whittling,” or turning soft pinewood into a variety of objects. One day, as Shelton told it, he whittled a small, cup-shaped depression into a block of pine and sold it to a tourist for fifty cents. Realizing he could make money, especially when “the tourists got thick,” Shelton turned the age-old local practice into a money maker. Shelton inspired others in the Missouri Ozarks to begin selling their handicrafts to tourists

⁴⁷⁴ “Outdoors in the Ozarks”; “Taney County is Deer Haven for Sportsmen,” *The Daily Standard*, 5 October 1959; “Taney County Farmers to Market their Deer ‘Crop’ from 20,000 Acres of Land,” *Springfield Leader and Press*, 4 October 1959;

⁴⁷⁵ “Taney County Farmers to Market their Deer ‘Crop’ from 20,000 Acres of Land”; “Taney Farmers Market Deer Crop,” *Springfield Leader and Press*, 16 October 1960.

⁴⁷⁶ “Taney Farmers Market Deer Crop,” *Springfield Leader and Press*, 16 October 1960.

⁴⁷⁷ “Outdoors in the Ozarks,” *The Daily Capital News*, 20 January 1961; “Pasture Plots will Improve Deer Hunting,” *Gasconade County Republican*, 26 January 1961.

and they soon found “excessive demand” for their goods. Thacker helped Shelton and others organize what would become an annual arts and craft show in 1957 for local artisans to sell their work. The shows were relatively successful so, two years later, they created LOMAC to solidify and build upon their labors.⁴⁷⁸

LOMAC’s organizers framed part of their group’s purpose as the protection of Ozark history and heritage. They saw the “old-time native arts and crafts” as vessels for that history.⁴⁷⁹ In particular, the group sought to protect an idealized vision of the whole family and gender economy of the rural Ozarks. In the words of one LOMAC member, in the Ozarks, women still “possess the talent and the time for quilting,” and men, “disdaining machines,” still made tables and chairs by hand.⁴⁸⁰ An important element, then, of Ozark handicraft organizing revolved around the preservation of a gender system in which women worked in the home and skilled labor grounded a man’s masculinity. In spite of this gender traditionalism, women dominated LOMAC’s board of directors. By 1962, Ozark women occupied all its staff positions as well as the presidency.⁴⁸¹

While LOMAC sought to safeguard old traditions, it nonetheless commodified them for private gain. LOMAC walked the same fine line as promoters of Appalachian culture who sought to preserve, study, and profit from that region’s mountain traditions.⁴⁸² LOMAC hoped to “widen the market for artists and craftsmen” and help them turn “artistic hobbies into a profitable way to make a living.”⁴⁸³ In other words, LOMAC wanted to integrate people into the marketplace by having them sell things they never before sold. Ozark artisans

⁴⁷⁸ Gerald Pipes, “Whittlin’ Now Big Business,” *Springfield Leader and Press*, 22 February 1959; “Arts and Crafts Show at Branson,” *Springfield Leader and Press*, 2 March 1958.

⁴⁷⁹ “Over the Ozarks,” *Springfield News-Leader*, 21 April 1960.

⁴⁸⁰ “Preserving Heritage of the Ozarks,” *Springfield Leader and Press*, 8 May 1960.

⁴⁸¹ “Officers Chosen by Crafts Group,” *Springfield Leader and Press*, 15 February 1962.

⁴⁸² Ronald Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008). See, in particular, chapter four.

found this opportunity appealing, and within a year of the group's founding it grew from 17 to 123 members who paid dues to the group by giving it a percentage of their sales.⁴⁸⁴

LOMAC's leaders created a market for its burgeoning membership through local handicraft festivals that attracted both tourists and Ozark natives. In April 1960, for example, LOMAC set up a handicrafts bazaar at "plumb nelly week" in Branson, a festival that celebrated traditional rural culture. Attendees experienced an "old-fashioned" street auction, contests for hog calling and "biggest bare feet," and a beauty contest.⁴⁸⁵ LOMAC also established travelling handicraft shows that allowed members to sell their goods to rural and urban markets throughout the state.⁴⁸⁶ These bazaars and markets allowed tourists to memorialize their experiences through the purchase of "authentic" Ozark handicrafts. Though the economic foundations that had given birth to hog calling and handicrafts slipped in the postwar era, LOMAC helped ensure that rural culture, however idealized, would not slip away as well.

Despite its efforts to broaden the reach of Ozark's handicraft producer's, LOMAC struggled to help the region's artisans sell their goods.⁴⁸⁷ This is not to suggest, however, that LOMAC operated without impact. LOMAC presaged a major trend in consumer purchasing habits that would only grow through the twentieth century. Handicrafts can still be found at Ozark festivals and in small town stores, and other Ozark handicraft groups appeared

⁴⁸³ "Arts and Crafts League Formed," *Springfield News-Leader*, 8 January 1959; "Over the Ozarks," *Springfield News-Leader*, 21 April 1960.

⁴⁸⁴ "Preserving Heritage of the Ozarks," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 8 May 1960.

⁴⁸⁵ "Branson's Set for Big Week," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 17 April 1960.

⁴⁸⁶ "Arts and Crafts Show at Branson," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 2 March 1958; "Crafts Show Set Oct. 1-3," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 20 September 1959; "Arts-Crafts Fair Opens This Week," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 27 September 1959; "Preserving Heritage of the Ozarks," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 8 May 1960; "Branson (Special)," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 17 April 1964.

⁴⁸⁷ "Preserving Heritage of the Ozarks," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 8 May 1960.

throughout the rest of the century.⁴⁸⁸ The ultimate significance of both the deer hunting program and LOMAC is their reflection of a broader tendency to turn traditionally rural experiences and culture into a rural development strategy.

Perhaps the most ambitious tourist-based rural development scheme in Missouri occurred at the eastern edge of the Ozarks in a small farming and mining town on the Mississippi River known as Ste. Genevieve. Philip Francois Renault, a wealthy Parisian banker who also directed the mining operations of the Royal Company of the Indies, in the early eighteenth century. Renault settled in the area because of its extensive mines, particularly rich in lead, and became a mining magnate. Renault, of course, did not work the mines alone, and he brought with him twenty white miners and around five hundred Caribbean slaves. Nor did Renault find an empty landscape. A variety of Native American tribes, primarily the Peoria and Kickapoo, but also the Missouri, Osage, Kaskaskia, Shawnee, and Ottawa, populated the region and became important trading partners for the settlers.⁴⁸⁹

Ste. Genevieve experienced a relatively brief time as an important producer before falling into a much longer period of stagnation. Mining continued to be an important component of Ste. Genevieve's economy into the twentieth century, but agriculture surpassed it as the town's leading industry in the early nineteenth century. Its position on the Mississippi River and trade with Native Americans also cemented its status as a bustling colonial trade outpost. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, the growth of St. Louis increasingly relegated Ste. Genevieve to a minor trade role and ensured it would remain a

⁴⁸⁸ For an example, see http://ozarkregionalartscouncil.org/?page_id=2.

⁴⁸⁹ Carl J. Eckberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve: An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2014); Gregory Franzwa, *The Story of Old Ste. Genevieve* (Tucson: The Patrice Press, 1998), 20, 58; Rafferty, *The Ozarks*, 42-3.

small river town.⁴⁹⁰ By the early 1960s, the shrinking mining sector and generally poor agriculture resulted in an unemployment rate over eleven percent, well above the national average of 7.5 percent.⁴⁹¹ Local leaders saw few prospects for reviving agriculture or mining. Instead, they looked to the town's past as a French colonial, and then American, rural river town. Local leaders embrace so-called "heritage tourism" as the best route out of economic decline and put the town's centuries old building stock at the center of their efforts.

While the turn toward rural tourism in Ste. Genevieve would begin in earnest in the postwar period, its roots lay in the 1930s. As part of a public works project for unemployed architects funded by the National Park Service, Charles Peterson photographed and indexed Ste. Genevieve's historic buildings. He discovered many of the town's oldest structures, particularly those formerly occupied by the rural elite, still in use. Now, however, the town's working-class residents lived and conducted business inside of them. Peterson's study laid the groundwork for future appreciation and preservation of these buildings as a potential tourism product. In his 1935 speech at Ste. Genevieve's bicentennial, Mayor Harry J. Patrequin lauded the town's "quaint atmosphere" and encouraged visitors and townsfolk alike to "turn away from the monotony of the everyday and to make this visit, in the nature of a pilgrimage to a shrine of history."⁴⁹² Much like officials within the USDA, Patrequin opposed modern monotony the charms of rural life. The language used by Patrequin foreshadowed rhetoric that would be employed in the postwar years by the town's tourism boosters.

⁴⁹⁰ Franzwa, *The Story of Old Ste. Genevieve*, 64, 93; Brian Craft, "Historic Ste. Genevieve: A History of Heritage Tourism Development in Missouri's Oldest Town, 1885-2016" (MA Thesis, Southeast Missouri State University, 2017), 15-16.

⁴⁹¹ "Five Counties Seeking U.S. Aid to Create Jobs," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 10 September 1961.

⁴⁹² Craft, "Historic Ste. Genevieve," 31.

The local chapter of the Colonial Dames of America, an organization made up of women with familial roots dating to the pre-revolutionary era, made the first effort in postwar home preservation. The Dames first set their sights on the home of Louis Bolduc. Bolduc was one of the wealthiest French colonists in Ste. Genevieve, with investments in lead mining, the merchant trade, and the slave trade. Bolduc also owned a plantation, on which enslaved black men and women worked. The home's owners in the 1940s, however, had little interest in the home's history and put the land on which it sat up for sale. A gas station expressed some interest in the land, but the Dames ultimately secured its purchase in 1949. The home no longer reflected its original historical construction, so the Dames hired a team of architects and local historians to help restore the home. Over the course of the 1950s, the restoration work peeled away of years of modern additions, including partitions and floors. It also put up a new stockade fence around the house typically found in homes of the French colonial era.⁴⁹³

The house's popularity, which opened for visitors in 1958, inspired other wealthy residents of Ste. Genevieve to begin purchasing and restoring historical properties. Bernard and Vion Schram exemplified this pattern. Bernard worked as a St. Louis reporter and "dime-store" novelist before marrying Vion, a descendant of one of Ste. Genevieve's oldest and wealthiest French families. During the 1940s, the couple travelled the South Seas, where they developed an interest in "traditional" ways of life. In Tonga, they reported being "adopted by a tribal family," while in Australia "they hunted with an aboriginal snake tracker." The couple's interest in "pre-modern" lifestyles stayed with them when they returned to Ste. Genevieve in the 1960s. They purchased and restored the home of Jean Baptiste Vallé, the town's last commandant appointed by Spain in 1804, and a large landowner with major

⁴⁹³ Margaret Allen Ruhl, "Patriotic Group to Open Bolduc House," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 4

stakes in lead mining and fur trading.⁴⁹⁴ The Schrams, Bernard in particular, would go on to help organize and promote historic preservation and heritage tourism in Ste. Genevieve.

Efforts to create a more coordinated rural tourism economy in Ste. Genevieve began with the creation of a “Tourist Bureau” in the town’s Chamber of Commerce in 1964. Sensing the possibility for using rural tourism to the town’s advantage, the Tourist Bureau applied to the EDA for a \$30,000 research grant to study ways to develop and promote a local heritage tourism economy.⁴⁹⁵ After receiving the grant, the Tourist Bureau partnered with the St. Louis firm Allied Engineers and Architects to begin outlining a plan. For help, the two groups hired Charles Peterson, whose documentation of the town’s historic structures in the 1930s gave him something of an expertise in the subject. Peterson, along with an economist named Lee Carter, crafted much of the proposal.⁴⁹⁶

The plan, released in 1966, called for a dramatic reimagining and reconstruction of Ste. Genevieve.⁴⁹⁷ Its most ambitious element called for the creation of a “restoration area” in the town’s center in which the roughly twenty historically significant buildings would be located. Most of these buildings had formerly been homes of the planter, merchant, and mining elite. This area would be the center of tourism and provide visitors with an experience of “historical authenticity” and an “authentic street scene” that reflected the town’s rural heritage.⁴⁹⁸ However, attaining authenticity required a lot of work. Many of the buildings identified for their historical importance would need to be relocated because they stood outside the proposed restoration area. Because the buildings had been more or less in use

May 1958; Craft, “Historic Ste. Genevieve,” 49.

⁴⁹⁴ Matthew Hathaway, “History for Sale,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 8 December 2002.

⁴⁹⁵ “ARA to Assist in Developing Ste. Genevieve,” *The Sedalia Democrat*, 10 December 1964; “Restoration Set for Ste. Genevieve,” *The Springfield News-Leader*, 10 December 1964.

⁴⁹⁶ “Back 200 Years,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 6 August 1966. Craft, “Historic Ste. Genevieve,” 57-8.

⁴⁹⁷ *Investigation and Development of Master Plan for Restoration of Ste. Genevieve, Missouri* (St. Louis: Allied Engineers and Architects, 1966).

since their construction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they would also need to undergo substantial remodeling in order to reflect their original historical context. Peterson and Carter also wanted to beautify the town with new landscaping, install gas streetlights, move power lines underground, and resurface downtown buildings in an effort to make the town square better resemble its rural past. Finally, the two men envisioned the creation of an open-air market that resembled those of old Ste. Genevieve. The market would sell local produce as well as locally made handicrafts.⁴⁹⁹

While the plan also aimed to make Ste. Genevieve a more “efficient place for those who live there,” many aspects of it signaled a major disruption in the daily lives of locals. For example, it labelled some buildings within the restoration area “visually distracting” because they did not fit the rural aesthetic and called for their demolition or relocation. Many of these buildings included small businesses owned by residents that played important roles in modern daily life, including hardware stores and auto repair shops. Further, Peterson and Carter called for some streets to be turned into one-way roads, and for those streets to permit horse-drawn carts in an effort to bolster historical authenticity. The Tourist Bureau and the St. Louis contractors they hired imagined a radical reconstruction of the town to meet the needs of tourism. By literally pushing people and their businesses out of the town square, rural tourism boosters put the needs of locals at the periphery. Ste. Genevieve would no longer be a town functioning in the present, but a town that lived in the past for the benefit of tourists.⁵⁰⁰

Peterson and Carter, however, held a very narrow understanding of Ste’ Genevieve’s past. For example, the two men wrote that, before the arrival of Renault in the 1720s, the area was “essentially uninhabited.” For those Native Americans that did remain, Peterson and

⁴⁹⁸ *Investigation and Development*, 4, 13.

Carter's history portrayed European settlement in the region in positive terms. According to the two men, French settlers kept "the savages in friendship and alliance." Their history minimized slavery as well. They framed slavery as a "jarring note" in the town's history and wondered what the colony would have been like without those "unfortunate people." Peterson and Clark ignored the fact that black slaves outnumbered white settlers two to one and played an essential economic role for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In general, though, Carter and Peterson ignored slavery's presence in the French colonial and then U.S. context, and made no mention of the contributions of black men and women following emancipation. Slavery aside, they believed life in Ste. Genevieve must have been "very pleasant" and that its people did not strive "for personal gain."⁵⁰¹ This assumption erased the reason for the town's founding, to supply France with minerals, and its position in an imperial network of conquest and accumulation. The two men embraced a sanitized and specious understanding of rural Missouri's history.

A similarly idyllic conception of Ste. Genevieve's history could be found in EDA publications that boasted about the agency's work in the Ozarks. In its monthly journal *Economic Development*, the EDA described Ste. Genevieve as a place outside of time. Its description of the Ste. Genevieve project stated that the "rapid growth of St. Louis saved Ste. Genevieve from 'modernization' and preserved many of the old buildings in the town."⁵⁰² The author thus followed a typical pattern in rural development by spinning the town's supposed backwardness into a strength, and its lack of modernity into an authentic glimpse into rural life.

⁴⁹⁹ *Investigation and Development*, 5, 13, 19.

⁵⁰⁰ *Investigation and Development*, 8-19.

⁵⁰¹ *Investigation and Development*, 6-8.

⁵⁰² "Plan to Restore Sainte Genevieve," *Economic Development*, October 1966.

This far reaching plan for the revival of Ste. Genevieve ultimately illustrates the way rural tourism both relied upon, and helped perpetuate, an idealized vision of rural culture and history. The vision of the rural that came through in Peterson and Carter's plan needed to be made, not taken from the past and applied in the present. Though Peterson and Clark sought to provide tourists with an authentic experience of Ste. Genevieve's rural past, achieving that goal required a major makeover of the town's layout. Establishing the "restoration area" required the relocation of historical buildings and, in the process, superimposing an idealized rural past onto the rural present. By proposing to rebuild the rural past, the needs of people living in Ste. Genevieve, people living out arguably "rural" lives, fell to the wayside. Moreover, potential tourists would learn about Ste. Genevieve's rural past through the homes of its wealthy elite while simultaneously downplaying the presence of slavery and Native Americans. The work required to make Ste. Genevieve a place for heritage tourism suggested that it was not "lost" in time and history. The present needed to be replaced to make room for the past.

While this grand plan did not become a reality, the efforts of the Tourist Bureau did help tourism become a major feature of the economy in Ste. Genevieve. Local leaders balked at the plan's \$7.3 million price tag. Though federal funds would have helped with some of the cost, they did not, or could not, come up with the local portion of the cost. Business and civil elites continued to see tourism as a potentially lucrative industry for their town and through their support behind other tourism ventures.⁵⁰³ Some of those involved with the planning of the EDA project, for example, went on to establish the Foundation for Restoration of Ste. Genevieve. This new organization promoted preservation and heritage tourism. Following the plan laid out by Peterson and Carter, the foundation spent much of its

money on building restorations, though its limited budget precluded the more drastic renovations the two men promoted. The foundation also sponsored the *Jour de Fete*, an annual festival that celebrated the town's French rural past. Much like the proposed remodel of Ste. Genevieve, an idealization of the town's history suffused the festival. Visitors to Ste. Genevieve during the *Jour de Fete* went on tours of old homes and perused art shows displaying local work from local artists. In a nod to Peterson and Carter's plan, the *Jour de Fete* also saw a transformation of the town square that involved businesses displaying "antiques of a bygone era" and townspeople dressing in "costumes of eighteenth century Ste. Genevieve."⁵⁰⁴ Festival goers also participated in "la Guignolee," a French peasant tradition brought to North America that saw young men dig into pieces of cake in search of beans. The first to find his bean got to take the woman of his choice to the "King's Ball," a community dance that capped off the festival.⁵⁰⁵

Although tourism would make up an increasingly large proportion of Ste. Genevieve's economy, many residents resisted this trend. Ordinary people in the town, for example, rarely participated in the planning for the potential EDA project. The editor of the local newspaper stated that many townspeople not only questioned the economic benefits of heritage tourism, but also claimed that it only benefitted certain businesses and homeowners.⁵⁰⁶ Ordinary residents perhaps also found it difficult to support a project that promised to create only twenty-five jobs, at best.⁵⁰⁷ This ambivalence continued on the part of regular people continued into the 1970s. Schram, who became president of the Foundation, stated that locals rarely participated in preservation efforts, and that the group

⁵⁰³ "Back 200 Years," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 6 August 1966; *Investigation and Development*, 34.

⁵⁰⁴ "First Festival for Ste. Genevieve," *The Daily Standard*, 24 June 1966.

⁵⁰⁵ "Ste. Genevieve will Display Old Houses, Culture at Festival," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 7 August 1966.

⁵⁰⁶ Craft, "Historic Ste. Genevieve," 75.

had to “look for outside angels to pull our bacon out of the fire.”⁵⁰⁸ When people did participate in programs sponsored by the Foundation, they did so in ways that local elites disapproved. For example, the Foundation nearly called off the festival in 1969 because of public indifference and actually did so in 1975 when townspeople used the occasion not to celebrate the town’s past, but to drink in public.⁵⁰⁹

In rural Siskiyou County, California, local and state leaders similarly turned to dams in their efforts to revive their region’s flagging rural economy. Siskiyou, on the state’s border with California, had long been home to a timber economy that in the postwar years had shown signs of contraction. As California embarked on a major overhaul of its statewide water system, local leaders in Siskiyou saw an opportunity to build a tourism economy. With significant financial assistance from the state and federal governments, local, county, and state leaders focused their efforts on the construction of a large dam, recreational lake, and camping facilities known as Box Canyon Dam. The dam’s construction on the Sacramento River helped enact a larger shift in the rural economy of northern California away from extractive industries and toward the service sector. As a result of this larger shift, by the early 1970s, a study of Siskiyou’s labor market noted that tourism made up one of the top three industries in the county.⁵¹⁰ Rural northern California’s forests would no longer be prized for their timber, but for their capacity to supply tourists with rural experiences.

Siskiyou made up part of California’s “Northern Interior,” which includes all the counties north of Sacramento and east of the coast. While much of California rapidly urbanized after World War II, the Northern Interior remained sparsely settled. One of

⁵⁰⁷ *Investigation and Development*, 44.

⁵⁰⁸ “Residents Work to Unearth Indian Village,” *Springfield News-Leader*, 17 July 1983.

⁵⁰⁹ Craft, “Historic Ste. Genevieve,” 75-9.

California's least inhabited areas, at midcentury this region had an average density of ten people per square mile, or roughly only two percent of the state's population.⁵¹¹ Even within the Northern Interior, Siskiyou stood out for its lack of people. Weed, its largest city at the time, had a population of only 3,223, and the county as a whole counted only 31,500 people.⁵¹² What Siskiyou County lacked in people, though, it made up for with its national and state forests, as well as mountainous terrain.

This terrain had, for much of California's nineteenth and twentieth century history, made up a major component of Siskiyou's economy. Alongside timber, workers in Siskiyou had labored in mines, on railroads, and, to a lesser extent, on farms. Like many rural communities at midcentury, though, Siskiyou County's traditional rural industries no longer provided the stable employment they had in the past. By the mid-1960s, the amount of harvestable timber in the region declined as a result of decades of intensive lumbering, rendering many areas unproductive.⁵¹³ Tennant, a Siskiyou timber town had 1,500 families at its early twentieth century peak. By the 1950s, however, one description called it a "ghost town" as a result of the timber industry's demise. The mining economy, too, faced similarly steep declines as a result of overproduction and competition.⁵¹⁴ Before the 1950s, many also found employment working for Southern Pacific as locomotive mechanics. As new freeways, car culture, and long haul trucking spread in California, the railroad dramatically scaled back

⁵¹⁰ *California Community Labor Market Survey, 1969-1970* (California: Department of Human Resources Development, 1970), 25.

⁵¹¹ *California Tourism Industry: Trends and Investment Opportunities* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1967), 29.

⁵¹² *Box Canyon Project: Feasibility Study* (Sacramento: Department of Water Resources, 1965), 8; "Report on the Desirability of Investigating the Box Canyon Dam and Reservoir Project in Siskiyou County, January 1959, 2, Folder 493, Randolph Collier Papers, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

⁵¹³ *Box Canyon Project*, 9.

⁵¹⁴ "Untitled History of Damming Efforts in the Area" ca. October 1959, Folder 493, Randolph Collier Papers.

its operations and thousands lost work.⁵¹⁵ In Dunsmuir, a small town in Siskiyou home to many railroad workers, railroad employment dropped from 1,258 in 1950, to twenty-five in 1964.⁵¹⁶

Instead of urging people in small Siskiyou towns to relocate, the Economic Development Administration encouraged Northern Interior counties to reevaluate their rural environments. Though timber jobs may be disappearing, Siskiyou and other Northern Interior counties could develop a tourism economy revolving around its remarkable landscape. EDA statistics suggested that remaking the rural economy could prove quite lucrative. One EDA funded study on “trends and investment opportunities” in California tourism urged the state’s towns to take advantage of this burgeoning sector of the economy. In 1966 alone, the study reported that fourteen million out-of-state visitors spent over two billion dollars, while in-state travelers spent 250 million dollars on one day trips, and projected that both figures would continue to grow throughout the 1970s.⁵¹⁷ Because of its lush landscape and potential for tourism development, the report framed the Northern Interior counties as well-suited to take advantage of this boom.

The EDA envisioned the creation of “vacation growth centers” throughout the Northern Interior to take advantage of these rural landscapes. These centers would contain a nucleus of facilities organized around, for example, a dam and reservoir that could provide “comfortable accommodations” in rural areas. The study maintained that the formation of vacation growth centers would “establish new travel and vacation habits” that would bring urban and suburban Californians to rural areas with more regularity. Each vacation center would have a complex of cabins and a general store from which daily necessities could be

⁵¹⁵ To Randolph Collier from Elizabeth A. Cavin, 14 December 1964, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵¹⁶ “Analysis of Employment Situation by the Construction of Box Canyon Project,” July 1963, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers.

purchased, as well as the types of items needed for hiking, swimming, boating, and fishing.⁵¹⁸ The study reflected a reassessment of the economic benefits of the natural environment in rural California. The elements that made Siskiyou a potentially profitable tourist center were outdoor activities frequently associated with rural life. Rural landscapes would be valued less for extractive purposes and more for their ability to provide rural experiences.

Policymakers at the state level had already begun to lay the groundwork for vacation growth centers in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Efforts to create a statewide water plan in the 1950s provided one major boost. Known as the California State Water Plan, policymakers wanted to build a network of dams and water agencies that could better control, distribute, and conserve the water supply. A redistribution of water from the less populous northern portion of the state to the burgeoning central and southern parts would be one of the plan's primary outcomes. In November 1960, Californians voted on Proposition One, also known as the Burns-Porter Act, which funded the state's water plan with the issuance of \$1.75 billion in general obligation bonds. The strongest support for Burns-Porter emerged from the San Joaquin Valley and most of southern California, while the north heavily opposed it. Ultimately, the proposition passed. An amendment to the bill, known as the Davis-Grunsky amendment, passed in the state legislature, and allowed for state water project funds to be expended on recreational dams and reservoirs.⁵¹⁹ This amendment opened the way for state financing of the Box Canyon Dam.

⁵¹⁷ *California Tourism Industry*, 14, 18, 71, 76.

⁵¹⁸ *California Tourism Industry*, 193.

⁵¹⁹ Martin Nie, "Build It and They Will Come: A Reexamination of the California State Water Project," *Southern California Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 71-88; Lawrence Lee, "California's Water Politics: Opposition to the CVP, 1944-1980," *Agricultural History* 54, no. 3 (July 1980): 402-423; Harvey Grody, "From North to South: The Feather River Project and Other Legislative Water Struggles in the 1950s," *Southern California Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (Fall 1978): 287-

Though many northern Californians opposed the water plan, state legislators in the Northern Interior took advantage of its provisions to push for rural tourism projects in the region. In terms of Box Canyon, Randolph Collier and Pauline Davis played a particularly important role in shepherding the project. Collier represented rural Siskiyou County in the state senate from 1938 to 1976. Elected as a Republican, he switched party allegiances in 1959 and ran as a Democrat for his remaining years in office. Collier supported large state infrastructure projects, reflected best in his co-authorship of the 1947 Collier-Burns Act, which funded freeway construction in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵²⁰ Davis, also a Democrat, represented the second district in the state assembly, made up of all or parts of several counties in the Northern Interior, including Siskiyou, from 1952 until 1976. Her actions in that legislative body earned her the nickname “Lady of the Lakes” for her strong support for the construction of recreational lakes in her district. As co-author of the Davis-Grunsky amendment, she not only secured funds for recreational reservoirs, but also for rest stops along California’s freeways to provide services for those traveling to lightly settled parts of the state and, in the process, made accessing those places easier.⁵²¹ Though many northern Californians voted against the water plan, it laid the basis for their region’s transformation into a vacation growth center.

While resistance to the water plan may have been strong, many embraced tourism and the Box Canyon Dam, if not vacation growth centers, in Siskiyou County because they seemed to promise new jobs that would reverse the region’s rural decline. Even as the state debated the future of its water resources in the late 1950s, local governments in Siskiyou, including Mt. Shasta, Yreka, and Dunsmuir, all pushed for dam and reservoir construction

326; Mercel Shelton, “Progress of the California Water Plan,” *American Water Works Association* 51, no. 11 (November 1959): 1349-1356.

⁵²⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/08/03/obituaries/randolph-collier-father-of-coast-freeways.html>.

because they promised to create jobs in recreation and tourism.⁵²² Chambers of Commerce in Weed, Scott Valley, Dunsmuir, and Mt. Shasta passed resolutions in favor of the dam, also noting the possibility for economic development contained within tourism projects.⁵²³ Collier called Siskiyou “urgently in need” of new jobs that he believed these projects would provide.⁵²⁴ Collier pointed to the threat that the declining economy might have on Siskiyou County’s valuation and argued that recreational development would bolster its finances.⁵²⁵ A study on the feasibility of tourism projects like the Box Canyon Dam by the California Water Resources Board bolstered Collier’s arguments. The report maintained that “the money brought into the area by the thousands of visitors to the project area would give this portion of Northern California the ‘shot in the arm’ it so vitally needs.”⁵²⁶ Estimates of how big that shot would be varied. Collier predicted that the project might create 152 new jobs.⁵²⁷ William Warne, director of the Water Resources Board, was more optimistic, and believed the project would create 250 new jobs in the area, and boost retail sales by over five million dollars a year.⁵²⁸

Though tourism promised the creation of new jobs in a struggling rural economy, outdoors groups as well as California’s growing environmental movement had clashing

⁵²¹ http://articles.latimes.com/1995-12-16/news/mn-14618_1_pauline-davis.

⁵²² To Pete Chinca from Harvey Banks, 27 August 1959, Folder 493, Randolph Collier Papers; To Randolph Collier from Elizabeth A. Cavin, 14 December 1964, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers; To Randolph Collier from W.A. Barr, 21 November 1959, Folder 493, Randolph Collier Papers, “Resolution Number 612” ca. October 1959, Folder 493, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵²³ “Meeting in Pauline Davis’ Office,” 4 November 1963, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers; To James V. Mallory from Harvey O. Banks, 1 September 1959, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers; “1 Million Grant for Box Canyon from ARA,” *Mount Shasta Herald*, 2 November 1962; “Scott Valley Chamber of Commerce Resolution,” 20 December 1961, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵²⁴ To Charles DeTurk from Randolph Collier, 15 September 1962, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵²⁵ “Recreational Aspects of the Box Canyon Dam,” ca. 1963, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵²⁶ *Box Canyon Dam Feasibility Study*, 67.

⁵²⁷ “Box Canyon Project,” 9 November 1962, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵²⁸ “Ground-Breaking at Siskiyou Dam,” *Eureka Humboldt Standard*, 22 October 1966.

views on the Box Canyon project. Some, like the Siskiyou Consolidated and the Dunsmuir Rod and Gun Club supported dam and reservoir projects because they promised to expand the possibilities for outdoor recreation and tourism in the Northern Interior.⁵²⁹ In contrast, D.J. Bressi, chairman of the California Fly Fishing Unlimited Conservation Committee, believed the dam would do “long range damage” and destroy “one of the few remaining unspoiled streams.”⁵³⁰ California’s Sierra Club also opposed the dam. Club member Bryce Whitmore feared the dam would destroy “one of the most beautiful river areas in the state.”⁵³¹ More than just a concern for the natural beauty of rural northern California informed the Club’s opposition. An element of fiscal conservatism surfaced as well. Sierra Club member Bill Siri, for example, called the project a “not very subtle raid on our public funds.”⁵³² Whitmore agreed, and believed it was “immoral for the state or federal government to be financing such ‘recreation areas.’”⁵³³ Whitmore also seems to have been concerned that the Box Canyon project would affect his livelihood. Whitmore, along with his wife Mary, owned a river tour company that frequently operated on the Sacramento River.⁵³⁴ Ultimately, these opponents did little to organize a serious opposition to the project and failed to thwart its construction.

The Box Canyon Dam project itself largely reflected the vacation growth center concept outlined by the EDA. By the end of 1961, Collier and other county and state officials

⁵²⁹ To James D. Lambert from Harvey O. Banks, 1 September 1959, Folder 493, Randolph Collier Papers; To C.A. Wheeler from William L. Berry, 16 November 1959, Folder 493, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵³⁰ “State Acts on Box Canyon Dam Pollution,” *The Fresno Bee*, 25 August 1968.

⁵³¹ To Hugo Fisher from Bryce Whitmore, 3 February 1966, Folder 106, Carton 109, Sierra Club Records, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley California.

⁵³² To Bryce Whitmore from Bill Siri, 29 January 1966, Folder 106, Carton 109, Sierra Club Records.

⁵³³ To Hugo Fisher from Bryce Whitmore, 3 February 1966, Folder 106, Carton 109, Sierra Club Records.

⁵³⁴ “Wilderness Water Ways 1966 River Trip Program,” 1966, Folder 106, Carton 109, Sierra Club Records.

had begun developing a dam and reservoir project for Siskiyou County. The project would revolve around the large, man-made lake that would result from the construction of a dam on the Sacramento River. The lake would provide visitors with swimming, boating, and fishing activities, and a network of campsites would crop up around the lake. Collier himself almost explicitly thought about Box Canyon in the vacation growth center framework. He saw the declines in Siskiyou's traditional industries as permanent and believed it would need to reorient itself toward a new economy. The county's "mountainous and attractive country" that had originally provided jobs in mining and timber could now meet the "rapidly increasing demand" for rural tourism.⁵³⁵ Collier imagined the touristic possibilities of the dam as a way to complement nearby recreational projects and create a full-time tourism economy in Siskiyou. In particular, Box Canyon would supplement the ski resort at Mount Shasta completed in 1958. Much like Box Canyon, Collier played a critical role in guiding this project to completion. Collier helped secure state highway funds to improve road access to the project, and then served as president of the Ski Bowl Corporation, the private entity that operated the resort.⁵³⁶ Collier claimed that visitors to the ski resort boosted the surrounding towns and that creating a dam at Box Canyon would open up "year 'round" recreation and tourist possibilities.⁵³⁷ Visitors could ski in the winter and swim, camp, and fish in the summer.

The planning, funding, and implementation of the Box Canyon Dam project reflected the decentralized character of postwar rural development policy. The county government controlled the project, but state and federal funding proved necessary for the project to begin. Though the project had its origins in the early 1960s, it struggled to get off the ground

⁵³⁵"Box Canyon Project," 9 November 1962, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵³⁶ "History of Recreational Development in Southern Siskiyou Area," ca. 1963, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers.

because of insufficient local funding.⁵³⁸ Figures for the project's cost hovered initially around \$7 million, but the final price totaled \$9.1 million (about \$70 million in 2019).⁵³⁹ In 1963, Collier and Davis helped county officials by lobbying hard within the state legislature to secure funding for the project. As a result of their efforts, they acquired about \$4.5 million in Davis-Grunsky funds to finance the dam's construction.⁵⁴⁰ For federal funding, supporters initially turned to the ARA. In 1963, Michael Hennessey, the attorney for Siskiyou County's board of supervisors, crafted an application for Siskiyou County that requested a grant of just under \$1 million dollars.⁵⁴¹ By the time construction was ready to begin, the ARA had expired. The county reapplied for EDA funds, which ultimately contributed \$4.6 million. to the project.⁵⁴²

The county used a significant chunk of that money to purchase land for the project. It is worth commenting on the relative ease with which the county acquired land, particularly because it contrasts so sharply with the experience of Georgia discussed below. The reservoir and dam area occupied over 2,200 acres of forested and mountainous land. About forty acres of the project fell within the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, and the county quickly received a federal permit to operate in the park. The city of Mt. Shasta also owned a small parcel of

⁵³⁷ "Recreational Aspects of the Box Canyon Dam," ca. 1963, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵³⁸ "Untitled Collier Speech" ca. October 1961, Folder 493, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵³⁹ "State Park in Siskiyou Wins Push," *The Petaluma Argus-Courier*, 17 October 1963; "Ask Approval of Box Canyon Dam," *Eureka Humboldt Standard*, 29 January 1966; "Ground-Breaking at Siskiyou Dam," *Eureka Humboldt Standard*, 22 October 1966; "Summary of Box Canyon Project Costs," Folder 493, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵⁴⁰ To Richard Kelly from William Warne, 18 November 1963, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers; "Ground-Breaking at Siskiyou Dam," *Eureka Humboldt Standard*, 22 October 1966; "Box Canyon Dam History," ca. 1963, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵⁴¹ "Capital Cost and Possible Financing Plan for Bix Canyon Dam," 11 April 1963, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers; To William L. Batt from Hale Champion, 29 March 1963, Folder 494, Randolph Collier Papers; "1 Million Grant for Box Canyon from ARA," *Mount Shasta Herald*, 2 November 1962.

⁵⁴² "Pauline's Capital News," 16 April 1970, Folder 495, Randolph Collier Papers; "Box Canyon Project: Findings on the Amendatory Supplemental Application," July 1967, Folder 495, Randolph Collier Papers.

land that the county would need for the project. The eagerness of local leaders to see new jobs for residents led to a similarly speedy agreement between the city and county that allowed the latter to lease the land that it needed.⁵⁴³ The county purchased the rest of the project's land from private owners using federal and state funds. Most of the purchases went smoothly, though one state report on the project noted that some land speculation had occurred since the project was announced.⁵⁴⁴ This speculation perhaps accounts for some of the increases in the project's total cost. The county also had to bring one landowner to court to acquire their land, but this lawsuit ultimately did not hinder the project's implementation.⁵⁴⁵

Though public funds financed the entirety of the project's dam and reservoir components, county leaders in Siskiyou contracted out the construction of the camping facilities and the concession rights to those facilities to private sector companies. Concession rights initially went to a firm called Patterson and Webber, but, through a series of subcontracts and then lease defaults, Shipstads Land and Recreation Corporation became the sole lessee. The owners of Shipstads got their start in the mid-1930s with the creation of a travelling ice-skating show called "Ice Follies," but they expanded into other entertainment ventures after the war.⁵⁴⁶ The firm constructed a main park area containing 245 campsites, a 180 seat amphitheater, 50 picnic sites, an 8 acre beach, and a marina with 20 boat spaces.⁵⁴⁷ As part of its contract with Siskiyou County, Shipstads promised to pay the county ten percent of the earnings it made from renting out its campsite and other facilities.⁵⁴⁸ Despite

⁵⁴³ *Lake Siskiyou Feasibility Study* (California: Department of Parks and Recreation, 1974), 8.

⁵⁴⁴ *Box Canyon Project: Feasibility Study* (California: Department of Water Resources, 1965): 51.

⁵⁴⁵ To William R. Gianelli from Michael Hennessy, 7 December 1967, Folder 495, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵⁴⁶ "A New Recreation Area," *Oakland Tribune*, 23 August 1970.

⁵⁴⁷ "Lake Siskiyou, 1974," Folder 496, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵⁴⁸ "Box Canyon Reservoir (Lake Siskiyou)," c. 1975, Folder 496, Randolph Collier Papers.

the quick succession of leasing rights, construction of the dam, reservoir, and then camping facilities proceeded relatively smoothly between 1965 and 1969, when the project reached its completion.

Though Siskiyou's old rural economy may have been disappearing, the Box Canyon Project preserved some aspects of rural identity, at least in an idealized form. The rural ambience and attractions constructed by the Shipstads Land and Recreation Corporation at the Box Canyon Dam, for example, garnered positive reviews from California's urban press. Donald Culpepper, writing for the Long Beach *Independent*, described the area surrounding the lake in picturesque terms, praised the modern facilities, and noted the ease with which he caught fish in the "crystal blue water."⁵⁴⁹ For Culpepper, the rural beauty contrasted sharply with the urban grit of Los Angeles, and he told his readers the region would "drive you out of your smog-filled head."⁵⁵⁰ Culpepper's article therefore neatly captured the sensation that promoters of rural tourism hoped to create. Visiting a rural area would provide tourists with a distinctly "rural" experience that could rejuvenate their urban bodies and minds.

Box Canyon may have preserved some elements of Siskiyou's rurality, but it failed to provide a meaningful replacement for the older rural economy. The ideal landscapes described by Culpepper did not attract as many visitors as originally hoped.⁵⁵¹ By 1970, for example, estimates suggested that the dam would receive as many as 100,000 "visitor days," while the real number only reached 59,000. Between 1970 and 1973, the average overnight usage of the 245 campsites was only thirty four percent. Most of those visitors came from the

⁵⁴⁹ Donald Culpepper, "A Lake Just for the Fun of it," Long Beach *Independent*, 12 May 1970.

⁵⁵⁰ For similarly positive takes on Box Canyon after its construction, see "Here's Information on New Recreation Area," *The Press Democrat*, 27 July 1971; "Lake Siskiyou Offers Good Fishing and Lots of Fun," *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, 15 April 1971.

⁵⁵¹ "Box Canyon Reservoir (Lake Siskiyou)," c. 1975, Folder 496, Randolph Collier Papers; "Statement on Recreational Facilities at Box Canyon Reservoir by Ronald B. Robie," 21 June 1975, Folder 496, Randolph Collier Papers.

Bay Area and Sacramento, the closest major urban centers. Some blamed the dam's lack of visitors on the 1970s fuel shortages, which made driving to the dam more burdensome.⁵⁵² While supporters of rural tourism in Siskiyou might see its detachment from urban life as a major draw, the remoteness of Siskiyou County proved too much for the average tourist struggling to pay rising gasoline prices.

If the lake did not attract as many tourists as originally hoped, its construction spurred land and home sales in the areas surrounding the Box Canyon Dam. Much like the proponents of the dam, contractors and landowners alike appealed to an idealized version of the region's rural landscape to promote their own projects. By the early 1970s, advertisements began to appear in newspapers from California's metropolitan areas, particularly Los Angeles and San Francisco. Classifieds advertised land in "beautiful Mt. Shasta" with "gentle rolling land, forested steams," while others noted the "spectacular valleys and mountain views."⁵⁵³ The sort of language and rhetoric mobilized to push rural tourism projects in Siskiyou County quickly travelled to, and helped support, other sorts of economic activity in the county.

A new "rural" subdivision represented the most ambitious attempt to take advantage of tourism economy created by Box Canyon and the rural environs surrounding it. A major California land developer named H.V. Hunsaker spearheaded the project, known as Mt. Shasta Forest, with design assistance from Albert Rosen and Donald Plehn of Dynasonics Corps. Hunsaker and Dynasonics had worked together on a previous housing project in Kern County, California called Quail Mountain. Located in the Tehachapi Mountains, the land had formerly been used as a cattle ranch until Hunsaker bought the land for housing

⁵⁵² "Lake Siskiyou, 1974," Folder 496, Randolph Collier Papers.

⁵⁵³ For some examples, see "Classifieds – Beautiful Mt. Shasta," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 August 1971; "Classifieds – Beautiful Mt. Shasta," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 May 1971; "Classifieds –

development. Though the project would replace the ranch, Rosen stressed that the rural character of the area would remain intact, telling one newspaper reporter that the project would preserve the atmosphere of a working cattle ranch.⁵⁵⁴ Each lot would be at least 2.5 acres, for example, in order to allow for “ample room to roam and play.”⁵⁵⁵ The Quail project echoed many of the features of rural tourist development more generally: the homes replaced a formerly functional rural industry with an “experience” of rural life. This project, though never aspiring to be part of an urban environment, further reflected the use of western imagery in the development and incorporation of the San Fernando Valley into Los Angeles.⁵⁵⁶

Similar principles undergirded the Mt. Shasta Forest development. Hunsaker began promoting the project in 1967, in the middle of Box Canyon’s construction. After purchasing over a thousand acres of land around the dam, Hunsaker began advertising the project as a sort of rural refuge in urban newspapers throughout the state. In a San Francisco *Examiner* advertisement announcing the project, Hunsaker called it a “private preserve” that would contain no industry or commercial establishments, only a “spread of lovely land.” Touting the seemingly untouched qualities of the area, Hunsaker touted the land as “back-to-nature.”⁵⁵⁷ Hunsaker’s advertisements apparently worked. By 1970, around six hundred 2.5-acre plots had been sold and developed for single-family homes in the project.⁵⁵⁸ Like Quail Mountain, Mt. Shasta Forest’s advertisements reflected the use of stereotypically rural imagery by tourism projects in order to spur new development.

Mt. Shasta Special Offering,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 July 1971; “Classifieds – Mt. Shasta, Hurry!” *San Francisco Examiner*, 30 June 1971.

⁵⁵⁴ “Quail Mountain Beckons Sportsmen,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 January 1970.

⁵⁵⁵ “Spectacular Quail Mountain Area in Development,” *Independent Press-Telegram*, 19 January 1970.

⁵⁵⁶ Laura Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

⁵⁵⁷ “Private Forest Preserve,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 24 January 1967.

Although Box Canyon failed to generate as many tourist dollars as early promoters had hoped, Siskiyou County's desperate economic situation ensured that it would become dependent on tourism to generate economic activity. This dependence became particularly clear in the wake of an environmental calamity that struck the county in 1991. In July of that year, a Southern Pacific train derailed at a nearby bridge, and spilled 19,000 gallons of herbicide, much of which seeped into the water. A "toxic plume" hung in the air, pushing visitors out of the county with its scent of "rotten eggs and sulfur."⁵⁵⁹ The pesticide killed off hundreds of thousands of fish, as well as much of the plant life surrounding the water.⁵⁶⁰ Around 700 people fell ill as well, with some experiencing nosebleeds, miscarriages, and the peeling away of their skin.⁵⁶¹ Some local businesses, however, tried to downplay the severity of the crisis. Joe Kimsey, a local bait shop owner, called the people claiming sickness "goddamned hippies. If you were to check the welfare records, and the people who say they're sick, you'd see it's the same ones."⁵⁶² Joe Fisher, the president of Dunsmuir's Chamber of Commerce, agreed, stating that claims of illness came from "a whole lot of unemployed people and people on welfare who are 'sick' and looking for a settlement." In reaction to these statements, a Siskiyou resident named Jim Youngblood argued that local business and civic elites downplayed health problems because they did not want to "hurt the image" of the county and undermine its tourist trade.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁸ "All-Seasons Sports Area," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 March 1973.

⁵⁵⁹ "Spill Kills Summer Season Along River," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 July 1991; "After the Spill State Officials Want to Let Nature Take Course on Upper Sacramento River, but Dunsmuir's Economy Can't Stand to Wait," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 December 1991.

⁵⁶⁰ "Dunsmuir Spill Left Residue of Problems," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 July 1992.

⁵⁶¹ "A Pesticide Spill that Crippled a River and Spoiled a Sleepy California Town," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 December 1991; "Dunsmuir Spill Left Residue of Problems," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 July 1992.

⁵⁶² "A Pesticide Spill that Crippled a River and Spoiled a Sleepy California Town."

⁵⁶³ "Dunsmuir Spill Left Residue of Problems."

Concerns over the tourism economy proved real. The spill decimated the tourist trade that had developed around Box Canyon Dam. One resident told reporters that “a lot of us make our living because of tourism...what else are we going to do?”⁵⁶⁴ Ron McCloud, a hardware store owner, said tourism was “the only thing going for us,” and that after the crash he had not “sold a fishing rod.”⁵⁶⁵ While business owners like McCloud received a settlement from Southern Pacific to cover lost revenues, many still sought to revive the moribund tourist trade. McCloud gathered 600 signatures on a petition to restock the lake immediately, and the Dunsmuir Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution calling for a similar revival of the local fishery.⁵⁶⁶ The California Department of Fish and Game, however, wanted to let the area recover more naturally, with a deliberately planned reintroduction of fish.⁵⁶⁷ By December 1993, Fish and Game relented to the demands of the business community, and agreed to stock a portion of the river by the dam with hatchery fish by the spring of 1994 so that “Dunsmuir’s beleaguered business community” would have “something to lure vacationing families after three years of empty restaurants and vacant motel rooms.”⁵⁶⁸

While the construction of Box Canyon Dam in Siskiyou County unfolded more or less according to plan, proponents of rural development and tourism in Alma, Georgia did not fare as well. This section continues the examination of rural development in Alma from the previous chapter, and focuses on the fight over the construction of a dam and recreational

⁵⁶⁴ “Spill Kills Summer Season Along River,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 July 1991

⁵⁶⁵ “Dunsmuir not Hooked on DFG Trout Strategy,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 February 1992; “After the Spill State Officials Want to Let Nature Take Course on Upper Sacramento River, but Dunsmuir’s Economy Can’t Stand to Wait.”

⁵⁶⁶ “After the Spill State Officials Want to Let Nature Take Course on Upper Sacramento River, but Dunsmuir’s Economy Can’t Stand to Wait;” “Dunsmuir not Hooked on DFG Trout Strategy,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 February 1992.

⁵⁶⁷ “After the Spill State Officials Want to Let Nature Take Course on Upper Sacramento River;” “Dunsmuir not Hooked on DFG Trout Strategy.”

⁵⁶⁸ “Dunsmuir Welcomes back Anglers,” *The Press Democrat*, 1 May 1994.

lake between the late 1960s and the 1980s. A close examination of this project, known as Lake Alma, in southeast Georgia is instructive for a couple reasons.⁵⁶⁹ Lake Alma revealed a conflict over what the rural meant, and what rural recreational tourism would look like. Further, it exposes tensions within the political structure of rural development. Its adherence to federalism allowed some measure of local input, but it also created room for conflicts within and between the various levels of authority. The introduction of the Environmental Protection Agency, backed by an ascendant environmental movement, exacerbated these tensions and thwarted efforts to turn Alma into a tourist destination.

The Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission, created in 1967 by the city of Alma, was composed of local officials and businessmen who oversaw the planning of rural development projects in Alma. While the commission targeted infrastructure, housing, and manufacturing as key elements in Alma's revival, tourism served as another major plank in the group's development agenda. The proposed Lake Alma formed the center of those plans. The lake's design called for the damming of Hurricane Creek, a swamp just east of Alma, with a twenty-eight-foot-tall dam built from about 412,000 cubic yards of earthen material.⁵⁷⁰ The completed project would yield a recreational reservoir roughly seven miles long filled with over 1,400 acres of water.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ For some examples, see *A Development Plan for Lake Lanier Islands* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1967); *Tourist and Recreation Potential of the Cumberland Plateau Area* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1965).

⁵⁷⁰ Mittie Vaughn, "Corps of Engineers Calls Public Meeting," *Alma Times*, 29 December 1977; *Final Determination of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Assistant Administrator for Water Pursuant to Section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act Concerning the Proposed Lake Alma Impoundment and Proposed Mitigation of Associated Environmental Impacts, Alma, Bacon County, Georgia*, downloaded from <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-05/documents/lakealmaf.pdf>.

⁵⁷¹ "Hurricane Creek Protective Society, et al., v. Patricia Harris, et. al," 9-10, 1978, Folder 2, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Records, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens.

L.W. Taylor, the manager of Bacon county's electric co-op and the director of the commission, believed the Lake Alma project had several virtues. Taylor first of all found the environment surrounding the swamp "uniquely suitable" for a recreational lake.⁵⁷² Moreover, the project would fill a void in outdoor recreation and tourism in the region. Much like reports from the USDA and EDA, Taylor saw the U.S. increasingly becoming a "playing, sporting, relaxing country," and that Alma needed to develop the facilities necessary to take advantage of this boom.⁵⁷³ Lake Alma would accomplish this goal and, in doing so, contribute to Alma's broader development goals. Taylor argued that the lake would not only serve a growing tourism market, but help Alma attract industry as well. Taylor argued that the "industrialist" is concerned about quality of life for "himself, his family, [and] his employees," and that such a lake would set Alma apart from other small rural towns.⁵⁷⁴ Taylor's analysis reflected a particular prescription for the rural future: rural habitats, in this case a swamp, could be transformed into regional tourist destination. In doing so, Alma would be integrated economically and socially into an increasingly affluent, leisurely society.

As with many rural development projects in the mid-twentieth century, federal funding proved to be crucial for getting the Lake Alma project started. Interest in the project dated back to the mid-1950s, but Alma and Bacon County had no way of funding a project of this scale on local funding alone.⁵⁷⁵ With the infusion of federal funds into Alma in the late 1960s, many in the community finally believed the lake would get built. In 1969, with money

⁵⁷² *Planning Grant Application by the City of Alma, Bacon County, Georgia to Become a Demonstration City* (Alma: City of Alma, 1967), I-11.

⁵⁷³ *Mid-Planning Statement*, II-74; *1967 Planning Grant Application*, III-25; *Planning Grant Application by the City of Alma, Bacon County, Georgia, to Plan a Model City* (Alma, Georgia, Model Cities Commission, 1968), 3B-118; On the regional aspect of the project, see "Army Holds Lake's Fate," *Alma Times*, 19 January 1978.

⁵⁷⁴ *1968 Planning Grant Application*, 3B-113.

⁵⁷⁵ *Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission, Mid-Planning Statement, Comprehensive Model Cities Program, Alma-Bacon County, Georgia* (Alma, Georgia: Model Cities Commission, 1969), II-80.

from HUD's Open Spaces program, which provided grants to cities for the purchase of land for future development, Alma began acquiring land in the area surrounding Hurricane Creek.⁵⁷⁶ In 1971, HUD released additional funds to conduct a feasibility study for the Lake Alma project. The study suggested that the project would be viable and would provide a boost the local economy in the form of tourism dollars. Shortly following the report's release, HUD pumped additional money into the project to begin preliminary engineering work at the site to prepare for the dam's construction. It also gave the commission another grant of \$290,000 to purchase more land. This grant covered half of the cost of land purchasing, with the rest made up from local funds.⁵⁷⁷

Support for the Lake Alma project reflected many of the same arguments made in favor of the Box Canyon Dam project in Siskiyou County. Local, county, and state government officials supported the project the project for its potential economic benefits.⁵⁷⁸ Alma Mayor Tessell D. Mullis argued it would greatly increase economic activity in Bacon County and operate with a sort of multiplier effect on the area's service economy.⁵⁷⁹ Liston Elkins, a city council member in the neighboring town of Waycross, thought the project would turn southeast Georgia into a "destination area for tourism" that would redound to the entire region's benefit.⁵⁸⁰ Others fused together environmental and economic arguments,

⁵⁷⁶ "City Buys Open Spaces Land in North Alma Area," *Alma Times*, 9 January 1969.

⁵⁷⁷ *National Wildlife Federation, et al v John Marsh, Secretary of the Army, et al*, 1973, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F2/721/767/162745/>; "Lake Alma – Facts and Figures," Folder 9, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Papers.

⁵⁷⁸ To Patricia Harris from George Busbee, 5 July 1977, Folder 2, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Papers; "Why the Department of Natural Resources Supports the Construction of Lake Alma," ca. 1988, Folder 10, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Papers; "Commissioners to Condemn Lake Alma Project Property," *Alma Times*, 23 August 1973; "Governor Backs Lake Alma Project," *Alma Times*, 14 July 1977; "Army Holds Lake's Fate," *Alma Times*, 19 January 1978; "Resolution Supports Lake Alma Project," *Alma Times*, 19 January 1978; "Mayor's Dream: The Building of Lake Alma," *Alma Times*, 19 January 1978; "Economic Development Council Supports Lake Alma Project," *Alma Times*, 26 January 1978.

⁵⁷⁹ "Know the Truth about Lake Alma – Don't Be Misled," *Alma Times*, 25 March 1976.

⁵⁸⁰ "Economic Development Council Supports Lake Alma Project," *Alma Times*, 26 January 1978.

maintaining that the project would transform a relatively useless patch of land into a machine for rural development. Leon Kirkland, the director of the Game and Fish Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, argued the project's land was of "very marginal quality for environmental purposes."⁵⁸¹ Others saw Hurricane Creek as a "dinky, unattractive stream that smells bad in the summer [and] breeds mosquitos and cottonmouths."⁵⁸² Proponents of Lake Alma believed that transforming a seemingly marginal, unpleasant swamp into a recreational attraction would act as an economic boon to the region without sacrificing either the beauty or health of the land.

In sharp contrast to the Box Canyon project, though, a powerful opposition emerged against Lake Alma in 1973 that put it into a sort of purgatory from which it would never escape. In Georgia, the opposition stemmed primarily from landowners unwilling to sell their land, while landowners in California quickly sold off their land to Siskiyou County. Organized opposition to Lake Alma had its immediate origins in the decision of the Bacon County Board of Commissioners to condemn 2,522 acres of land owned by thirteen Alma residents. These landowners would go on to form the core of project's opposition.⁵⁸³ In order to be eligible for HUD funding, Alma needed to have the "signed options" of the thirty eight landowners whose property made up significant portions of the project by June 30, 1973. As the date neared, only twenty-five landowners had signed. HUD extended the deadline into September to give Alma more time to reach agreements with the remaining landowners. Supporters of the project worried that it would be undermined by recalcitrant landowners, and they pressured the commission to use its right of eminent domain to secure the land. By the end of August, the commissioners decided to condemn the remaining acres of land

⁵⁸¹ "Will Lake Hurt Environment?" *Alma Times*, 6 July 1978.

⁵⁸² "Lake Alma Plan Still Tangled in Pile of Red Tape," found in Folder 6, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Papers.

“under heavy pressure” from residents, though it is unclear who pushed the county to make the decision.⁵⁸⁴ Following the county’s use of its eminent domain powers, the thirteen landowners formed the Hurricane Creek Protective Society and filed a suit against Bacon County, Alma, and HUD to stop the project.⁵⁸⁵ This suit would be the first of many that plagued the project and prevented it from coming to fruition.

At the center of the opposition stood Delano Deen. Deen worked as a professor of chemistry at South Georgia College, located in nearby Douglas.⁵⁸⁶ Aside from the Hurricane Creek Protective Society, of which he served as president, Deen worked with the Georgia Wildlife Federation, the state-level chapter of the National Wildlife Federation. Deen’s family had been landowners in Alma for decades, with much of the land under cultivation for tobacco. When Deen’s father died he inherited that land.⁵⁸⁷ Deen had built his home overlooking Hurricane Creek, a home that he and his brother built using timber from the surrounding forest. The county commissioners condemned over a third of Deen’s land, that which most closely abutted Hurricane Creek, for eight four dollars an acre.⁵⁸⁸

Deen’s opposition to the project reflected his family’s long history of farming in rural Georgia, from which a particular understanding of rural life arose. In many ways, shades of rural pastoralism colored Deen’s vision of rural life. Deen evoked the rhythms of farm life that oscillated between hard work and enjoyment of simple pleasures when he wrote to his cousin Floyd that it was “only a short time ago” that the two worked the tobacco fields,

⁵⁸³ “Lake Project in Trouble; Deadline is September 30,” *Alma Times*, 26 July 1973; *Darling Int’l, Inc. v. Carter*, 294 Ga. 455, 2014.

⁵⁸⁴ “Commissioners to Condemn Lake Alma Project Property,” *Alma Times*, 23 August 1973; “Condemnation Papers Filed on Lake Property,” *Alma Times*, 6 September 1973.

⁵⁸⁵ “Suit Filed Against Lake Alma Project,” *Alma Times*, 27 September 1973.

⁵⁸⁶ “Council Tells Lake Backers to ‘Reprogram’ Fund Request,” *Savannah Morning News*, 22 June 1977, in Folder 2, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Papers.

⁵⁸⁷ “To Build a Lake,” *Alma Times*, 12 July 1979; To Floyd Deen from Delano Deen, 1 October 1974, Folder 1, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Papers.

“thumped” watermelons, and ate homemade ice cream together. Here, Deen touched on the cycle of work and leisure characteristic of life on the farm. Deen continued with this theme when he wrote of his father’s love of fishing in the swampy creek after he finished with the farm’s “necessary chores.” The swamp provided his father a quiet refuge that helped to “lighten the load especially in times of frustration.” Deen’s own excursions into the swamp taught him to “love its mystery.” Much like Freeman and Baker, Deen’s understanding of rurality evoked an argument that rural landscapes had restorative effects. Although now a chemistry professor and not a farmer, Deen saw farming and an almost primordial appreciation for nature as linked. The development of Hurricane Creek would sunder that relationship and way of life.

Deen did more than embrace a pastoral vision of rural life in his opposition to Lake Alma. He also criticized the project on environmental and economic grounds. He argued the Lake Alma project would not only destroy local wildlife habitats, but also the wetlands necessary for the filtering of waste created by Alma and surrounding farms.⁵⁸⁹ Sacrificing the environment on the altar of rural development would yield few economic benefits. Here, Deen struck a populist tone. He framed the project as “welfare for the rich,” and its primary beneficiaries would be “landowners and businessmen, and those financially well off enough for water skiing and golf.” Deen believed the project would “accentuate race and class disparities in access to amenities,” while creating few jobs for the area’s residents.⁵⁹⁰ Deen argued that the project would not “stop outmigration of people, bring in industry, or cause Alma to flourish,” and often pointed to similar projects in rural towns that failed to stimulate

⁵⁸⁸ “Delano Deen Continues Waging War,” News clipping, ca. 1977, in Folder 2, Box 13, Papers of Georgia Wildlife Federation.

⁵⁸⁹ “Corps of Engineering Hearing Scheduled,” *Alma Times*, 12 January 1978.

⁵⁹⁰ To William Grossman from Delano Deen, 26 May 1977, Folder 2, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Papers.

the broader economy.⁵⁹¹ Deen therefore challenged the very basis of postwar rural development and its vision of a new rural economy.

This mixture of environmentalism and skepticism of rural tourism projects echoed throughout much of the opposition's rhetoric. Some, like Zell Miller, Georgia's Democratic lieutenant governor, echoed Deen's populist rhetoric. Miller questioned the need to spend \$3 million of taxpayer money for some "rich folks who want to build homes around that lake to waterski."⁵⁹² At a fish fry organized by Delano Deen, Miller told the audience he opposed the lake because it would "make a few wealthy individual folks richer" by constructing a "wasteful and destructive dam."⁵⁹³ William McCarthy, an economics PhD from the University of Georgia and collaborator with Deen at the Hurricane Creek Protective Society, ditched Miller's populism for small government conservatism. McCarthy considered himself a "born again convert to the free market process" and believed the lake would give "our environment...a medical mastectomy" and called the project a "free lunch." Alton Cauley, a resident of Bacon County, believed that the county should focus on "improving the environment instead of trying to destroy it," while also questioning the efficacy of federal spending in creating jobs.⁵⁹⁴ In a manner unseen in California, opposition to Lake Alma knit together an unlikely mix of rural romanticizers, populists, environmentalists, and free market proselytizers.

⁵⁹¹ "Comments of Hurricane Creek Protective Society on 1976 Environmental Impact Statement, x-146, in *Lake Alma Project, Final Environmental Impact Statement*. This statement was included in volume five of the *Draft Supplement to the Lake Alma Final Environmental Impact Statement* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1986).

⁵⁹² "Miller Firm on Lake Alma Project Opposition," *Florida Times-Union*, 21 June 1980, in Folder 5, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Papers.

⁵⁹³ "Miller Assails Lake Alma at Coffee Park," *Alma Times*, 17 July 1980.

⁵⁹⁴ To Colonel Stanley G. Genega from Alton Cauley, 3 December 1986, in *Final Supplement to the Lake Alma Final Environmental Impact Statement* (Washington D.C.: Army Corps of Engineers, 1986).

Despite the skepticism of federal activity evidenced by some of Lake Alma's opponents, the EPA proved to be their strongest weapon. In particular, critics of the Lake Alma project used to great effect the requirement that all federally funded projects undertake an environmental impact statement (EIS). The EIS brought together a panel of experts to evaluate the potential environmental ramifications of any given federal project, while also creating space for local people to express their concerns or support of the project. The time that it took to complete this process frequently slowed down project implementation. The first lawsuit launched by Deen and the other landowners affected by the eminent domain decision ended out of court in 1974 with an agreement between the city of Alma and the plaintiffs that the former would conduct an EIS for the project. Alma's city council voted unanimously to spend \$85,000 to hire a Louisiana-based consulting firm named Gulf Research Institute to conduct the study.⁵⁹⁵ Completed in 1976, the EIS found that the project would result in some "temporary displacement and elimination" of wildlife, but that overall it would improve water quality and increase the diversity of wildlife habitats. Moreover, the project would stimulate "increased economic development," though only six to ten full time jobs would be created.⁵⁹⁶ The EIS supported the pro-lake contingent more than its opponents, but its job creation estimates undermined their more hopeful projections.

Despite the conclusions of the EIS, the EPA recommended to HUD that funds should not be released for the Lake Alma project. Barbara Blum, the EPA's deputy director, saw the project as "unsatisfactory from a standpoint of environmental quality."⁵⁹⁷ Following the announcement by the EPA, the Department of the Interior came out against the project on environmental grounds as well, and HUD eventually assented to the opinions expressed by

⁵⁹⁵ "\$126,656 Hospital Equipment, \$85,000 Survey Approved," *Alma Times*, 5 June 1975; "Lake Study Funds are Approved," *Alma Times*, 17 July 1975.

⁵⁹⁶ *Lake Alma Project EIS*, i-ii.

⁵⁹⁷ "EPA Asks Fund Delay on Lake Alma Project," *Alma Times*, 31 March 1977.

both departments and decided to withhold funds.⁵⁹⁸ HUD's decision unsurprisingly upset local supporters of the project in Alma and Bacon County who believed that the EIS had vindicated their position. Mayor Mullis called HUD's decision "unjustified" and told a reporter that "we find our local government controlled by the bureaucrats in Washington, D.C."⁵⁹⁹ In response, in September 1977 Alma and Bacon County launched a lawsuit against HUD to force it to reverse its decision. Mayor Mullis commented on the lawsuit, stating that "when HUD in Washington has made up its mind, you just have to go to court to get them to listen to you."⁶⁰⁰

It seems that Washington listened. Shortly after filing the suit, both sides reached an agreement that Alma would apply for a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers under section 404 of the Clean Water Act.⁶⁰¹ This particular provision regulated the discharge of earthen material into wetlands areas for the creation of dams and set in motion a series of public hearings on the project. If the project passed the muster of the Corps, then HUD would dispense funds for Lake Alma. The hearings proved to be a major event in the small Georgia town. In Alma, 600 people attended a hearing that stretched from 7pm to 2:30 am, with 90% registering support for Lake Alma. In response to the outpouring of public support, HUD agreed to release the funds if the Corps approved the section 404 permit.⁶⁰² Then, in early 1978, the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Interior Department also said it would support Lake Alma if the local government agreed to create several "green tree reservoirs" in the

⁵⁹⁸ To T.D. Mullis from Stanley [illegible], 24 March 1977, Folder 2, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Papers; "Lake Alma Hits Federal Buzz Saw of Opposition," *Alma Times*, 28 July 1977.

⁵⁹⁹ "Funds Denial on Lake Alma," *Alma Times*, 18 August 1977.

⁶⁰⁰ "Suit on Lake Alma a Strong Possibility," *Alma Times*, 25 August 1977; "Resolutions Passed on Lake Alma Project," *Alma Times*, 15 September 1977; "City, County Filed Suit," *Alma Times*, 29 September 1977; "City and County Officials to File for Delay Action," *Alma Times*, 24 November 1977.

⁶⁰¹ "Corps of Engineers Calls Public Meeting," *Alma Times*, 29 December 1977.

⁶⁰² "Army Holds Lake's Fate," *Alma Times*, 19 January 1978.

project area covering just under 200 acres. These reservoirs were supposed to mitigate the displacement of wildlife caused by the creation of the dam by providing new sources of food and shelter.⁶⁰³ The Corps agreed to issue the permit if Alma agreed to integrate these reservoirs into the project. Both Alma and the Corps agreed to the reservoir plan, and the Corps issued the permit in August 1980.⁶⁰⁴

Far from settling the matter, though, the Corps' decision set off another round of bureaucratic combat. Delano Deen immediately attacked the reservoir plan as woefully insufficient and maintained that at least 7,500 acres of new habitat would need to be created, not 200, to mitigate the project's effects. Deen and others hoped that the EPA would use its "final veto authority" to stop the project on environmental grounds. The Clean Water Act, while tasking the Corps with overseeing the 404-permitting process, gave the EPA the ability to veto the permit. This power had yet to be invoked by the EPA. Shortly after the Corps issued the permit, EPA administrator Eckhard Beck came out against the decision, but did not issue a formal veto.⁶⁰⁵ The project sat in bureaucratic limbo for another year until the new EPA administrator appointed by Ronald Reagan, Anne Gorsuch, issued a statement in October 1981 that supported the Corps' decision to issue the 404 permit as long as Alma implemented the reservoir plan, and stated that the Lake Alma project "conforms with federal environmental standards."⁶⁰⁶ While Gorsuch's decision appeared to finally clear the way for the project to begin, it became the source of another decade of litigation that would finally kill the project.

⁶⁰³ "Discussion of Special Permit Condition: Green Tree Reservoir," Folder 4, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Records.

⁶⁰⁴ To Barbara Blum from Hugh Robinson, 18 October 1979, Folder 4, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Records; "Department Seeks Lake Alma Plan," *Alma Times*, 7 December 1978; "Corps of Engineer to Issue Lake Permit," *Alma Times*, 7 August 1980.

⁶⁰⁵ "EPA Denies Lake Alma's 404 Construction Permit," *Alma Times*, 14 August 1980.

⁶⁰⁶ "Lake Alma Project Clears EPA Hurdle," *Alma Times*, 15 October 1981; "Lake Permit is Received," *Alma Times*, 12 November 1981.

Partnered with the National Wildlife Federation and the Georgia Wildlife Federation, Deen and the Hurricane Creek Protective Society sued the Corps, HUD, and Alma and Bacon County in 1982 in the U.S. District Court for Southern Georgia in a final attempt to block the project. Deen and the plaintiffs argued that the inclusion of the reservoir plan into the broader Lake Alma project so altered its basis that a new EIS would need to be completed. Further, because the reservoirs would themselves alter the environment, they required their own, separate EIS investigations.⁶⁰⁷ The Georgia court disagreed with the plaintiffs, who then appealed to the Eleventh District Court in 1983.⁶⁰⁸ The appeal was successful, and the Corps and Alma began working on an updated EIS, which was released in 1987. The new EIS defended the project on environmental grounds by arguing that the reservoirs would effectively mitigate destruction to wildlife habitats, and on economic grounds by arguing the lake would fill a recreational need in the area and stimulate further economic development through tourism.⁶⁰⁹

Unsurprisingly, the National and Georgia Wildlife Federations, along with Deen and the Hurricane Creek Protective Society, vigorously criticized the new EIS. So, too, did the EPA, which reversed Gorsuch's stance on the project. The groups reiterated their previous critiques of Lake Alma, and focused on its economic and environmental consequences.⁶¹⁰ In September 1988, the EPA issued its "final determination," which forthrightly vetoed the

⁶⁰⁷ *National Wildlife Federation, et al, v John O. Marsh, et al*, 1982, in Folder 6, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Records.

⁶⁰⁸ *National Wildlife Federation, et al, v John O. Marsh, et al*, 1983, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F2/721/767/162745/>.

⁶⁰⁹ *Final Supplement to the Lake Alma Final Environmental Impact Statement*.

⁶¹⁰ "Joint Public Hearing Comments of National Wildlife Federation on Draft Supplemental EIS Lake Alma Project, 10 November 1986," Folder 7, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Records; To Stanley Genega from Lee A. DeHihns, 24 November 1987, Folder 8, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Records; "Comments of National Wildlife Federation, Georgia Wildlife Federation, Hurricane Creek Protective Society on Final Supplemental EIS and on Section 404 Application, Lake Alma Project, ca. 1987," Folder 8, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Records.

issuance of funds and permits to build the lake.⁶¹¹ Shortly thereafter, HUD informed Alma that it would no longer be releasing funds for the construction of Lake Alma.⁶¹² Following this development, Alma and Bacon County sued the EPA in the District Court for Southern Georgia, and asked the court to overrule the EPA's final determination.⁶¹³ The court upheld the EPA's decision in 1990, and the city of Alma never appealed, effectively ending the project to turn Hurricane Creek into a tourist destination for Alma and Bacon County. In 1992, the state of Georgia passed a law that allowed counties to sell land back to landowners who lost their property as a result of condemnation and eminent domain. Over the next few years, Bacon County quietly sold back the over 2,000 acres it had originally condemned for the purposes of the project in 1973.⁶¹⁴

Tourism as a means of rural development and job creation left a mixed record. At its most successful, as in the case of Box Canyon, jobs were created, but not nearly enough to make up for the much larger structural shifts that left rural areas economically depressed to begin with. Further, tourist development put forth a vision of the rural that encouraged rural places and people to reorient their economy toward serving the needs of suburban and urban people. Rural tourist development put rural people and places in a subservient position. This subservience was built in part upon a highly idealized understanding of the rural life and the rural past that lionized rural places for their ability to rejuvenate the body and minds of

⁶¹¹ *Final Determination of the EPA Concerning the Proposed Lake Alma Impoundment and Proposed Mitigation of Associated Environmental Impacts, Alma, Bacon County, Georgia*, downloaded from <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-05/documents/lakealmaf.pdf>; "Comments of the NWF, GWF, HCPS, on the U.S. EPA's Proposed Section 404 Determination, 13 September 1988," Folder 9, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Records.

⁶¹² To James Deen from Charles N. Straub, ca. 1989, Folder 10, Box 13, Georgia Wildlife Federation Records.

⁶¹³ *City of Alma, et al v U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, et al*, 1990, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/744/1546/1797566/>.

⁶¹⁴ *Darling Int'l, Inc. v. Carter*, 2014.

people living in congested cities. As we have seen, though, this vision of rural development often did not sit well with many of the non-civic and business leaders in rural towns, who either resisted with their indifference toward tourist projects or fought back with their own vision of what rural development might look like. Nonetheless, the idea of tourist development that emerged in the postwar years as a solution to rural decline lives on, as any visitor to a small town with a refurbished business district can attest.

Chapter Five

Reforming Industrial Agriculture in California

When federal policymakers, local government officials, and businessmen, and social scientists set about creating a rural development policy, they put forth a specific vision of rural decline as well as renewal. They saw the poverty and population decline impacting rural communities as part of an economic restructuring of rural America. As a result, traditional rural industries, particularly farming, mining, and timber, could no longer sustain the countryside. These groups accepted, for example, the large-scale farm economy and the need for fewer farmers. Far from abandoning rural communities or encouraging migration from the country to the city, they developed a public-private rural development program devoted to remaking the economic base of rural America through investments in infrastructure, industrial attraction, and rural tourism. While this vision of development attracted major support and funding from the state and private sector, it did not exhaust the possibilities for rural revival.⁶¹⁵

This chapter and the next argue that two distinct, farm-centered solutions to the rural crisis arose from grassroots movements driven by small farmers and farmworkers. Though these movements put forth different visions for their reform of the rural economy, they shared important assumptions about the character of the rural crisis that affected farm communities in ways that differed quite dramatically from postwar rural developers. Though grassroots farm activists and rural development each saw the rural crisis as a product of economic restructuring, the former deepened that analysis with a critique of political, economic, and racial power structures that drove rural decline. Grassroots farm reformers critiqued public policy and state support as critical elements of the postwar period's

agricultural transformations. The state empowered large farmers while largely ignoring the needs of small farmers and farmworkers. Linked to these political and economic critiques was an analysis of racial exploitation and discrimination as key components of the rural crisis. State policy largely benefited white farmers, while negatively impacting black and brown farmers and farmworkers. Reversing the rural crisis for these grassroots agricultural activists ultimately meant reforming the political, economic, and racial power structure that drove the rural crisis. Rural developers ultimately set aside these questions and accepted the concentration of power in the hands of large farmers. In contrast, agricultural reformers wanted to lay the basis for a new, more equitable farm economy.

In California, grassroots agricultural activists wanted to reform their state's farm economy by reining in the power of notoriously powerful large growers. This goal was pursued through California Rural Legal Assistance, founded in 1966 by Mexican American farmworkers and lawyers with a \$1.2 million grant from the War on Poverty. CRLA provided legal aid to tens of thousands of rural Californians, often for the first time. However, CRLA's lawyers worked primarily with farmworkers, and focused on fighting what they saw as rural California's major source of poverty: the large growers who controlled the farm economy. They understood rural poverty as a product of unequal economic relationships that could best be addressed by organizing and empowering workers. Lawyers and farmworkers joined together in CRLA to fight a war on poverty that used the legal system to expand farmworkers' labor rights, check the abuses of grower power, and build a more just agricultural economy. CRLA's position, while largely accepting the landlessness and proletarianization of California's farmworkers, sought to replicate the success of New Deal labor policy and industrial union activism in the farm sector.

⁶¹⁵ Portions of this chapter have appeared in the Spring 2020 edition of *Agricultural History* under

CRLA engaged in a wide variety of legal actions, but its attempt to regulate large farms and empower farmworkers can best be illustrated by focusing on the group's high-impact cases. These cases revolved around problems of working conditions, labor exploitation, and unionization. While numerically less significant, they represented cases that CRLA's attorneys and clients believed were most important and reflective of the sort of work CRLA should do. By the end of the 1970s, changes in the broader farmworker movement, agricultural economy, and federal funding for legal services challenged the ability of CRLA to carry out this mission. Nonetheless, CRLA's early successes highlight the significance of grassroots opposition to entrenched agricultural inequality and poverty and illuminate a vision of rural America quite distinct from that put forth by proponents of rural development policy.

The roots of that poverty lay in the structure of California farming. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, a system of agriculture characterized by highly capitalized large farms developed in this region. Compared to farms in other parts of the United States, California's farms were bigger and concentrated in fewer hands. This particular pattern of ownership became increasingly prominent in the decades following the 1930s. Between 1935 and 1954, the number of California farms decreased from 150,360 to 123,075. While the net total declined, the number of farms over one thousand acres increased.⁶¹⁶ These farms also commanded much of the state's farm sales: by the 1960s, just over 5 percent of California's farms harvested nearly half of its crop land.⁶¹⁷

the title "Fighting Poverty in the Fields: Legal Services and the War on Poverty in Rural California." I would like to thank Albert Way for allowing me to reprint portions of it here.

⁶¹⁶ Fact Finding Committee on Labor and Welfare, *California's Farm Labor Problems* (Sacramento: Senate of the State of California, 1963), 17.

⁶¹⁷ *California's Farm Labor Problems*, 18.

Low-wage labor, particularly from nonwhite workers, underpinned this economy. California's growers relied on a succession of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino workers, and by the 1920s many workers were of Mexican descent. During the harvest, these workers often migrated from farm to farm. For many, the migration began in Mexico and carried them throughout California's agricultural valleys. While laboring on particular farms, workers frequently stayed in camps with substandard living conditions and worked under oppressive foremen.⁶¹⁸

The state played a critical role in nurturing this system. Twentieth-century federal irrigation projects transformed California's large valleys into fertile fields.⁶¹⁹ New Deal price and crop support programs also subsidized and insured farmers and tended to privilege those who already had large operations. While the federal government aided growers, key New Deal labor laws did not protect farmworkers.⁶²⁰ State universities and agricultural experiment stations also performed important farm-based research and demonstration projects that tested the latest techniques. The federal government also assisted growers in recruiting foreign labor, most notably between the 1940s and 1960s when it helped them hire workers from Mexico with the Bracero Program. This support forged an alliance between the state and federal governments and California's growers.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁸ Benny J. Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900–1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2016); Linda C. and Theo J. Majka, *Farmworkers, Agribusiness, and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*.

⁶¹⁹ Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*; Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁶²⁰ Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Richard Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966); Paul E. Mertz, *New Deal Policy and Southern Rural Poverty* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

⁶²¹ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

California's growers also possessed a fairly unified set of beliefs shaped by their shared engagement with similar farming circumstances. They envisioned California agriculture as possessing "exceptional features," particularly the need for highly liquid labor markets. Growers expected their workers to be "civically unengaged and continually replaced."⁶²² They believed that the cycle of planting and harvesting, and its inherent vulnerabilities, necessitated such an arrangement. Further, while growers valued state assistance, they rejected regulations that impinged upon their control over production. California's growers institutionalized their worldview in organizations like the California State Farm Bureau and in periodicals like *California Farmer*. This ideological unity, combined with state support and economic power, frequently allowed them to wield great influence within the market and government. This structural power would raise significant hurdles for farmworkers and CRLA lawyers.⁶²³

Despite the entrenched power of California's large growers, resistance to their dominance has been a regular feature of the state's agricultural history. Benny Andrés documented the history of farmworker organizing in California's Imperial Valley in the early twentieth century, and its violent suppression at the hands of growers.⁶²⁴ In 1933 tens of thousands of workers, especially in cotton, launched a major strike that halted much of the farm economy and triggered aggressive repression from growers.⁶²⁵ This opposition by

⁶²² Elizabeth Lamoree, "The Managed Crisis: Labor Relations and Management in California, 1930–1980" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2012), 12–13.

⁶²³ Steven Stoll, *The Fruits of Natural Advantage: Making the Industrial Countryside in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Lamoree, "Managed Crisis," 16–17.

⁶²⁴ Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*.

⁶²⁵ Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexicans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929–1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

growers did not prevent the building of a new postwar labor movement around Cesar Chavez, who, along with Dolores Huerta and Larry Itliong, pursued farmworker unionization through the United Farm Workers (UFW).⁶²⁶

Over the same period of time, Mexican Americans fought for justice in a variety of arenas not related to labor. The League of United Latin-American Citizens pursued equal civic participation for Mexican Americans throughout the Southwest in the mid-twentieth century.⁶²⁷ In 1947 Mexican American civil rights activists won the landmark Mendez v. Westminster School District case. This case came out of California's then agriculturally oriented Orange County and successfully challenged the segregation of Mexican American students.⁶²⁸ This long history of political and economic organizing helped clear the ground for CRLA's use of the legal system to help California's farmworkers.

Litigation on behalf of the poor also predated CRLA. "Legal aid societies" first appeared in New York in the 1870s and by 1960 employed around four hundred attorneys. This small group of attorneys, however, could not effectively serve the nation's estimated 50 million poor people.⁶²⁹ Legal aid societies also received little funding. Private funds supported their activity, and, at their height in 1962, these societies spent only \$4 million providing legal support to the poor.⁶³⁰ Moreover, legal aid societies did not see their role as

⁶²⁶ Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*; Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory*; Ernesto Galarza, *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970); Sam Kushner, *Long Road to Delano* (New York: International Publishers, 1975).

⁶²⁷ Cynthia E. Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Mario Garcia, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930–1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Benjamin Marquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of Mexican American Political Organization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

⁶²⁸ Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941–1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Ch. 3.

⁶²⁹ Earl Johnson Jr., *Justice and Reform: The Formative Years of the American Legal Services Program* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1974), 4; Alan W. Houseman, "Political Lessons: Legal Services for the Poor—A Commentary," *Georgetown Law Journal* 83 (1994–5): 1671.

⁶³⁰ Johnson, *Justice and Reform*, 8–9.

reforming society or even changing the law. Reginald Smith, one of the most vocal proponents of early legal aid, argued that US laws were “eminently fair” and that lawyers should focus only on expanding access to the justice system.⁶³¹

Changes in the legal profession during the 1960s made the sort of legal activism pursued by CRLA possible. The period’s idealism gave birth to “new public interest lawyers” who wanted to use their profession to promote progressive change.⁶³² A 1964 article written by attorneys Jean and Edgar Cahn proved equally significant.⁶³³ The Cahns criticized lawyers who did not see the social import of their profession and called for the creation of neighborhood law centers that would take up the causes of the poor. These centers would embed lawyers within the communities they served in order to make them better vehicles for reform.⁶³⁴

James Lorenz’s early career reflected these changes. Brooklyn-born and a 1964 graduate of Harvard Law School, Lorenz moved to Los Angeles and practiced real estate law for a corporate law firm. Lorenz, however, had a strong streak of idealism and felt constrained by the large firm’s atmosphere. While he admitted to knowing little about farming, he worked for a time as legal counsel for the Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers but found the group’s urban location prevented it from genuinely helping

⁶³¹ Reginald Heber Smith, *Justice and the Poor: A Study of the Present Denial of Justice to the Poor and of the Agencies Making More Equal Their Position Before the Law, with Particular Reference to Legal Aid Work in the United States* (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1919), 15.

⁶³² “The New Public Interest Lawyers,” *Yale Law Journal* 79, no. 6 (May 1970): 1070; Thomas Hilbink, “Constructing Cause Lawyering: Professionalism, Politics, and Social Change in 1960s America” (PhD diss., New York University, 2006).

⁶³³ Johnson, *Justice and Reform*, 40–41.

⁶³⁴ Don Broyles, “Poverty and Social Reform: OEO Legal Services and the Case of California Rural Legal Assistance” (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1976), 172–74; Jean C. and Edgar S. Cahn, “The War on Poverty: A Civilian Perspective,” *Yale Law Journal* 73, no. 8 (July 1964): 1317–52.

farmworkers.⁶³⁵ Lorenz's discontent pushed him to create a group in line with the Cahns' theory of neighborhood lawyering, and he found critical financial support in the recently declared War on Poverty.

The War on Poverty's Legal Services Program (LSP) combined the new enthusiasm for reform among young attorneys and the Cahns' ideas of neighborhood lawyering to reshape legal aid. By 1967 the LSP had disbursed \$42 million to legal services organizations throughout the United States for the creation of neighborhood law centers.⁶³⁶ In contrast to the practice of legal aid societies, LSP guidelines maintained that funded groups should pursue law reform in addition to expanding access to the legal system.⁶³⁷ Lorenz put the matter more starkly and argued that legal services should be "concerned with the reallocation of power."⁶³⁸ To be sure, the LSP did not grant lawyers total freedom. They could not take criminal or fee-generating cases, or, more importantly for CRLA, represent unions.⁶³⁹

In his applications for funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which administered the War on Poverty from Washington, DC, Lorenz placed farmworkers' problems at the center. He highlighted in particular the impact of weak labor regulations. Given the poverty line of \$3,000, for example, Lorenz showed that approximately 84 percent of California's three hundred thousand farmworkers lived in poverty in 1965.⁶⁴⁰ Lorenz argued that a key source of this poverty was the fact that New Deal protections for industrial

⁶³⁵ Broyles, "Poverty and Social Reform," 174.

⁶³⁶ Johnson, *Justice and Reform*, 174.

⁶³⁷ Davis, *Brutal Need*, 33; *Guidelines for Legal Services Programs* (Washington, DC: Office of Economic Opportunity, 1967); "The New Public Interest Lawyers," 1074.

⁶³⁸ "The New Public Interest Lawyers," 1075.

⁶³⁹ "CRLA Refunding Proposal for 1971," Folder 9, Box 7, Papers of California Rural Legal Assistance, Special Collections, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California (hereafter cited as CRLA Papers).

⁶⁴⁰ "Proposal to Aid Farm Workers and Other Poor Persons Residing in the Rural Areas of California," Mar. 1966, p. 2, Folder 7, Box 5, CRLA Papers.

workers did not extend to people who labored on the farm. The 1935 National Labor Relations Act did not extend collective bargaining rights to farmworkers, and the workplace regulations of the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act did not apply to the fields.⁶⁴¹

Lorenz also argued that power imbalances in the farm economy exacerbated farmworkers' problems. Lorenz believed that an "inequitable distribution of wealth and power" characterized California agriculture and that CRLA must "develop long-range remedies which would assist the poor as a class and not just isolated individuals."⁶⁴² This analysis shaped his rationale for constructing a statewide, as opposed to a local, program. Lorenz argued that growers had already "amalgamated into regional or state-wide groups," so CRLA must do the same.⁶⁴³ Lorenz therefore understood agriculture in terms of class conflict and believed the solution to farmworker poverty could be found in organizing workers.

While Lorenz emphasized class issues, he also factored the racialized character of California's agriculture into his analysis. CRLA highlighted the problems faced by people of Mexican descent, given their predominance in the labor force. California's growers believed these workers had certain physical and psychological characteristics that suited them for the conditions of farm labor.⁶⁴⁴ Lorenz argued that these workers faced racial discrimination on top of labor exploitation and that the two worked together to worsen their poverty.⁶⁴⁵ CRLA's attorneys also knew that racism extended beyond the field. The group took cases

⁶⁴¹ "Proposal to Aid Farm Workers," p. 2, Folder 7, Box 45, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁴² "Proposal to Aid Farm Workers," p. 36, Folder 7, Box 45, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁴³ "Proposal to Aid Farm Workers," p. 15, Folder 7, Box 45, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁴⁴ Cozzens, "Defeating the Devil's Arm," 502.

⁶⁴⁵ "Proposal to Aid Farm Workers," p. 3, Folder 7, Box 45, CRLA Papers.

that affected Mexican American farmworkers in the realms of education, municipal services, housing, and access to welfare.⁶⁴⁶

Although Lorenz and CRLA's attorneys believed litigation could ameliorate farmworker poverty, they understood its limitations. Gary Bellow, who worked in legal aid societies in New York and Washington, DC, before serving as deputy director for CRLA, believed that law reform, no matter how radical, would be inadequate.⁶⁴⁷ Bellow argued that "the problem of unjust laws is almost invariably a problem of distribution of political and economic power."⁶⁴⁸ Without strict enforcement, legal changes carried little weight. Lorenz also included social movements in his vision of an effective legal service group. He argued that CRLA's legal action would have to be a "catalyst for political consciousness and organizing" outside the courtroom as well.⁶⁴⁹ Thus, CRLA's attorneys did not see the law as the final arbiter of farmworker problems.

The program crafted by Lorenz matched the LSP's agenda, and the OEO funded CRLA generously. CRLA initially received \$1,276,138 (Lorenz had asked for less) in 1966. With that money, CRLA opened a central office in San Francisco as well as nine offices in important agricultural areas in the state. The regional offices in Madera, Santa Rosa, El Centro, Salinas, Santa Maria, McFarland, Modesto, Gilroy, and Marysville formed the organization's spine and put it in close contact with farmworkers.⁶⁵⁰ Lorenz had originally intended to establish an office in Delano because of its links to ongoing farmworker

⁶⁴⁶ "CRLA Refunding Proposal for 1967," Dec. 6, 1966, pp. 22, 43, 61, Folder 1, Box 7, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁴⁷ On Bellow's life before CRLA, see "Oral History Interview with Gary Bellow, conducted by Zona Hostetler," NEJL Oral Histories Collection, National Equal Justice Library, DigitalGeorgetown, <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/709332> (accessed Jan. 21, 2019).

⁶⁴⁸ "The New Public Interest Lawyers," 1077.

⁶⁴⁹ "The New Public Interest Lawyers," 1077.

⁶⁵⁰ Michael Bennett and Cruz Reynoso, "California Rural Legal Assistance: Survival of a Poverty Law Practice," *Chicano Law Review* 1 (1972): 2.

struggles. Sargent Shriver, the OEO's first director, suggested locating it in nearby McFarland to minimize the ire of growers.⁶⁵¹ CRLA's funding coincided with the formation of similar legal assistance groups in Texas, Florida, and other southern agricultural states.⁶⁵²

CRLA also used its funds to recruit attorneys who, in general, shared Lorenz's elite educational background. Almost all graduated at the top of their classes and received degrees from law schools including Harvard, Boalt Hall, and the University of Michigan. Not only did these attorneys receive their education in urban areas, they largely worked in cities before arriving in rural California. Nonetheless, their desire for social change led them to leave the city and establish themselves in farm country.⁶⁵³ CRLA's trouble in hiring lawyers of Mexican descent suggested the "Anglo" background of the legal team. In 1971 Lorenz declared CRLA's attempts to hire Mexican American attorneys to better reflect its clientele a failure. He proffered that CRLA's failures here reflected the highly competitive job market for Mexican American attorneys, which meant they could fetch a salary CRLA could not match.⁶⁵⁴

Talented lawyers aside, CRLA's formation would have been far less successful without the larger mobilization of California's farmworkers. CRLA formed in the midst of intense farmworker organizing throughout the Southwest that led to the formation of the UFW.⁶⁵⁵ Chavez and Itliong also served initially on CRLA's board.⁶⁵⁶ Chavez did express some skepticism of CRLA, however, primarily because OEO restrictions limited its ability to

⁶⁵¹ Bennett and Reynoso, "Survival of a Poverty Law Practice," 8.

⁶⁵² On Texas, see "Our History," Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid website, <https://www.trla.org/who-we-are> (accessed Jan. 21, 2019); Florida, "Our History," Florida Rural Legal Services website, <https://www.frls.org/about-us/our-history/> (accessed Jan. 21, 2019); on the South more generally, see Shepard, *Rationing Justice*.

⁶⁵³ "CRLA Refunding Proposal for 1967," Dec. 6, 1966, p. 32, Folder 1, Box 7, CRLA Papers; *El Camino Rural*, June 15, 1967, pp. 5–6, Folder 8, Box 100, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁵⁴ "CRLA Refunding Proposal for 1971," p. 45, Folder 9, Box 7, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁵⁵ On UFW organizing in the mid-1960s, see Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, Chs. 8–12.

help the union directly.⁶⁵⁷ At least one farmworker found this constraint too frustrating. When Lorenz informed him that he could not strike with the union, the worker told Lorenz to “go to hell” and quit CRLA.⁶⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the growing farmworker movement provided CRLA with a reservoir of potential clients, legal actions, and the momentum to challenge entrenched grower power.

While at least one farmworker quit over CRLA’s inability to walk the picket line, many more joined. Indeed, CRLA took seriously the OEO’s mandate to achieve the “maximum feasible participation” of the poor.⁶⁵⁹ CRLA gave decision-making authority to California’s rural poor, and those who became involved in CRLA shaped its pro-labor agenda. For example, Citizens Advisory Councils, populated by farmworkers and other clients, helped decide the sorts of cases attorneys should pursue. Councils formed at CRLA’s regional offices and a representative from each council sat on CRLA’s board of directors.⁶⁶⁰ Council members demanded that CRLA take cases that would “maximize the bargaining position of the poor” and improve field conditions.⁶⁶¹ The councils’ demands also impacted the decisions made by the board of directors. One board statement said that CRLA should focus on “eliminating the causes of poverty and the conditions of inequality. . .” and that “Cases affecting the employment of poor people” should receive top priority.⁶⁶² These statements provide important insights into how farmworkers conceived of their situations. Labor issues emerged as central problems CRLA’s clients wanted the group to address.

CRLA also incorporated “community workers” into its operation, and these community workers pushed a labor-focused agenda. Because they often had farm work

⁶⁵⁶ “Proposal to Aid Farm Workers,” p. 21, Folder 7, Box 45, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁵⁷ Cozzens, “Defeating the Devil’s Arm,” 502.

⁶⁵⁸ “Closing Memorandum of CRLA,” May 1971, pp. 56–57, Folder 7, Box 7, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁵⁹ *Guidelines for Legal Services Programs*, 10.

⁶⁶⁰ “CRLA Refunding Application for 1968,” p. 15, Folder 1, Box 45, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁶¹ “CRLA Refunding Application for 1968,” p. 16, Folder 1, Box 45, CRLA Papers.

backgrounds themselves, community workers helped CRLA attorneys discover and understand problems faced by many farmworkers. They also interviewed clients and did investigative fieldwork. Many spoke both English and Spanish and therefore became a critical link between Anglo lawyers and Spanish-speaking farmworkers.⁶⁶³ Rueben Rodriguez exemplified the role of community worker in CRLA. Before joining CRLA, Rodriguez worked with the Central California Action Association, which provided basic education and vocational skills to the area's seasonal workers.⁶⁶⁴ Rodriguez worked in CRLA's Madera office and responded to complaints of field violations by investigating and filing reports. Before he filed paperwork, Rodriguez worked with the growers and the California Farm Bureau, which oversaw field conditions, to bring about voluntary compliance. Because growers and the state farm bureau seldom cooperated with CRLA, Rodriguez's research played a critical role in informing CRLA's litigation.⁶⁶⁵

The community workers involved with CRLA also provided their own analyses of farmworker poverty. Community workers articulated their ideas through the formation of a union. Because CRLA's caseload regularly numbered in the thousands each year, these workers initially sought to impose limits on the number of cases on which they worked.⁶⁶⁶ Gilbert Flores led the charge. Born in Lemoore, California, he had worked in the fields since

⁶⁶² "CRLA Refunding Application for 1971," pp. 37–38, Folder 9, Box 7, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁶³ "Community Worker Position Description," ca. 1968, Folder 11, Carton 99, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁶⁴ "Noticiero CRLA," Jan. 1, 1969, California Rural Legal Assistance website, <http://www.crla.org/sites/all/files/content/archive/crla-noticiero/California%20Rural%20Legal%20Assistance%20Inter%20Office%20NewsLetter,%20January%201,%201969.pdf> (accessed Jan. 21, 2019); Maia Sortor, *Central California Action Associates, Inc.* (Washington, DC: Office of Economic Opportunity, 1968), available online through Education Resources Information Center, Institute of Education Sciences, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED045236.pdf> (accessed Jan. 21, 2019).

⁶⁶⁵ "Closing Memorandum of California Rural Legal Assistance," May 1971, pp. 201–11, Folder 7, Box 7, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁶⁶ Between 1967 and 1968 alone, CRLA accepted over ten thousand cases. "CRLA Refunding Application for 1968," p. 29, Folder 1, Box 45, CRLA Papers.

the age of five, and his parents, who migrated from Mexico, participated in the great cotton strike of 1933. Flores learned to organize laborers working first with the Community Service Organization in 1957, then with the UFW.⁶⁶⁷ Writing on the necessity of a community workers union, Flores declared that unions played a role “essential to the economic, social, and political freedom of society,” and that “under prevailing economic conditions,” unorganized workers could not secure good wages or working conditions.⁶⁶⁸ Flores’s rhetoric complemented that of Lorenz and should be read as a critique not only of the situation of community workers, but of the conditions faced by workers more broadly. The union succeeded in winning wage increases, insurance benefits, and caseload limitations for community workers.⁶⁶⁹

The issues faced by community workers extended beyond workload. A conflict between Flores and Edward Mattison, who coordinated community worker training, suggests that racism surfaced within the group. Flores complained that Mattison abused his authority and failed to understand farmworkers. In a suggestive statement, Flores claimed that “we would rather lose our jobs than be pushed around because we are Mexicans and defeat the purpose for which we were hired.” Flores not only highlighted racial tension within CRLA but also suggested that workers of Mexican descent in CRLA linked economic with racial justice. A union offered a way for these community workers to stake a claim for equality within CRLA, even as they fought with the lawyers against growers. CRLA’s lawyers and farmworkers shared a critique of agriculture and the conditions of its workers that

⁶⁶⁷ “Oral History, Growing Up in a Migrant Worker Family,” Farmworker Movement Documentation Project, University of California San Diego Library, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/medias/oral-history/> (accessed Jan. 19, 2019).

⁶⁶⁸ “Preamble to the Constitution of the Community Workers Union,” Feb. 13, 1967, Folder 11, Box 99, CRLA Papers.

⁶⁶⁹ “Community Worker Contract,” Folder 11, Carton 99, CRLA Papers.

foregrounded labor empowerment as the solution. These shared assumptions laid the groundwork for their collaboration in litigation that sought to reshape California agriculture.

CRLA's use of LSP funds to reform California's farm economy began early on in the group's history. One of its most significant cases started in 1967 and morphed into two suits: *Wetherton v. Martin Produce Co.* and *Wetherton v. Growers Farm Labor Association*. These suits revolved around the question of growers' ability to fire workers for unionization. Section 923 of California labor law affirmed that workers had the right to "full freedom of association, self-organization, and designation of representatives of [their] own choosing . . . and that [they] shall be free from the interference, restraint, or coercion of employers of labor, or their agents."⁶⁷⁰ While California's labor law appeared to apply to all workers, federal law did not extend collective bargaining rights to farmworkers. By pursuing these cases, CRLA hoped to clearly define the right of farmworker unionization.

These cases came out of CRLA's field office in Salinas, located in one of California's most fertile valleys and a central hub of farmworker organizing. Robert Gnaizda and Martin Glick served as the office's lawyers. Before running the Salinas office, both men worked on civil rights cases for the Justice Department in Mississippi.⁶⁷¹ Four community workers staffed the office, including two farmworkers and an organizer named Hector De La Rosa. CRLA hired De La Rosa following his success in civil rights organizing and securing federal funds to build better housing for farmworkers in Soledad.⁶⁷² De La Rosa's abilities fit well

⁶⁷⁰ Quoted from "Wetherton v. Growers Farm Labor Association," Justia US Law website, <https://law.justia.com/cases/california/court-of-appeal/2d/275/168.html> (accessed Sept. 20, 2017).

⁶⁷¹ Maurice Jourdane, "California Rural Legal Assistance Celebrates Fifty Years," *Huffington Post*, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/maurice-jourdane/california-rural-legal-as_b_13285032.html (accessed Jan. 21, 2019).

⁶⁷² Lori A. Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 173; Dora Noton, "Hector de la Rosa and Jesus Lopez: Voices of the People," *Monterey County Weekly*, Dec. 31, 1998, http://www.montereycountyweekly.com/news/local_news/voices-of-the-people/article_5983158a-36d8-56de-8312-97a6e3734895.html (accessed Jan. 21, 2019).

with the sort of office Gnaizda sought to build, one focused on helping farmworkers expand their bargaining power.⁶⁷³

In August 1967 carrot grower John Martin, owner of Martin Produce Co., fired nine farmworkers after he discovered they had joined the UFW. The first farmworker to be fired at Martin Produce, Manuel Ortiz, told Gnaizda about an altercation he had with Martin shortly after being fired. Ortiz met with Martin, an unnamed field foreman, and E. James Houseberg, the vice president of both the Growers Farm Labor Association and the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association. Martin Produce belonged to both organizations. During this meeting, Ortiz recounted that Houseberg questioned him extensively about union activity. Houseberg told Martin during this meeting that “all of his employees could be fired because the unions had no power” in the area. Houseberg then commanded Ortiz to tell the others attempting to organize that “they would be fired if they joined a union.” On August 8, when Martin learned that eight other men had joined the union, he fired them.⁶⁷⁴

Ortiz’s story proved to be crucial for the suits brought by CRLA’s Salinas office. The attorneys argued in *Wetherton v. Martin Produce Co.* that Martin and his company violated the policy established by section 923 and could be tried under section 922, which stated that any person who “coerces or compels” an employee not to join a union as a condition of employment is guilty of a misdemeanor.⁶⁷⁵ Ortiz’s account of the cooperation between Martin and Houseberg also allowed CRLA to bring a suit against Houseberg and the two grower associations. Gnaizda and Glick argued in *Wetherton v. Growers Farm Labor Association* that Houseberg and the associations formed a conspiracy to deny Ortiz and the

⁶⁷³ “Report to the Office of Economic Opportunity and CRLA Board of Trustees on Operations of California Rural Legal Assistance,” May 24–Nov. 25, 1966, Folder 1, Box 7, CRLA Papers; Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 173.

⁶⁷⁴ “*Wetherton v. Growers Farm Labor Association*,” FindLaw website, <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/ca-court-of-appeal/1826732.html> (accessed Sept. 20, 2017).

⁶⁷⁵ “*Wetherton v. Growers Farm Labor Association*.”

others their labor rights and should be found guilty of violating sections 922 and 923 of the California labor code.⁶⁷⁶

In their suit against Martin Produce, Gnaizda and Glick settled with the carrot grower out of court and managed to get Ortiz and the other workers reinstated. However, Houseberg's lawyer, Andrew Church, challenged the suit against his client in California's First District Court of Appeal. There, Church argued that sections 922 and 923 only applied to so-called "yellow dog contracts"—those an employee signed that promised he or she would not unionize. Church further argued that because the associations did not employ the fired workers, they could not be held liable under labor law. The court disagreed. In its decision, it argued that a 1961 case rendered the meaning of sections 922 and 923 clear: they applied not only to yellow dog contracts but to all forms of coercion. Church's other claim proved stickier. The court admitted the associations did not employ the workers, but Ortiz's testimony clearly suggested they formed a conspiracy to violate labor law. The court argued that Houseberg made statements with "menacing connotations concerning union activity" and, given the cooperation between Houseberg and Martin in their interrogation of Ortiz, suggested the existence of a "joint project for Martin to discharge appellants and for Houseberg to influence other growers" not to hire them.⁶⁷⁷ The court ultimately found Houseberg and the growers' associations also responsible for illegally firing the farmworkers.

The court's ruling affected both the individual workers and the broader farmworker movement. The case revealed the extent of grower power in California but also that it could be effectively challenged. The court awarded the workers damages, future preference for jobs at Martin Produce, and an agreement between Martin and the workers to pay the latter no less

⁶⁷⁶ "Wetherton v. Growers Farm Labor Association."

than \$4,500 each year they worked.⁶⁷⁸ *El Malcriado*, the UFW's newspaper, hailed the cases as "historic" decisions that finally placed farmworkers under the protection of California labor law.⁶⁷⁹ Indeed, the cases forged a major step forward in legalizing farmworker unionization by proving that state labor law protected farmworkers. They also served as important precursors to the 1975 Agricultural Labor Relations Act, which provided a legal framework for collective bargaining on the farm.⁶⁸⁰

At almost the same moment that CRLA took up the unionization case, its lawyers in the Modesto office targeted the ability of growers to hire imported labor. This decision to fight labor importation further reveals the ways CRLA hoped to mobilize War on Poverty funds to fight rural inequality. While the Bracero Program formally ended in 1965, the Labor Department continued to help growers hire Mexican workers.⁶⁸¹ CRLA attorney Sheldon Greene, based in Modesto, argued that the ability of growers to easily hire foreign workers at wages lower than the domestic rate undercut farmworker unionization.⁶⁸² Greene's reasoning here complemented the UFW's controversial opinion. Chavez in particular viewed preventing labor importation from Mexico as crucial to strengthening the union.⁶⁸³ The UFW published reports detailing the failure of Immigration and Naturalization Services to prevent

⁶⁷⁷ "Wetherton v. Growers Farm Labor Association."

⁶⁷⁸ "Closing Memorandum of California Rural Legal Assistance," p. 53, May 1971, Folder 6, Box 7, CRLA Papers; Broyles, "Poverty and Social Reform," 265–67.

⁶⁷⁹ "Court Upholds Farm Workers' Right to Unionize," *El Malcriado*, p. 14, Aug. 1969, Farmworker Movement Documentation Project, University of California San Diego Library, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/archives/#malcriado> (accessed Sept. 21, 2017).

⁶⁸⁰ For a discussion of this law and its limits, see Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 509–13, 518, 528–29.

⁶⁸¹ On the Bracero Program, see Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, Ch. 4.

⁶⁸² Sheldon Greene, "Immigration Law and Rural Poverty—The Problems of the Illegal Entrant," *Duke Law Journal* 18, no. 3 (1969): 475–95.

⁶⁸³ Jennifer Gordon, "Law, Lawyers, and Labor: The United Farmworkers' Legal Strategy in the 1960s and 1970s and the Role of Law in Union Organizing Today," *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Labor and Employment Law* 8, no. 1 (2005): 46.

border crossing and demanded that it forcibly remove these workers from the fields and deport them.⁶⁸⁴

As in the Wetherton cases, farmworkers prompted CRLA's intervention. Modesto-area tomato pickers filed a complaint with Greene and told him that growers replaced them with Mexican workers. These growers had in fact requested Labor Department assistance in getting 8,100 workers from across the border.⁶⁸⁵ Replacing domestic workers with foreign ones violated Labor Department protocol. Greene investigated further and found that growers also flouted minimum wage and housing rules governing labor importation.⁶⁸⁶ Greene filed an injunction with the US district court in San Jose and presented evidence that tomato growers did not follow Labor Department standards.⁶⁸⁷ Greene named Labor Department secretary Willard Wirtz, the department itself, and the growers in the suit and sought a temporary block on further labor importation until a stronger mechanism for enforcement of rules could be devised.⁶⁸⁸

The injunction lasted just over two weeks, but its timing, in the middle of the tomato harvest, all but ensured an angry reaction from growers. Bob Meyer, a King City tomato grower, decried what he called CRLA's "harassing legal maneuvers" that prevented him from harvesting his crop.⁶⁸⁹ Les Hubbard, executive assistant for the Council of California Growers, argued that as a result of the suit growers found it better "to lose part of their crops

⁶⁸⁴ Gordon, "Law, Lawyers, and Labor," 46; Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 488–506. This position ultimately caused many to publicly break with the UFW and tarnished its reputation among the many Mexican-born farmworkers.

⁶⁸⁵ "Late Arrival of Braceros Cut Hiring," *Long Beach Independent*, Oct. 11, 1967; "Court Order Halts Worker Importation," *San Bernardino County Sun*, Sept. 10, 1967.

⁶⁸⁶ "Report on Investigation of Certain Activities of CRLA," May 29, 1968, p. 18, Folder 5, Carton 1, CRLA Papers; Broyles, "Poverty and Social Reform," 231–32.

⁶⁸⁷ Harry Bernstein, "Braceros Will Arrive in California on Weekend," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 16, 1967.

⁶⁸⁸ "Judge Dissolves Order Preventing Use of Braceros," *Long Beach Independent*, Sept. 13, 1967; "Tomato Growers Show Optimism in 1967 Crop," *Redlands Daily Facts*, Oct. 5, 1967.

than harvest them at exorbitant costs.”⁶⁹⁰ The council estimated the suit cost growers nearly \$500,000.⁶⁹¹ One US senator from California, Republican George Murphy, blasted the use of tax dollars to sue the government and demanded Shriver “fire” James Lorenz for “improper and irresponsible action.”⁶⁹² CRLA also faced criticism from the Democratic Party. US congressional representative B. F. Sisk of the Fresno area wrote President Johnson that CRLA’s suit would destroy his “constituents,” by which he meant the state’s growers, not the farmworkers.⁶⁹³

The suit ultimately ended in something of a stalemate. CRLA dropped the case when Wirtz agreed going forward to publicly disclose all requests for foreign farm labor and hold hearings when grievances arose.⁶⁹⁴ Further, in 1968 the Labor Department established a committee to review the processes for labor importation. Growers and labor representatives chosen by CRLA would sit on the committee.⁶⁹⁵ CRLA chose Chavez, Bert Corona of the Mexican American Political Association, and Mike Peevey, a representative from the California AFL-CIO. When it came time for the committee to meet in March 1968, however, the growers had not chosen any representatives and in fact boycotted the meeting altogether. Richard Thornton, manager of the California-Arizona Farm Labor Association, called it a “pressure play . . . to force recognition of the unions.” Lorenz expressed amazement that the growers would resist the government “by refusing to meet in the same room with

⁶⁸⁹ Harry Bernstein, “Tomato Growers Blame Politics for Crop Losses,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 29, 1967.

⁶⁹⁰ “Late Arrival of Braceros Cut Hiring,” *Long Beach Independent*, Oct. 11, 1967.

⁶⁹¹ Bernstein, “Tomato Growers Blame Politics for Crop Losses.”

⁶⁹² Bernstein, “Tomato Growers Blame Politics for Crop Losses.”

⁶⁹³ Bennett and Reynoso, “Survival of a Poverty Law Practice,” 8–9.

⁶⁹⁴ “Judge Dissolves Order Preventing Use of Braceros,” *Long Beach Independent*, Sept. 13, 1967; “Agreement Reached on Bracero Program,” *Redlands Daily Facts*, Sept. 13, 1967.

⁶⁹⁵ Harry Bernstein, “Growers Boycott Panel on Foreign Workers,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 5, 1968; “Judge Dissolves Order Preventing Use of Braceros,” *Long Beach Independent*, Sept. 13, 1967.

representatives of labor and the Mexican American community.”⁶⁹⁶ Wirtz punished growers by refusing to provide them with foreign workers for the rest of 1968.⁶⁹⁷ Wirtz’s decision provided CRLA with a significant, albeit temporary, victory that made it more difficult for growers to employ strikebreaking laborers hired abroad.⁶⁹⁸ CRLA nonetheless abandoned the issue soon after, and the case suggests the limits of a litigation-based strategy in the face of overwhelming grower power, their demand for cheap labor, and the state’s willingness to acquiesce.

A third case, originating in the Salinas office, operated at the nexus of welfare and labor rights and further illustrates CRLA’s efforts to reform California agriculture. The case, *Ramos v. County of Madera*, stemmed from the closure of Madera’s schools for the week of September 18, 1967, in order to help growers get labor for an emergency grape harvest. The Madera County Welfare Department also assisted growers by visiting recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and telling them they would lose their benefits unless they and their children over the age of ten worked the harvest. One welfare department caseworker told the Segovia family, for example, that the mother’s disabled arm and need to care for her developmentally disabled child should not prevent them from working in the fields. The caseworker made harassing phone calls to the Segovia household and forced the mother to leave the child unattended at home while she worked. Members of the Valera, Vega, Segovia, and Ramos families, who eventually sought CRLA’s help, all complied and worked under what they testified to be substandard conditions. The fields had no toilets, first aid kits, or clean drinking water. One child fell ill as a result of the work, and another was

⁶⁹⁶ The quotes from Thornton and Lorenz are both from Bernstein, “Growers Boycott Panel on Foreign Workers.”

⁶⁹⁷ Greene, “Immigration Law and Rural Poverty,” 478.

⁶⁹⁸ Broyles, “Poverty and Social Reform,” 239–42.

injured. Eventually, these families had their assistance revoked because the welfare department deemed their work inadequate.⁶⁹⁹

The families originally appealed to the Madera County Welfare Department to have their benefits reinstated. After several months of silence from welfare officials, they sought the help of CRLA attorneys Dennis Powell, Maurice Jourdane, and Ralph Abascal. Powell filed a suit in the Madera County court against the county government, the welfare department, and its officials, charging that they violated statutes governing field conditions and broke child labor laws by forcing children under the age of sixteen to work. Powell and his clients sought damages and class injunctive relief, in this case demanding that the welfare department stop breaking welfare and labor law. The attorneys for the defendants, Roy Wolfe and Edward Chidlaw, challenged Powell's case because the AFDC recipients had not exhausted the administrative grievance processes. They further argued that the welfare department's actions fell within its "discretion" and that the department could not be held liable for damages. The judge, Thomas Coakley, sided with the county.⁷⁰⁰

Powell appealed to the California Supreme Court, where he eventually found success. Here, Powell restated his previous arguments but also argued that his clients had not exhausted the welfare department's remedies because it could not reward damages or class injunctive relief. The court would have to settle this matter. The justices unanimously agreed that, because the welfare department only dealt with individual cases, the class-action nature of this case fell out of its bounds. Further, they found that the defendants violated state welfare law by creating new eligibility requirements, which only the state could do, by making the families work in an emergency harvest. The defendants violated their duty to

⁶⁹⁹ This narrative was taken from *Ramos v. County of Madera*, 4 Cal. 3d 685; and *Ramos v. County of Madera* 5 Civ. 1144.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ramos v. County of Madera* 5 Civ. 1144, in particular the respondent's brief and the appellants opening brief.

“obey legislative enactments” by forcing people to work under conditions that violated California’s labor code. CRLA’s clients received their damages, and the court issued an injunction against the defendants.⁷⁰¹ Like other CRLA cases, Ramos had a broader impact. As a result of the decision, welfare recipients in California had the ability to sue welfare department employees and their employers, as well as other state officials responsible for causing injury. According to legal scholar Timothy Muris, welfare recipients could now better force public employees to “fulfill their duties of care.”⁷⁰² CRLA’s litigation, shaped by farmworkers, ultimately provided an effective challenge to the intertwined power of growers and the state.

These successes, however, also engendered significant opposition. Indeed, hostility toward CRLA materialized quickly, even before it began winning controversial cases. Soon after CRLA received funding in 1966, the California State Bar, whose members often supported growers, enacted an anti-CRLA resolution. The board saw nefarious purposes in CRLA and attacked it for championing “militant advocacy . . . [for] the contentions of one side in an economic struggle now pending.” Clinton Bamberger, the LSP’s director, called this analysis “about the best . . . definition of the War on Poverty” he had heard.⁷⁰³ In a 1966 Fresno Bee article, O. W. Fillerup, vice president of the Council of California Growers, called CRLA an illegitimate “social project to aid the rural poor.”⁷⁰⁴ Though Lorenz dismissed Fillerup’s comments as a reflection of his “bourgeois ideology,” he could not deny

⁷⁰¹ *Ramos v. County of Madera*, 4 Cal. 3d 685.

⁷⁰² Timothy Muris, “Scaling the Welfare State: Expanding Concepts of Governmental Employee Liability,” *UCLA Law Review* 21 (1973): 626.

⁷⁰³ Bennett and Reynoso, “Survival of a Poverty Law Practice,” 5.

⁷⁰⁴ The Council of California Growers had often vigorously fought unionization attempts. See, John Gregory Dunne, *Delano: The Story of the California Grape Strike* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967). The article in the *Fresno Bee* was republished in its entirety in *El Camino Rural*, CRLA’s internal newsletter. See *El Camino Rural*, Nov. 1966, Folder 8, Box 100, CRLA Papers.

that CRLA intended to aid California's farmworkers and challenge the power of growers over them.⁷⁰⁵

While CRLA's attorneys and their clients saw a labor-focused legal strategy as the best method for improving the bargaining position of farmworkers, they pursued a wide array of cases. Indeed, between July 1967 and June 1968, CRLA took over ten thousand cases touching on a variety of aspects of rural poverty and inequality. Housing issues, discrimination, education, divorce proceedings, and bankruptcy cases all went through the doors of CRLA offices. Importantly, CRLA's attorneys did not see these non-labor cases as distinct from their overall strategy of reforming rural California's political economy. According to Lorenz, the cases that might reform the structure of California farm labor law could not be separated from "the daily aspects of the campaign."⁷⁰⁶ Even seemingly simple cases, Lorenz argued, opened a window into issues "common to the entire class" and emanated from their political, social, and economic positions.⁷⁰⁷ The daily casework of CRLA's attorneys and community workers reflected the group's larger vision of racial and economic justice in rural California.

CRLA's actions against discrimination in municipal services in Wasco reflect this aspect of the group's work. Rural communities in rural California did not often have modern public infrastructure like water and sewer lines, especially when farmworkers made up the majority of those communities. In Wasco, located in Kern County, the situation was particularly bad. Wasco had two separate water systems. One was public owned and served most of the town, and a second, privately owned water system that served a low-income section of town populated by sixty households of black and Mexican American farmworkers.

⁷⁰⁵ *El Camino Rural*, Nov. 1966, Folder 8, Box 100, CRLA Papers.

⁷⁰⁶ "CRLA Refunding Proposal for 1967," Dec. 6, 1966, p. 32, Folder 1, Box 7, CRLA Papers.

⁷⁰⁷ "CRLA Refunding Application for 1968," p. 15, Folder 1, Box 45, CRLA Papers.

These farmworkers had long complained about the quality of their water and claimed that it was cloudy and smelled bad and stained their clothes when they used it for washing laundry. They took their complaints to the city who had the water analyzed. The results revealed no problems with the water.⁷⁰⁸

Unsatisfied with the city's tests, in early 1967, these farmworkers brought their complaints to CRLA attorney Carol Silver, who headed up CRLA's regional office in nearby MacFarland.⁷⁰⁹ Silver took new water samples provided by the farmworkers to a private chemist for new testing, which revealed dangerous impurities in the water.⁷¹⁰ Silver's office filed suit against the public and privately owned utility companies as well as the California Board of Health. After lengthy negotiations, Silver and the farmworkers reached a settlement with the privately owned water company. In response to the suit, the utility paid \$3,000 to each family and instituted new regulations to improve water quality.⁷¹¹ While the Wasco case did not have the sort of far-reaching implications of cases like *Wetherton* and *Ramos*, it did reflect CRLA's attempts, however limited at times, to improve farmworkers' lives.

CRLA also took on discrimination against Mexican American and Spanish speaking students in California's school system. In 1970, CRLA challenged a common practice in California schools that saw tens of thousands of Spanish speaking students classified as "educable mentally retarded." The practice was brought to the agency's attention by farmworkers in Soledad whose child, Diana, had received an English-only IQ test. Because she scored poorly on it, the school placed Diana in an "EMR" class with eight other students,

⁷⁰⁸ *The Poor Seek Justice: Legal Services in Action* (Legal Services Program: Washington D.C., 1967), 12.

⁷⁰⁹ "CRLA Refunding Proposal for 1967," Dec. 6, 1966, p. 32, Folder 1, Box 7, CRLA Papers.

⁷¹⁰ Martha Minow, "Political Lawyering: An Introduction," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 31 (1996), 287-288.

⁷¹¹ *Law in Action: A Monthly Account of the Legal Services Program* (Legal Services Program: Washington D.C., 1967), 1.

all of whom spoke Spanish as their primary language. Initially, CRLA arranged for Diana and the other students to retake the IQ test in Spanish, where they scored much higher and forced the school to place them in standard classes. Afterward, CRLA filed a lawsuit, *Diana v State Board of Education*, that challenged the practice statewide. CRLA won the suit, and as a result 22,000 Spanish speaking students who had been placed in EMR classes as a result of taking English-only IQ tests were allowed to retake the test in Spanish. Moreover, the suit forced the State Board of Education to develop culturally relevant IQ tests that would fairly test Spanish-speaking students.⁷¹²

CRLA also took on major voting rights discrimination in California in 1967. Prior to that year, California's state constitution contained an English literacy requirement for voting. This rule dated back to 1894 and was pushed for inclusion in the constitution by Republican assemblyman A.J. Bledsoe from Humboldt. Bledsoe had a clear anti-democratic outcome in mind, stating that its purpose was to protect the ballot from "the ignorant classes." Bledsoe had been a member of a vigilante group named the Committee of Fifteen that forcibly expelled Chinese immigrants from Humboldt. Seventy years later, the requirement had obvious negative implications on California's farmworkers who did not often have proficiency in English. Lorenz himself filed a lawsuit against Governor Ronald Reagan and other state officials on behalf of Mexican American and Puerto Rican farmworkers who brought the problem to CRLA's attention. The case took three years to resolve, but in 1970 the State Supreme Court ruled the English-language provision unconstitutional.⁷¹³ CRLA's anti-discrimination suits in the realms of municipal services, education, and voting rights fit well within its larger vision of agricultural reform. These cases reflected an attempt on the

⁷¹² "Caseload Analysis," ca. 1971, Folder 9, Box 7, CRLA Papers; "Report on Education Task Force," ca. 1971, Folder 3, Box 313, CRLA Papers.

part of CRLA to pursue a broader vision of rural reform grounded in racial and economic justice.

CRLA's early successes, however, engendered significant opposition. California governor Ronald Reagan emerged as its leader, and his anti-CRLA campaign reflected his larger efforts as governor to restrict access to social services in the state.⁷¹⁴ In 1970 Reagan began compiling a case against CRLA that would justify stripping it of its OEO funding.⁷¹⁵ Governors could veto funding for anti-poverty programs within their states but had to provide proof that the program violated OEO rules. To build his case against CRLA, Reagan hired Lewis Uhler to head the California state OEO. Uhler's past suggested he would not be favorable to CRLA. John Rousselot, director of public relations for the John Birch Society, suggested Uhler to Reagan. After graduating from Boalt Hall in 1958, Uhler worked with the John Birch Society under Rousselot, who recommended Uhler because he had a "reputation for being painstaking and thorough in research."⁷¹⁶ Uhler put his skills to work in the creation of the 1970 Report of the Office of Economic Opportunity Commission on California Rural Legal Assistance, which formed the basis for Reagan's case against CRLA.⁷¹⁷

Uhler composed his report with evidence culled from a questionnaire sent to 3,400 judges and attorneys in California and from interviews he conducted with past clients and defendants in CRLA cases.⁷¹⁸ Uhler's report levied three charges. First, CRLA cooperated

⁷¹³ Carl Greenberg, "Latins Move to Void English Testing in Voting," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 May 1967; Philip Hager, "Literate Latins Ruled Eligible for State Vote," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 March 1970.

⁷¹⁴ Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough: Welfare and Imprisonment in 1970s America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁷¹⁵ Steven Roberts, "California Legal Aid Program Faces Threat of a Reagan Veto," *New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1970.

⁷¹⁶ Bennett and Reynoso, "Survival of a Poverty Law Practice," 23.

⁷¹⁷ Lewis Uhler, *Report of the Office of Economic Opportunity Commission on California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. to the Honorable Frank Carlucci* (San Francisco: California State OEO, 1970).

⁷¹⁸ Bennett and Reynoso, "Survival of a Poverty Law Practice," 26.

illegally with the UFW. Second, CRLA ignored clients in order to “chase” class-action lawsuits. Finally, the group had subverted “local control,” meaning that it often operated, with federal funding, against the wishes of local bar associations.⁷¹⁹ The credibility of Uhler’s report proved dubious. Only the first charge actually violated OEO rules.⁷²⁰ Even conservative columnist James Kilpatrick called it as biased as an “evaluation of the Chicago Police by Eldridge Cleaver.”⁷²¹ Nonetheless, the report provided Reagan with what he needed to try to undermine CRLA, and on December 26, 1970, Reagan told the federal OEO he intended to veto its funding.⁷²²

While CRLA would eventually be cleared of these charges, that outcome could not be guaranteed. It seemed at first that CRLA would be sacrificed on the altar of Republican Party politics. President Richard Nixon and Governor Reagan represented the party’s different wings, and Nixon knew he needed the support of the popular conservative figure going into the 1972 election.⁷²³ Nixon told Republican moderates in California not to “attack Reagan in any ideological dispute” because they needed California’s support at the 1972 convention.⁷²⁴ Reagan also used his office to spread the report’s claims while simultaneously preventing reporters from taking copies home, to preclude the report from being effectively scrutinized.⁷²⁵ Finally, Reagan framed a short-term refunding of CRLA, which the OEO

⁷¹⁹ Uhler, *Report of the Office of Economic Opportunity Commission on California Rural Legal Assistance*.

⁷²⁰ *Guidelines for Legal Services Programs*.

⁷²¹ James Kilpatrick, “Reagan Was Right In Torpedoing CRLA, But Will He Be Upheld?” *Oroville Mercury Register*, Jan. 21, 1971, quoted in Bennett and Reynoso, “Survival of a Poverty Law Practice,” 45.

⁷²² “Reagan Vetoes \$1.8 Million Federal Grant for Poverty Agency,” *New York Times*, Dec. 28, 1970.

⁷²³ Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974–1980* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 31; Douglas Brinkley and Luke Nichter, eds., *The Nixon Tapes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 472.

⁷²⁴ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “The Nixon-Reagan Stare Down,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 3, 1971, quoted in Bennett and Reynoso, “Survival of a Poverty Law Practice,” 47.

⁷²⁵ Bennett and Reynoso, “Survival of a Poverty Law Practice,” 36–37.

provided until the report could be investigated, as part of a gradual phasing out of the program.⁷²⁶

The OEO established a commission composed of three Republican judges to investigate the report's claims. Hearings began on March 27, 1971 and spanned fifteen days. The commission interviewed over two hundred witnesses.⁷²⁷ Reagan and Uhler refused to participate because they did not want a public and adversarial commission, which would subject the report to critical scrutiny, and instead desired a fact-finding committee.⁷²⁸ While the hearings transpired, Reagan continued his media campaign and insinuated that CRLA firebombed an office occupied by former defendants in a CRLA suit.⁷²⁹ Nonetheless, the commission cleared CRLA of all charges. It condemned Uhler and his report, stating that it "unfairly and irresponsibly subjected" CRLA attorneys to "totally unjustified attacks."⁷³⁰ Following the ruling, the OEO fully refunded CRLA.⁷³¹

Though CRLA secured its federal funding, Reagan's attacks had a destabilizing effect on legal services and the War on Poverty.⁷³² LSP supporters called for a politically independent body to administer the program that would be insulated from threats posed by politicians like Reagan. Nixon also sought such a program, if for different reasons. After his own confrontation with Reagan, Nixon wanted an independent program so his administration could be shielded from LSP controversies.⁷³³ Congressional debates over how much power

⁷²⁶ Bennett and Reynoso, "Survival of a Poverty Law Practice," 52.

⁷²⁷ "Closing Memorandum of California Rural Legal Assistance," p. 7, May 1971, Folder 7, Box 7, CRLA Papers.

⁷²⁸ "California to Boycott CRLA Panel," *Washington Post*, Apr. 18, 1971.

⁷²⁹ Bennett and Reynoso, "Survival of a Poverty Law Practice," 61.

⁷³⁰ "Closing Memorandum of California Rural Legal Assistance," pp. 26–28, May 1971, Folder 7, Box 7, CRLA Papers; "CRLA Given Funds over Reagan Veto," *Washington Post*, July 1, 1971.

⁷³¹ "CRLA Given Funds over Reagan Veto," *Washington Post*, July 1, 1971.

⁷³² Bennett and Reynoso, "Survival of a Poverty Law Practice," 79.

⁷³³ Warren George, "The Development of the Legal Services Corporation," *Cornell Law Review* 61, no. 5 (June 1976): 689–90.

the president should have to appoint directors of the new legal services program prevented a quick resolution, but by July 1974 President Gerald Ford signed into law the Legal Services Corporation Act. This act established a new body, the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), to oversee the program.⁷³⁴

Scholars disagree about the law's impact. It had certain advantages, such as instituting a goal of minimum access that required that two legal services lawyers exist for every ten thousand individuals. While the ratio seems low, it provided the LSC with a rationale to expand.⁷³⁵ The act did not, however, provide political insulation for legal services. The LSC depended on Congress for funds, and the president had the power to appoint all members of the corporation's board of directors.⁷³⁶ Further, some have argued that the creation of the LSC turned legal services into a bureaucracy and dulled its potential for law reform.⁷³⁷ Others have contended, however, that law reform flourished in the 1970s and that legal services for the poor would not see their true demise until 1996 as part of President Bill Clinton's broader restructuring of the welfare state.⁷³⁸

CRLA's efforts toward banning the use of short-handled hoes suggests that uncertainty surrounding legal services did not prevent CRLA from taking cases that sought to reform California agriculture. The short-handled hoe came to California with Japanese farmworkers in the late nineteenth century, and its size allowed for precision in shaping soil, removing weeds, and harvesting. However, Japanese farmworkers never used the tool for

⁷³⁴ George, "The Development of the Legal Services Corporation," 698–700.

⁷³⁵ Shepard, *Rationing Justice*, 112.

⁷³⁶ Francis Regan, *The Transformation of Legal Aid: Comparative and Historical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 29

⁷³⁷ Earl Johnson, *To Establish Justice for All: The Past and Future of Civil Legal Aid in the United States* (New York: Praeger, 2013), 447.

⁷³⁸ William Quigley, "The Demise of Law Reform and the Triumph of Legal Aid: Congress and The Legal Services Corporation from the 1960's to the 1990's," *St. Louis University Law Review* 17 (1998): 241.

long because it required them to bend over and strain their backs.⁷³⁹ When growers replaced Japanese workers with other groups, they continued to require the tool's usage. They prized it for its accuracy and efficiency, but for other reasons as well. According to one field supervisor, he preferred the tool because with longer-handled hoes he could not "tell whether they are working or just leaning on their hoes. With the short-handled hoe I know when they are not working by how often they stand up."⁷⁴⁰ The tool became a way for growers to control workers and impose discipline.⁷⁴¹

CRLA's work on the short-handled hoe grew out of farmworker agitation. When workers of Mexican descent became dominant in California's fields, they quickly came to despise the tool, which they referred to as *el cortito*, or "the short one."⁷⁴² Workers regularly resisted its use but failed to have it removed from the fields.⁷⁴³ CRLA's lawyers did not originally target the tool as part of their reform efforts, and it only became part of their agenda because farmworkers demanded that CRLA address it. In 1969 Jourdane and community worker Harry Cantu visited a labor camp outside Salinas as part of a project documenting farmworker housing. One farmworker became exasperated with Jourdane and Cantu's focus on housing and exclaimed, "This is bullshit! There are real problems for you to deal with, like *el cortito*." According to Jourdane, the man's fellow farmworkers "supported his demand." After further visits to the camp, Jourdane and CRLA decided to take on *el cortito*.⁷⁴⁴

After several years of research and interviews, in 1972 Jourdane brought his case against the tool to California's Industrial Safety Board (ISB), an administrative body

⁷³⁹ Murray, "The Abolition of El Cortito," 27.

⁷⁴⁰ Murray, "The Abolition of El Cortito," 28.

⁷⁴¹ Murray, "The Abolition of El Cortito," 29.

⁷⁴² Murray, "The Abolition of El Cortito," 29.

⁷⁴³ Murray, "The Abolition of El Cortito," 30–32.

⁷⁴⁴ The two quotes are taken from Murray, "The Abolition of El Cortito," 32.

responsible for workplace safety regulations. Governor Reagan appointed ISB board members, so Jourdane knew his case would be difficult. However, ISB decisions could be appealed to the state supreme court, where Jourdane believed he would have better luck.⁷⁴⁵ Jourdane argued that the use of the hoe violated Title 8 of the ISB code, which banned unsafe hand tools. Jourdane contended that the ISB, which believed Title 8 applied only to faulty or broken tools, held an overly narrow interpretation. Jourdane presented testimony from farmworkers who complained of the long-term injury the tool caused them and the way growers used it to control their labor. They also stated that a long-handled hoe worked as efficiently as its shorter counterpart. Further, Jourdane presented evidence from doctors who incontrovertibly stated that the tool damaged farmworker bodies. In contrast, growers who argued against CRLA presented no clear counter-evidence but instead claimed that opponents exaggerated the effects of the tool's use. They testified that damage resulted only from improper use.⁷⁴⁶

Jourdane's instincts about the ISB proved correct. The board ruled in July 1973 that the tool could be used in California's fields and that Title 8 only applied to defective tools. Jourdane immediately appealed to the California Supreme Court, which accepted the case. Evelle Younger, the state's attorney general who presented the ISB's case, argued that the court could not overturn the ISB's ruling because CRLA sought a new regulation from the ISB specifically banning the hoe. Justice Matthew Tobriner easily dismissed this argument, however, and claimed CRLA clearly wanted a broader interpretation of an existing regulation, on which the court could rule. Tobriner argued that the ISB too narrowly interpreted its statute against unsafe hand tools and maintained that nothing in the rule, which

⁷⁴⁵ Murray, "The Abolition of El Cortito," 33–34.

⁷⁴⁶ *Sebastian Carmona v. Division of Industrial Safety*, Jan. 13, 1975, Folder 1, Box 313, CRLA Papers; see also "Sebastian Carmona v. Division of Industrial Safety," FindLaw website, <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/ca-supreme-court/1830728.html> (accessed Sept. 24, 2017).

only stated that “unsafe hand tools shall not be used,” justified the ISB’s interpretation. Further, Tobriner argued that other ISB statutes demanded that rules should be given a “liberal interpretation” to ensure worker safety. Tobriner ultimately did not reverse the ISB’s decision but commanded it instead to rethink its decision in light of his argument.⁷⁴⁷ Fortunately for CRLA the recent election of Democratic governor Jerry Brown, seen as sympathetic to farmworkers, changed the composition of the ISB, and on April 7, 1975, the ISB finally issued a ban on el cortito.⁷⁴⁸

In spite of CRLA’s successes, by the end of the 1970s and early 1980s the climate in which it operated shifted and became less hospitable. For example, the UFW’s decline undermined a critical base of CRLA’s support and vitality.⁷⁴⁹ Changes in California’s agricultural economy also challenged CRLA’s unionization victories. Growers circumvented union contracts by breaking their operations into smaller pieces and contracting with nonunion labor. Further, shipper-retailers, who became increasingly powerful in a food supply chain controlled by supermarkets, also bypassed unions by working with nonunion contractors.⁷⁵⁰ Some of CRLA’s victories also proved to be short lived. In the early 1980s reports stated that el cortito had been spotted once again in the fields.⁷⁵¹ Further, public officials frequently ignored the court injunctions made possible by Ramos because they knew

⁷⁴⁷ *Sebastian Carmona v. Division of Industrial Safety*, Jan. 13, 1975, Folder 1, Box 313, CRLA Papers.

⁷⁴⁸ “Use of Short-Handled Hoe Banned by State,” *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 8, 1975; Murray, “The Abolition of El Cortito,” 36–37.

⁷⁴⁹ Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, esp. Ch. 31. See also, Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory*.

⁷⁵⁰ Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 723.

⁷⁵¹ Bill Billiter, “‘It’s Bad,’ Says Worker: Short-Handled Hoe Keeps Turning Up,” *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 8, 1983; Steve Tripoli, “Despite Its Ban, Short-Handled Hoe is Back: El Cortito: It’s Still Taking a Toll on State’s Farm Workers,” *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 8, 1984; David Reyes, “Second Observed Occurrence This Year: Workers Use Outlawed Hoe in Irvine Field,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 17, 1984.

post-decision oversight would be minimal.⁷⁵² These examples substantiated Lorenz and Bellow's arguments that legal activism without strong enforcement from the state and social movements would do little to protect courthouse victories.

Finally, budget cuts and changes in the rules governing the LSC weakened CRLA's position. As president, Reagan continued his attacks on legal services for the poor by slashing the LSC's budget and obstructing its operation by nominating board members hostile to its mission.⁷⁵³ Another blow came from President Bill Clinton. Aside from further budget cutting, Clinton's administration issued a new rule prohibiting LSC-funded groups from engaging in class-action lawsuits.⁷⁵⁴ These laws made it exceedingly difficult to represent farmworkers as a group and achieve far-reaching law reforms.

CRLA's history of legal activism, particularly its labor-focused peak in the 1960s and 1970s, illuminates a key, farm-centered vision of rural reform in the postwar period. In contrast to proponents of rural development, who largely bracketed the question of the farm, CRLA and its farmworker partners saw reform and regulation of the agricultural economy as the proper path for solving problems of rural poverty and inequality. CRLA's attorneys sought to use the legal system to reform the deeply unequal farm economy in California. CRLA focused on improving the bargaining position of California's farmworkers through legal actions that bolstered unionization, improved field conditions, and checked the abuses of grower power. Poor people, in this case primarily Mexican American farmworkers, also played a critical role in shaping CRLA's efforts. They brought complaints to attorneys, investigated field conditions as community workers, and influenced CRLA's labor-focused strategy while sitting on the organization's board.

⁷⁵² Muris, "Scaling the Welfare State," 634–35.

However, CRLA was not the only group pursuing dramatic agricultural reforms. As we will see in the next chapter, across the south black farmers began forming a variety of cooperative ventures in an effort to improve their economic position and create an alternative to the increasingly large-scale agricultural economy spreading across the region in the postwar period.

⁷⁵³ Johnson, *To Establish Justice for All*, 529–34.

Chapter Six

Building a Cooperative Farm Economy in Georgia and Missouri

In California, CRLA set aside questions of landlessness and tenure, focusing instead on improving the bargaining position and workplace conditions of the state's proletarianized agricultural workforce. For the Federation of Southern Cooperatives (FSC), these questions formed the core of its approach to the rural crisis. Spread across the south and lower Midwest with long histories of small farms and agricultural activism, the FSC represented a strand of agricultural reform that embraced a smaller-scale cooperative agriculture as an alternative to industrial farming. Funded early on by the War on Poverty and the Ford Foundation, the group reached its peak in the mid-1970s, with 110 co-ops representing 30,000 southern, mostly African America, farm families.⁷⁵⁵ The FSC did not venerate or romanticize the small farmer, nor did it seek to turn back the clock on agricultural history. Instead, it embraced an agricultural future made up of small, cooperatively organized farms that would create not only a more equitable agriculture but be productive and efficient as well. By improving the economic power of black farmers, the FSC hoped to reverse black rural outmigration and achieve greater political, economic, and racial equality for black farmers. The FSC's leaders wanted to create a black rural renaissance that positioned rural America as a haven and alternative to the city. For the FSC, then, the small farm co-op would be a vehicle for the broader political and economic transformation of black rural America.

An examination of the FSC's work in Georgia and Missouri also illustrates the global character of farm reform projects in the postwar period. As scholars of rural development have shown, experts and ideas often circulated the globe, and development projects tried in

⁷⁵⁴ Regan, *The Transformation of Legal Aid*, 56.

⁷⁵⁵ "A Proposal for the General Support of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives," 21 October 1971, Folder 2086, Box 337, Series 1 Grants, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

one place were often tried in other, quite different, contexts around the world.⁷⁵⁶ The FSC, for example, drew inspiration from land reform projects tried in other countries, particularly Israel. Moreover, local land reform advocates in Missouri's bootheel region had worked on rural development and land reform projects in countries ranging from India to Honduras. Though the FSC and its member co-ops responded to local problems of racial and economic inequality in agriculture, their efforts and ideas formed part of a broader, global discussion surrounding agricultural reform.

This chapter examines the many projects of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. Though the FSC had a presence in every southern state, this chapter will focus on its activities in Missouri and Georgia, which reflected the broad range of cooperative activities undertaken by the FSC. The FSC acted in part as a sort of USDA for black farmers who had found themselves ignored or discriminated against by agricultural institutions. It provided co-op members with information on how to diversify their operations and better manage their farms. It also financed a wide array of cooperative institutions. It helped small farmers band together to purchase and share seeds, machinery, and tools, as well as form cooperative marketing arrangements for the selling and distribution of their goods. Moreover, the FSC supported more experimental communal farming arrangements in both Missouri and Georgia. Like CRLA, the FSC programs and the challenges they posed to entrenched power structures engendered a dramatic backlash. The attacks experienced by the FSC, however, were in some ways far more vicious. While CRLA managed to weather these attacks on its program, the FSC found itself operating on a much smaller, diminished scale by the early

⁷⁵⁶ Amy Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Nancy Kwak, *A World of Homeowners: American Power and the Politics of Housing Aid* (University of Chicago Press, 2015); Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Harvard University Press, 2005); Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

1980s.

When the FSC formed in 1967, southern black farming communities had been struggling with poverty, outmigration, forced expulsion, and institutional neglect for decades. The average size of black-owned farms hovered around 50 acres in the mid-1960s, about a quarter of the size of white farms, and earned only \$883 per year.⁷⁵⁷ The USDA and local lending institutions actively discriminated against these farmers, which cut them off from the financial and technical assistance that would have allowed them to expand and improve their operations.⁷⁵⁸ Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers also found themselves increasingly out of work after the 1930s. New Deal farm policy subsidized farmers who took land out of production. Many of those farmers were white landowners with large farms, and they met the demands of agricultural policy by taking land worked by black tenants out of production. Many of these people simply left the rural south, while others stayed and worked as underpaid farm hands or in low-wage factories. Additionally, as civil rights protests spread across the south, white landowners responded by kicking black activists off the land.⁷⁵⁹ These shifts almost totally did away with the southern sharecropping system and had a dramatic impact on black landowners as well. Between 1954 and 1968, the number of black farm owners dropped from 175,000 to 66,815. In Georgia, the total fell from 12,049 to 4,450 during the same time period.⁷⁶⁰ The FSC grew out of this crisis in black agriculture.

⁷⁵⁷ “Ford Foundation Grant to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” 15 September 1971, Reel 1690, Grants E-F, Ford Foundation Records, RAC; “Agenda for Action: The Technical Advisory Board of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” 27 June 1972, Folder 2088, Box 338, RAC.

⁷⁵⁸ Pete Daniel, *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); “Little Cooperation on Co-ops,” 30-1.

⁷⁵⁹ “Grassroots Cooperatives and Credit” July 1968, Folder 2083, Box 337, RBF, RAC.

⁷⁶⁰ Charles Prejean, “Proposal for Agricultural Development in the Rural Southeast,” February 1975, Folder 2091, Box 338, RBF, RAC; See also, Charles Prejean, “Report of the

The formation of the FSC in 1967 emerged after several years of disparate cooperative organizing among southern black farmers. These cooperatives, which began forming in the early 1960s, sought to fill the void left by the USDA and other rural institutions. Their efforts revolved around helping members gain access to credit and consumer goods, as well as market their agricultural or handicraft products.⁷⁶¹ In 1966, a group of these early cooperative organizers met at the Mt. Beulah Training Center in Edwards, Mississippi to form a central service organization that could support the burgeoning movement. The attendees formed the FSC to coordinate their activities and elected Charles Prejean as the executive director. Prejean himself had come from the black cooperative movement. During his college years in the early 1960s, Prejean helped form a number of cooperatives in southwest Louisiana and continued this work after graduation with the Southern Consumers Cooperative.⁷⁶² By the summer of 1967, Prejean and the FSC had hired a small staff to operate the group's central office in Atlanta.

From that burgeoning southern city, Prejean shaped the FSC into an organization at once intensely practical yet motivated by a broader vision of rural life. On the practical side, the FSC devoted itself to helping small black farmers become more profitable. While Prejean wanted to make farms profitable through enhancing productivity, his solution did not line up with the USDA's emphasis on large-scale monocropping. Prejean argued that black farmers had for too long attempted to grow cotton, corn, or tobacco on plots of land that were too small to turn a profit. Instead, he wanted farmers to diversify and focus on vegetables and

Experiences of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in Working with Black Small Farmers in the Rural South," November 1981, C-1, Reel 2695, Grants E-G, Ford Foundation Records, RAC; "Little Cooperation on Co-ops," April 1973, accessed via "Virtual Vault" at RAC; Lester Salamon, "Black-Owned Land: Profile of a Disappearing Equity Base," April 1974, Folder 23, Box 22, Federation of Southern Cooperatives Records, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans.

⁷⁶¹ "Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Report to the Ford Foundation," ca. October 1971, Folder 41, Box 89, FSC Records.

⁷⁶² "Resume, Charles Prejean," ca. 1978, Folder 12, Box 32, FSC Records.

animal husbandry, which he believed were more economically viable on small farms.⁷⁶³ FSC training programs would teach farmers how to reshape their farms for these new operations, instruct them in basic bookkeeping skills, and provide grants and loans to members so they could purchase seeds, machinery, and other necessary items to reorient their farms.⁷⁶⁴ The FSC did not imagine small farmers achieving this expansion on their own, and believed the cooperative form would be critical for this growth. By helping these small farmers organize co-ops, the FSC positioned them to better pool their limited resources, collectively bargain for higher prices for their products, and lower prices on seeds, fertilizer, and machinery.⁷⁶⁵ For a group of farmers who had long been ignored by the USDA, the FSC's programs represented a major departure.

The FSC sought to do more than simply to improve profitability for black farmers but to build a more equitable farm economy. Prejean saw a small-scale, cooperative farm economy as a counter to what he called the "corporate dominated farming" that had concentrated southern political and economic power.⁷⁶⁶ He envisioned the creation of a small cooperative economy with more widely dispersed landownership that could provide economic security and prosperity for black farmers. For Prejean, the democratic aspects of

⁷⁶³ "Federation of Southern Cooperatives 1972 Annual Report," Folder 2088, Box 338, RBF, RAC; "Ford Foundation Grant to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives," 15 September 1971, Reel 1690, Grants E-F, Ford Foundation Records, RAC; "Untitled Background Information on FSC," ca. 1970, Folder 2084, Box 337, RBF, RAC; "Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Report to the Ford Foundation," ca. October 1971, Folder 41, Box 89, FSC Records.

⁷⁶⁴ "Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Report to the Ford Foundation," ca. October 1971, Folder 41, Box 89, FSC Records; "A Proposal for the Expansion of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives Greenhouse Operation," ca. June 1972, Folder 6, Box 29, FSC Records; "Progress Report and Request for Refunding," 25 August 1970, Folder 2084, Box 337, RBF, RAC; "A Proposal for the General Support of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives," 21 October 1971, Folder 2086, Box 337, RBF, RAC.

⁷⁶⁵ "Twelfth Annual Report, The Federation of Southern Cooperatives, 1978-1979," Folder 14, Box 83, FSC Records; "Untitled Background Information on FSC," ca. 1970, Folder 2084, Box 337, RBF, RAC; "A Proposal to Research Techniques of Assistance to Grass-Root Cooperatives in the Southern and Border States," 10 July 1968, Folder 2083, Box 337, RBF, RAC.

⁷⁶⁶ "Annual Report of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, 1974-1975," Folder 2092, Box 338, RBF, RAC.

co-ops provided the means to achieve these reforms.⁷⁶⁷ The co-op offered a venue for small black farmers to participate in daily economic decision-making that would, in the process, build their economic as well as political power.

For the FSC and Prejean, this democratization of the southern farm economy would not occur without linking agricultural reform with the black freedom struggle. Prejean explicitly framed the co-op as an intervention into the period's civil rights activism. The organization saw a cooperative farm economy as a way to push the black freedom movement in a new direction.⁷⁶⁸ Prejean celebrated the political and civil rights victories of the mid-1960s, but viewed them as "unanchored" and lacking in "economic foundations."⁷⁶⁹ In the wake of the Civil and Voting Rights Acts, Prejean believed that African Americans, especially, black farmers, lacked the economic power to make those rights a reality.⁷⁷⁰ Turning toward economic justice and self-determination, Prejean argued, needed to be the next terrain for black freedom struggles.⁷⁷¹ In rural areas, cooperation among black farmers would give them an economic foundation on which they could achieve political and racial equality and, in the process, revive black rural America.

Indeed, reversing the dramatic depopulation of black rural communities in the south formed a central component of the group's vision of agricultural reform. The FSC made explicit a critique of the city as a place where black political and economic equality could be realized. For Prejean, the city did not represent economic opportunity, but only further

⁷⁶⁷ "Basic Support Program for the Federation of Southern Cooperatives," 5 February 1974, Folder 2090, Box 338, RBF, RAC; "Position Paper," 7 May 1974, Folder 8, Box 29, FSC Records.

⁷⁶⁸ "Background Information on Cooperative Development Financial Institution," 12 December 1969, Folder 2083, Box 337, RBF, RAC.

⁷⁶⁹ "Twelfth Annual Report, The Federation of Southern Cooperatives, 1978-1979," Folder 14, Box 83, FSC Records.

⁷⁷⁰ "Annual Report of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, 1977-1978," Folder 2095, Box 339, RBF, RAC.

⁷⁷¹ "Statement on Improving Federal Services for Minority Rural Community Development and Rural Development in General," 28 April 1976, Folder 2093, Box 339, RBF, RAC.

poverty. He wanted the black cooperative movement to get people back on the land, and to keep the people already there on it. However, Prejean did not portray rural life in idyllic or pastoral terms. Instead, he and the FSC simply saw landed independence and a diversely planted farm, enmeshed in cooperative institutions, as the best means to revive rural black communities and secure political, racial, and economic equality. Prejean's emphasis on getting people back on the land reflected an argument made by proponents of rural development about using development to solve both rural and urban problems. From Prejean and the FSC's perspectives, offering people a better way of life in the country through cooperative farming could also solve problems of urban congestion and poverty.⁷⁷²

These various elements of the FSC program coalesced into a broader vision of rural life. At the center stood the co-op, populated by black farmers who worked small plots of land and planted a diverse farm. This rural economy would be localized, with Prejean imagining "self-sustaining communities throughout the south of...locally owned, financed, and operated businesses."⁷⁷³ This locally owned, cooperatively organized rural economy would also be free of racial subjugation. Prejean wanted to build back farm cooperatives that would not be dependent upon, or dominated by, "white folks."⁷⁷⁴ Importantly, the FSC did not look backward to formulate its new rural vision. The group regularly emphasized that rural communities must have modern services and infrastructure, and that farmers should

⁷⁷² "A Proposal for an Educational Institute for Cooperatives," ca. 1971, Folder 2087, Box 337, RBF, RAC; "Proposal for Agricultural Development in the Rural Southeast," 12 February 1975, Folder 2091, Box 338, RBF, RAC; "History, Goals, and Program of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives," ca. 1972, Folder 29, Box 38, FSC Records.

⁷⁷³ To Bryant George from Charles Prejean, 4 August 1971, Folder 2096, Box 337, RBF, RAC; "Micro-Regional Economic Development Plan and 1971 Report," 2 May 1972, Reel 1690, Section 5.

⁷⁷⁴ To Bryant George from Charles Prejean, 4 August 1971, Folder 2096, Box 337, RBF, RAC.

adopt new technologies and practices when useful.⁷⁷⁵ These locally owned co-ops would be tied into domestic as well as foreign markets. Prejean wanted black farmers to be part of the “world economic system” and open agricultural markets abroad to black southern farmers.⁷⁷⁶ Thus, the FSC articulated a vision of rural America that was locally owned and controlled, free of economic and racial exploitation, and agriculturally productive.

One place the FSC tried to make this rural vision a reality was at its farm in Epes, Alabama. Working in the model of extension support to farmers, the FSC founded a 1,300 acre “Rural Training, Research, and Demonstration Farm” in western Alabama.⁷⁷⁷ Though it followed a model not unlike that of the USDA, its mission, and the people it supported, differed quite dramatically. Jim Jones, director of the Epes facilities and a former SNCC organizer, wanted to improve small farms in an “increasingly mechanized, sophisticated, and capital-intensive” agricultural economy.⁷⁷⁸ Jones’ goal, though, was not to have small farmers replicate their larger competitors, but build an alternative model of agricultural development focused on cooperation and agricultural diversity. The Epes farm also extended its services to farmers who had never been assisted by the USDA or agricultural colleges.

⁷⁷⁵ “Micro-Regional Economic Development Plan and 1971 Report,” 2 May 1972, Reel 1690, Section 5; “Federation of Southern Cooperatives Proposal, 8 December 1971,” Folder 2087, Box 337, RBF, RAC; “Federation of Southern Cooperatives 1972 Annual Report,” Folder 2088, Box 338, RBF, RAC; “Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Report to the Ford Foundation,” ca. October 1971, Folder 23, Box 17, FSC Records.

⁷⁷⁶ To Bryant George from Charles Prejean, 4 August 1971, Folder 2096, Box 337, RBF, RAC.

⁷⁷⁷ Thomas Bethell, “In Defense of Freedom’s Victory: The Ordeal of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” Folder 2099, Box 340, RBF, RAC; “Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Loan Proposal, Folder 2, Box 58, FSC Records; “Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Summary Report of Activities for Quarter Beginning 1 September 1971 and Ending 30 November 1971,” Folder 2087, Box 337, RBF, RAC.

⁷⁷⁸ “Little Cooperation on Co-ops;” “Federation of Southern Cooperatives – Institute,” ca. 1972, Folder 4, Box 32, FSC Records; “1971 Annual Report to the Board and Membership of FSC,” Folder 3, Box 83, FSC Records; “History, Goals, and Program of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” ca. 1972, Folder 29, Box 83, FSC Records; “Federation of Southern Cooperatives Proposal,” 8 December 1971, Folder 2087, Box 337, RBF, RAC; “Federation of Southern Cooperatives 1972 Annual Report,” Folder 2088, Box 338, RBF, RAC; “Report of the Experiences of

Jones wanted to extend services to black farmers who owned small plots of land. Sometimes, farmers would travel to the Epes farm to attend classes, while at other times the Jones sent out agricultural experts to meet with people on their farms.

The main outline of the program at the Epes farm can be seen through its “Small Farmers Training School.” This program, conducted at the farm, instructed farmers in basic farm management principles, but also in the agricultural and cooperative principles that underlay the FSC. The school led classes, for example, about the benefits of year-round crop production and crop diversity. In contrast to the specialization and monocropping pushed by the USDA, the FSC’s training school not only praised the benefits of diverse crops, but also the introduction of small cattle and swine operations.⁷⁷⁹ The training school taught farmers basic skills in bookkeeping, farm management, and soil testing. While these studies might seem prosaic at first, in the context of black exclusion from the farm institutions like the USDA that had historically imparted this knowledge, these classes appeared radical. The FSC hired agricultural experts to teach these classes and would have been some of the first experts many black farmers learned from.⁷⁸⁰ Aside from learning new skills in planting and management, small farmers also studied how farm cooperatives worked, as well as the social and economic principles that undergirded the FSC’s vision of a cooperative farm economy. In 1971 alone, over 1,200 co-op members participated.⁷⁸¹ While Jones wanted the Epes farm to help farmers survive in an agricultural economy shaped by the precepts of the USDA, the emphasis on small scales and crop diversity in its training programs explicitly challenged mainstream farm policy’s adherence to the big farm and monocultures. In this way, Epes

the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in Working With Black Small Farmers in the Rural South,” November 1981, Reel 2695, Section 1.

⁷⁷⁹ “Third Quarterly Report, Fiscal Year 1971-2,” Reel 1690, Section 5.

⁷⁸⁰ To Bryant George from Charles Prejean, 27 July 1971, Folder 23, Box 17.

⁷⁸¹ “Proposal for Small Farmers Training Fall Crop Program and General Support of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” November 1971, Folder 8, Box 20, FSC Records.

epitomized the FSC's commitment to small black farmers as well as its broader vision of how rural America and agriculture should be structured.

Aside from training co-op members at the Epes farm, the FSC also provided financial and technical assistance to cooperatives organized by small landowners and renters. The West and East Georgia Farmers' Cooperatives exemplified the sorts of co-ops the FSC helped. West Georgia, one of the FSC's first members, formed in 1963 in Harris County, while farmers founded East Georgia in Waynesboro in 1968.⁷⁸² Both co-ops emerged in predominately black, poor, and rural counties.⁷⁸³ Like the FSC membership more broadly, tenure status in these co-ops varied. Tenants made up the majority in the East Georgia co-op, while landowners predominated in West Georgia.⁷⁸⁴ Comprehensive membership totals are sketchy, but at their heights in the mid-1970s, the West and East Georgia co-ops had 400 and 700 members, respectively.⁷⁸⁵ Like the broader FSC, both co-ops conceived of their mission in terms of preventing rural outmigration and expanding the political and economic power of black farmers.⁷⁸⁶

The low-incomes of the farmers who composed the West and East Georgia Cooperatives meant that they had to rely extensively on financial assistance from the FSC to build their institutions. Funding from the FSC revolved in part around helping co-ops build

⁷⁸² Lee Simowitz, "Dixie's Many-Sided Co-ops Endeavor to Boost Poor," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 4 May 1969; "Support Proposal for East Georgia Farmers Cooperative," 10 May 1976, Folder 22, Box 16, FSC Records.

⁷⁸³ "Agricultural Cooperative Concentrated Assistance Program," ca. 1971, Reel 1690, Section 3; "Report of the Experiences of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in Working With Black Small Farmers in the Rural South," November 1981, PB-4, Reel 2695, Section 1.

⁷⁸⁴ To Rockefeller Brothers Fund from C.Z. Ballard, 1 November 1971, Folder 37, Box 64, FSC Records; Simowitz, "Dixie's Many-Sided Co-ops Endeavor to Boost Poor."

⁷⁸⁵ "A Proposal for the Support of a Feeder Pig Project at the West Georgia Cooperative," ca. 1973, Folder 2, Box 79, FSC Records; "The Executive Director's Report, ca. 1971," Reel 1690, Section 3.

⁷⁸⁶ "Support Proposal for East Georgia Farmers Cooperative," 10 May 1976, Folder 22, Box 16, FSC Records; "A Proposal for the Support of a Feeder Pig Project at the West Georgia Cooperative," ca. 1973, Folder 2, Box 79, FSC Records.

up a cooperative infrastructure that could provide a variety of services to members that would strengthen cooperative ties among farmers. The FSC provided loans and grants to the co-ops so that they could construct sheds and purchase cooperatively owned tools.⁷⁸⁷ Similarly, FSC financing allowed the co-ops to purchase larger items, particularly trucks, that farmers could use to transport their goods to the market.⁷⁸⁸ With FSC support, the West Georgia Cooperative opened its own gas station to provide discounted fuel to farmers.⁷⁸⁹ FSC assistance also helped the East Georgia Cooperative start a “custom work” program that provided farmers with machine repair and other services essential to farm operation.⁷⁹⁰

The major focus of FSC assistance, though, went toward helping cooperatives and their members improve their incomes so that they could stay on the land. In part, the FSC helped the Georgia co-ops purchase seeds for their members, broker marketing arrangements with favorable terms, and establish farmers markets.⁷⁹¹ Another major program focused on extending agriculture production into the winter. This “winter crop program” saw the FSC provide the Georgia co-ops with seeds, plants, fertilizers, pesticides, and technical assistance so they could begin growing late season vegetables to diversify production and generate an income year-round.⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁷ “West Georgia Cooperative, Request for Funds,” ca. 1969, Folder 2, Box 79, FSC Records.

⁷⁸⁸ To FSC Executive Board from Charles Prejean, 8 June 1971, Folder 24, Box 28, FSC Records; for a glimpse into the many loans the FSC provided, see Folder 22, Box 23, FSC Records.

⁷⁸⁹ “FSC Annual Meeting,” April 1969, Folder 3, Box 79, FSC Records.

⁷⁹⁰ “Support Proposal for East Georgia Farmers Cooperative,” 10 May 1976, Folder 22, Box 16, FSC Records.

⁷⁹¹ For examples, see “Sweet Potatoes,” 26 October 1979, Folder 48, Box 19, FSC Records; “Application for Assistance, Submitted by: the West Georgia Cooperative Agricultural Program,” ca. March 1971, Folder 2, Box 79, FSC Records.

⁷⁹² “A Proposal for the Support of a Winter Crop Program and the General Program of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” 4 August 1970, Folder 2084, Box 337, RBF, RAC; “Federation of Southern Cooperatives Second Quarterly Board of Directors Meeting,” 4 March 1971, Folder 2085, Box 337, RBF, RAC; “Memorandum to Dana S. Creel from Thomas A. Waman,” 1 October 1970, Folder 2085, Box 337, RBF, RAC; “Proposed Budget for Small Farmers Winter Crop Experimentation and Training Program”, ca 1970, Folder 2085, Box 336, RBF, RAC.

The FSC also partnered with the Heifer Project, Intl. to help the West and East Georgia co-ops develop a “feeder pig” operation. The Heifer Project, based in Little Rock, Arkansas, was a nonprofit development group that provided livestock to farmers in poor agricultural communities throughout the world. One of its programs focused on providing farmers feeder pigs, typically forty to eighty-pound farm-raised pigs sold for slaughter. The FSC saw feeder pig operations as potentially lucrative ventures for their member co-ops. Feeder pig programs had low initial overhead and promised relatively quick returns. The FSC’s partnership with Heifer allowed the group to provide the West and East Georgia co-ops with pigs, as well as financial and technical assistance to help farmers fence in land, construct the necessary buildings, and market the pigs once they reached maturity. The program also helped each co-op establish pig raising operations on land owned collectively by the co-ops, with the goal of creating a supply of pigs that could be distributed to members. Income accrued from the feeder pig program varied. FSC statistics suggest that farmers brought in anywhere from \$800 to \$5,000 extra a year.⁷⁹³

While the West and East Georgia co-ops represented the average co-ops funded by the FSC, the group also supported more experimental, far-reaching cooperative ventures. Exemplary in this regard was New Communities Inc. (NCI). Formed in southwest Georgia in 1969, NCI attempted to establish communal farming villages instead of cooperatively organizing individual landowners or renter. At the head of NCI stood Charles Sherrod, a minister and organizer of the Southwest Georgia Project, which spearheaded rural civil rights

⁷⁹³ “A Proposal for the Support of a Feeder Pig Project at the West Georgia Cooperative,” ca. 1973, Folder 2, Box 79, FSC Records; To Thurl Metzger from Ralph Paige, 7 April 1975, Folder 37, Box 17, FSC Records; “Support Proposal for East Georgia Farmers Cooperative,” 10 May 1976, Folder 22, Box 16, FSC Records; “West Georgia Farmers Cooperative, Description, History, and Progress Report,” 29 January 1976, Folder 3, Box 79, FSC Records; To Wendy Segal from Ralph Paige, 2 March 1973, Folder 2, Box 79; “Agricultural Cooperative Concentrated Assistance Program,” ca. 1971, Reel 1690, Section 3.

organizing in the region.⁷⁹⁴ Robert Swann and Slater King, who also played pivotal roles in civil rights organizing in southwest Georgia, helped Sherrod found NCI.⁷⁹⁵

Despite its embrace of cooperative farming, NCI fit in well with the FSC's larger goals and provided some of its most full-throated justifications for the cooperative as a rural alternative to outmigration and as a consummation of civil rights activism. Sherrod's turn to land reform came out of his southern voting rights organizing in the early 1960s. Sherrod's experience attempting to organize black tenant farmers taught him that the "man who owns the land owns you."⁷⁹⁶ Much like Prejean and the broader FSC, Sherrod saw landed independence as key to black equality and as the best way to make concrete the political and civil rights victories of the mid-1960s. Given its focus on landed independence, NCI's leadership expressed major skepticism about the city as a refuge for black Americans. Swann, for example, framed the co-op as a way to get black families back on land which had been stolen or expropriated in "one way or another from them."⁷⁹⁷ Sherrod also argued that the "exodus" of rural people to the cities needed to stop. The co-op would create a rural refuge and be an "economically viable alternative to urbanization for landless tenants and

⁷⁹⁴ On Sherrod's upbringing and early activism, see Folders 9, 12, and 15, Charles Sherrod Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin; Stephen Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1970* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

⁷⁹⁵ To Harlan Joye from Robert Swann, 4 June 1970, Folder 50, Box 54, National Sharecropper Fund Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan; "Planning for a Rural New-Town in Southwest Georgia, A Preliminary Prospectus," March 1969, Folder 51, Box 54, NSF Records; Shimon Gottschalk, "Planning Radical Change at the Grassroots: The Story of New Communities, Inc.," *The Journal of Sociology and Welfare* 4, no. 7 (September 1977).

⁷⁹⁶ "Planning for a Rural New-Town in Southwest Georgia, A Preliminary Prospectus," March 1969, Folder 51, Box 54, NSF Records.

⁷⁹⁷ To Harlan Joye from Robert Swann, 4 June 1970, Folder 50, Box 54, NSF Records; Sherrod made a similar statement. See, "New Communities, Inc., Bold Black Experiment," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 December 1973.

sharecroppers.”⁷⁹⁸ The farm cooperative could provide an economic independence and prosperity that work in industrial cities could not.

Though focused on the particular problems faced by black rural southerners, NCI’s program drew on knowledge and expertise from land reform initiatives abroad. NCI’s plans for a cooperative farming venture in the south became more concrete after a trip by Sherrod, Swann, and King to Israel in 1968 in order to study that country’s agricultural co-ops. Over the course of the trip, the group visited several Israeli farm communities and spoke to government officials to learn about the country’s farm policies.⁷⁹⁹ The men spent most of their time studying the moshav-style farming community.⁸⁰⁰ The moshav was made up from a cluster of small, privately owned farms, typically ten acres or less, with collectively farmed plots and communally-owned farm machinery. Typically, one hundred to one thousand people lived and worked in the moshav, which provided them with marketing services, transportation, irrigation, credit, education, and a variety of other services. In the late 1960s, Israel’s three hundred moshavs produced nearly fifty percent of all its farm products.⁸⁰¹ Sherrod’s interest in Israeli farm co-ops reflected the FSC’s curiosity with Israeli agriculture more broadly. Prejean and others in the FSC also travelled to Israel twice in the late 1960s study Israeli farming techniques. Like Sherrod, Prejean liked Israeli agriculture for its ability to mix support for small farmers with highly productive agriculture.⁸⁰²

⁷⁹⁸ “Planning for a Rural New-Town in Southwest Georgia, A Preliminary Prospectus,” March 1969; “Meeting of Fund-Raising Committee of New Communities, Inc.,” 25 August 1969, Folder 10, Box 56, NSF Records; “A Proposal for the Development of Rural New Towns,” 20 January 1969, Folder 42, Box 59, FSC Records.

⁷⁹⁹ To Charles Prejean from Charles Sherrod, 9 July 1968, Folder 8, Box 28, FSC Records.

⁸⁰⁰ Gottschalk, “Planning Radical Change.”

⁸⁰¹ To Mitchell Sviridoff from Bryant George, 24 January 1972, Folder 2087, Box 337, RBF, RAC; Ehud Yonay, “Small Farms in Israel: Will They Work Here?” *Independent Press-Telegram*, 4 August 1974; Nora Levin, “The Southern Cooperatives: Working to Save Rural America,” *The Courier-Journal*, 13 June 1971.

⁸⁰² To Charles Prejean from Bryant George, 4 October 1971, Reel 1690, Section 4, General Correspondence; “A Proposal for the Support of a Winter Crop Program and the General Program of

Much closer to home, NCI also consciously drew from New Deal precedents.⁸⁰³ During the 1930s, one of the biggest proponents of cooperative agriculture within the Roosevelt administration was Rexford Tugwell, a Columbia University economist who became a major proponent of a far-reaching reimagining of U.S. farm policy. Tugwell proselytized the large, cooperatively run farm as the solution to a whole host of rural and agricultural issues. In 1935, Roosevelt appointed Tugwell the head of the Resettlement Administration, an agency focused on solutions to farm poverty. For a short period of time, Tugwell used the agency to establish cooperative farms, but found his hopes dashed by proponents of more conventional farm arrangements within the administration and conservatives in Congress. Sherrod pointed to this earlier program and some of the successes it had achieved, calling his plans more than just a “will-of-the-wisp.”⁸⁰⁴

Sherrod’s embrace of the RA’s plans and legacy illustrates important continuities between prewar and postwar farm reform efforts. NCI’s final plans reflected the lessons it drew from Israel and the New Deal on the benefits that could be derived from cooperative farming. NCI’s plan revolved around the purchase of a large, 4,800 acre plot of farmland in Lee County, for which it would be the sole owner. NCI’s staff would select people from the southwest Georgia region who would live and work on the land and have rights to a particular plot of land for as long as they lived on it. Sherrod imagined that each community would have fifty to one hundred homes clustered around a central square, which would have light industry and essential social services. Each home would have a small subsistence plot and beyond those plots would be a larger piece of land farmed communally. As NCI became financially stable, Sherrod envisioned this model spreading throughout the rural south. This

the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” 4 August 1970, Folder 2084, Box 337, RBF, RAC; “Board of Directors Meeting, January 10-12, 1969,” Folder 27, Box 84, FSC Records.

⁸⁰³Gottschalk, “Planning Radical Change.”

⁸⁰⁴ “Planning for a Rural New-Town in Southwest Georgia, A Preliminary Prospectus.”

plan to turn a piece of southwest Georgia into a communal farm hinged on substantial financial support from the Office of Economic Opportunity. The OEO initially granted NCI a small sum to plan and scout for locations. It also expected a much larger, \$1 million grant to finance the purchase of the land.⁸⁰⁵

However, well-organized opposition from local, state, and national elites ultimately pushed the OEO to deny NCI that essential grant. The earliest source of opposition came from E.L. Forrester, who represented southwest Georgia in Congress between 1951 and 1965. Afterward he became a prominent local lawyer.⁸⁰⁶ Politically, Forrester sat on the far-right of the southern Democratic Party. Forrester had been in contact, for example, with the extreme right-wing Christian Nationalist Coalition, which shaped how he understood NCI. The group sent Forrester a map they produced depicting the borders of a southern “Negro Communist State” intent on taking over the region. Forrester told the coalition that saw this supposed communist takeover as a “highly active threat.”⁸⁰⁷ This statement reflected more than just Forrester’s attempt to placate his constituents. Soon after corresponding with the group, Forrester began writing Georgia Senator Richard Russell, warning him about the NCI’s attempt to create an “all-negro community” to “takeover” Lee County and urged him to do what he could to obstruct it.⁸⁰⁸ Russell passed these concerns on to Donald Rumsfeld, who at this time headed the OEO, and other agency officials.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁵ To Harlan Joye from Robert Swann, 4 June 1970, Folder 50, Box 54, NSF Records; Harold Logan, “He’s Building a New Home Town,” *The Boston Globe*, 12 January 1973; “To Board Members and Friends from Robert Swann, 29 April 1969; Folder 42, Box 59, FSC Records.

⁸⁰⁶ Sam Pruitt, “‘Sharecropper City’ in Lee Backed by Federal Funds,” *Albany Herald*, 2 November 1969, clipping in Folder 5, Box 46, Forrester Papers.

⁸⁰⁷ A copy of the map is in Folder 5, Box 46, Forrester Papers; The quote is from a letter. See, to S.T. Turnipseed from E.L. Forrester, 16 September 1969, Folder 5, Box 46.

⁸⁰⁸ To Richard Russell from E.L. Forrester, 21 August 1969, Folder 1, Box 23, Russell Collection; To Richard Russell from E.L. Forrester, 10 December 1969, Folder 5, Box 46, Forrester Papers.

⁸⁰⁹ See Folder 1, Box 23, Russell Collection.

Another critical source of opposition came from local War on Poverty funded groups in Lee County. Otis Hill, the chairman of the Lee County Neighborhood Service Center and owner of a car dealership, claimed he did not outright oppose NCI, but did set up meetings that provided an outlet for local opponents to organize and express their concerns.⁸¹⁰ At the regional level, the Southwest Georgia Community Action Council, chaired by a lawyer named Sam Gardner, came out staunchly against any further funds for NCI. This opposition from Forrester and southwest Georgia's War on Poverty groups eventually trickled up to Governor Lester Maddox. Governors had the ability to veto OEO funded projects in their state, which then forced the OEO director to overrule or sustain the veto. Maddox's long history opposition to civil rights did not portend well for NCI. When it came time to decide whether to veto NCI's grant application, Maddox labelled the group a "refuge" that would perpetuate what he called the "vicious cycle of poverty." He promised to veto all of NCI's requests for OEO grants, which placed the burden of funding NCI in the hands of Rumsfeld's OEO, who could choose to override the state level veto.⁸¹¹

Rumsfeld ultimately sided with Maddox and the opposition to NCI. At the end of September 1970, the OEO decided not to fund NCI. Joe Maldonado, the assistant director for OEO's program development, stated that the decision came as a result of a report produced by the Southwest Georgia Community Action Council. This report highlighted a lack of local support for NCI and the poor quality of farmland the group sought to purchase. This latter point in particular contradicted an assessment of the land's quality performed by NCI in

⁸¹⁰ Terry Adamson, "Maddox Kills \$96,124 OEO Leesburg Grant," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 14 August 1970.

⁸¹¹ "OEO Studies Veto of Its Sharecropper City Grant," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 23 July 1970; Jack Anderson, "Featherfield Fails: Maddox Joined the Establishment to Take Fizzle out of Black Dream," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 15 November 1970; To Richard Russell from Lester Maddox, 28 October 1970, Folder 1, Box 23; Russell Collection.

conjunction with a private contractor.⁸¹² Nonetheless, this denial forced NCI to look elsewhere for funds if it wanted to purchase the land, and the group turned to the private mortgage market to secure the bulk of the financing. The group signed an \$800,000 mortgage with Prudential Insurance, with the remaining \$200,000 balance covered by church-based economic development groups and the National Sharecropper Fund.⁸¹³ While this arrangement allowed NCI to secure the largest tract of black-owned land in the U.S., it also put it into a deep debt from which it would never escape and which caused major operational problems.⁸¹⁴

The loss of OEO funding also forced NCI to recalibrate its plans. Though it had initially hoped to parcel out land to families immediately, the need to pay down the debt shifted the group's priorities. Sherrod and the NCI leadership operated the farm essentially as a landlord, land use planner, and foreman: NCI's farm management committee would decide what to plant and would hire farm hands to do the work. NCI embraced the FSC's call for diversely planted fields, and focused its efforts on growing staple commodities, as well as vegetables, cattle, and pigs. Sherrod hoped that such a mixture would allow NCI to get its debt under control so it could begin the process of parceling out land to families.⁸¹⁵ However, the farm never cleared nearly enough profit to begin making payments on the \$100,000

⁸¹² To Richard Russell from Joe Maldonado, 30 September 1970, Folder 1, Box 23, Russell Collection; "Planning for New Communities, Part 1, Technical Proposal Prepared for New Communities Inc.," 17 June 1969, Folder 2, Box 23, Russell Collection.

⁸¹³ "New Communities, Inc., Prospectus 1970," 1 October 1970, Folder 37, Box 55, NSF Records; To Leonard Styche from John McClaughry, 25 November 1969, Folder 50, Box 54, NSF Records; Harold Logan, "He's Building a New Home Town," *The Boston Globe*, 12 January 1973; To Friends of New Communities from Robert Swann, 14 January 1970, Folder 42, Box 59, FSC Records.

⁸¹⁴ On the claim that the tract was the largest black-owned plot of land, see Gottschalk, "Planning Radical Change at the Grassroots."

⁸¹⁵ Gottschalk, "Planning Radical Change at the Grassroots;" "NCI Board Meeting," 17 October 1970, Folder 37, Box 55, NSF Records; "Farm Summary," October 1971, Folder 37, Box 55, NSF Records; "New Communities, Inc., Bold Black Experiment," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 December 1973.

yearly mortgage payment. By the end of the 1970s, NCI owed over \$1 million in debt.⁸¹⁶

Aside from mounting debt, NCI faced adverse planting conditions. Drought plagued much of southwest Georgia throughout the 1970s, which hindered the effective cultivation of the land.⁸¹⁷

While NCI suffered from a hostile opposition and financial troubles, other problems emerged from circumstances under the leadership's control. Most significantly in this regard, farm mismanagement and worker exploitation undercut NCI's ability to function. The latter problem in particular undermined the group's calls for racial and economic justice. In 1974, workers at NCI launched a strike in an attempt to correct course. Led by a farmworker named Leroy Wilkins, workers charged that NCI's problems emerged from the incompetence of farm manager Harrison Miller and marketing director Linda Youngblood. Wilkins reserved his strongest critiques for Sherrod, who he called a "master criminal and principle architect of our abuses." Wilkins charged Sherrod with hoarding what little money NCI made to pay high salaries for himself and the leadership. To fix NCI, Wilkins argued that workers needed more control over its operations. Moreover, Wilkins wanted a shift in farm operations away from production for profit and toward a model of production for use. This anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian message led workers to engage in a six-month strike, during which Sherrod replaced most of the workers with scabs. In response, Wilkins pushed Georgia's state-level FSC leaders to oust NCI from the group but could not secure a majority vote. By the middle of 1975, worker activism fizzled, and Sherrod declared the "labor problem" over.⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁶ Diana Smith, "Commissioner Recounts Path from Chain Gang to Settlement," *The Greenville News*, 19 February 1984; Dallas Lee, "Poverty Project Deep in Debt," *Florida Today* 28 February 1972.

⁸¹⁷ "New Communities, Inc. Board Meeting," 23 July 1977, Folder 48, Box 59, FSC Records.

⁸¹⁸ "New Communities Presentation," 20 July 1974, Folder 15, Box 29, FSC Records; To FSC Executive Committee from NCI Workers Committee, 25 December 1974, Folder 33, Box 68, FSC Records; To Board Members from the Farm Committee, ca. January 1975, Folder 33, Box 68, FSC Records; To Woodrow Keown from K.C. Childers, 7 April 1975, Folder 20, Box 21, FSC

However, NCI struggled with profitability over the course of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and NCI's goal of becoming a haven for displaced tenants and sharecroppers never materialized.

Though the deep south formed the center of the FSC, the group's vision of cooperative farming extended north to Missouri's bootheel region, one of state's most productive agricultural areas. There, a group of ex-sharecroppers and reform minded ministers formed BASIC, Bootheel Agricultural Services Incorporated, in 1966. BASIC, which joined the FSC soon after its founding, sought to provide access to land and agricultural work for displaced, primarily black sharecroppers. Much like the broader FSC organization, BASIC pursued racial and economic justice through an agrarian reform agenda.

In contrast to other farming regions in Missouri, agriculture in the bootheel only began on a large scale in the 1920s. Occupying the southeast corner of Missouri nestled along the Mississippi River, swamps had covered most of the area's land until the early twentieth century. In 1907, the state legislature passed a bill that created the Little River Drainage District, which supervised the planning and construction of a network of drainage ditches in the region. Between 1907 and 1926, it constructed 875 miles of ditches, giving the bootheel the largest drainage system in the world at the time. The reclamation of bootheel swampland opened up 500 million acres of land to agriculture that, because of the region's climate, could be used to grow the corn and wheat characteristic of the northern plains states as well as southern cotton. By the 1970s, farmland covered ninety two percent of bootheel land.⁸¹⁹

Records; "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of New Communities, Inc" 2-3 May 1975, Folder 48, Box 59, FSC Records.

⁸¹⁹ James Milne and John Remmert, *Bootheel Regional Profile* (University of Missouri, Extension Division, 1972), 5.

Like many farming regions in the U.S., the bootheel experienced dramatic changes in the postwar period. The forces of economic depression, farm policy, and new farm machinery reshaped patterns of bootheel landownership. While the depression forced many smaller operators to sell their land in the 1930s, farm policy further enabled large farmers to expand their operations and bring in new labor-saving technologies. These changes pushed many tenants, farmworkers, and small farmers out of bootheel. During the 1940s and 1950s, about 96,000 people left the area. Between 1954 and 1969 the number of farms declined by fifty three percent and fewer people owned the remaining plots. While farm policy and advances in agricultural technology reshaped patterns of landownership, they also drastically improved its productivity. By the 1970s, twenty five percent of Missouri's crops came from the bootheel.⁸²⁰ The region's productivity drove land prices up. The average value of farmland and buildings in Missouri at the end of the 1960s stood at \$53,000; in the bootheel, the average was \$121,000.⁸²¹

A racialized class structure characterized this new bootheel farm economy. According to one agricultural reformer in the region, bootheel farming was “an entrenched system...composed of landowners and the poor, both white and black.” Large landowners in the region were predominately white. While many displaced farmers left the bootheel, others attempted to eke out a living on the land. Those who stayed in the region were predominately black ex-sharecroppers and tenants who now worked as day laborers for white landowners. Sometimes they worked exclusively in the bootheel, while many others migrated throughout the southeast. Though the rural white poor formed a significant component of the bootheel farming, racism ensured that its black residents would occupy the bottom of the agricultural economy. Nonetheless, those who did not own land in the bootheel, regardless of race, lived

⁸²⁰ *Bootheel Regional Profile*, 30.

in extreme poverty: one third lived on less than \$1,000 per year.⁸²² Shacks without running water, toilets, or electricity comprised most of the bootheel's housing stock for its poor residents.⁸²³ These problems ultimately gave rise to the formation of BASIC in 1966.

BASIC's founding was in part made possible by the Missouri Delta Ecumenical Ministry, an interfaith group of clergy and activists that supported local reform groups in the bootheel. Though rooted in the bootheel, MDEM's leadership brought with them a wealth of experience from working on rural development and land reform projects abroad. William Chapman, a vicar of an Episcopalian church in the bootheel town of Kennett, formed MDEM in 1965 to support the efforts of local reform groups. Before starting MDEM, Chapman worked on community development projects in India. When he moved to Kennett in the early 1960s to take his post at the Episcopalian church, the stark inequality of the region pushed him to create a group that could organize around issues of poverty and racism. The group's assistant director, E. Battle Smith, was Roman Catholic. Smith worked with the U.S. Agency for International Development in Honduras in the early 1960s, and then went on to form his own private development group called *Cooperacion*. This group worked in Yoro, one of the poorest states in Honduras, on small agriculture and communication projects. MDEM's next two directors, Richard Male and Lawrence Levine, were both Jewish. Levine served in the Peace Corps in Brazil where he worked on neighborhood development programs.⁸²⁴

⁸²¹ *Bootheel Regional Profile*, 73.

⁸²² Robert Joiner, "Bootstraps for the Bootheel," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 30 June 1974.

⁸²³ The National Commission on Neighborhoods, *People, Building Neighborhoods: The Final Report to the President and Congress of the United States, Case Study Appendix Volume II* (Washington D.C.: The Commission, 1979), 864-5.

⁸²⁴ *People, Building Neighborhoods*, 873, 881; "Experimental Ministry for Southeast Missouri," *The Daily Standard*, 30 August 1966; Robert Duffey, "Rev. Bill Chapman, Who Pushed for Social Justice, Dies at 74," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 15 December 1998; Stephen Darst, "Group Fights Poverty in Missouri's Delta Region," *St. Louis Review*, 1 September 1972; Robert Cohn, "Former AZA Youth Leader Directs Bootheel Poverty Program," *St. Louis Jewish Light*, 24 April 1974; "L. Levine Named MDEM Head," *St. Louis Jewish Light*, 6 August 1975.

In 1966, MDEM's leadership brought together a group of bootheel farm activists to form BASIC. Though MDEM's early leadership skewed white, black residents of the bootheel formed the core of BASIC. Its director was Bill Cooper. Cooper had no formal academic training but was born in the bootheel and, through a life working in its fields, knew its farms and agricultural markets well. David Humes, the group's assistant director, also hailed from the bootheel. Like many workers in the region, Humes had cobbled together a livelihood through work in a garment factory and as a migrant farmworker. In contrast to other people in BASIC's leadership roles, its community organizer Gus Townes had a college degree. Townes, born in the small bootheel town of Hayti and studied agriculture at Lincoln University, an historically black land grant college in Jefferson City, Missouri. Finally, Ruben Ruff, also from Hayti, worked as a farmer before joining BASIC as a field foreman.⁸²⁵ While MDEM cultivated native black leadership for BASIC, the group's makeup also reflected the region's racial fault lines. The white poor of the bootheel, which BASIC tried to organize, generally ignored the group, leaving much of BASIC's leadership and membership black.⁸²⁶

Financial support for BASIC came predominately from private sources. MDEM, which funneled many resources to BASIC early on, received money from state and national level church groups. The Danforth Foundation, established in St. Louis in 1927 by the founder of Ralston Purina, also provided BASIC with a \$30,000 grant. Another important source of early financial support came from the St. Louis-based Monsanto Chemical

⁸²⁵ To Bryant George from Frank Hartmann, 1 June 1971, Reel 1690, Section 4, General Correspondence; To Bryant George from Nancy Kolben, 7 December 1970, Section 4, General Correspondence; Jeanne Fox, "Mayor Humes' Fund-Raising a Good Lesson for Rest of State," *The Kansas City Times*, 12 August 1976; Jesse Lynn, "Keep Migrant Workers at Home is Goal of BASIC," *The Daily Standard*, 16 September 1969; "Ag Students to Receive Awards," *The Daily Capital News*, 24 February 1977; "Ruben Ruff Sr., Obituary," *Delta Dunklin Democrat*, 10 February 2008.

Corporation. Monsanto lent BASIC a \$20,000 interest free loan in 1967 but turned most of that loan into a grant soon after issuing it. The United Auto Workers, while not providing direct financial assistance, gave BASIC trucks, tractors, planters, and cultivators. Support also poured in from the FSC beginning in 1968. With assistance from the Ford Foundation, which identified BASIC as a “promising” co-op, the FSC helped BASIC purchase machinery, provided training for its managers and bookkeepers, and paid salaries for some staff as well.⁸²⁷

BASIC’s operation and larger objectives reflected those of the FSC. Cooper and the rest of BASIC’s leadership created a program aimed to keep the bootheel’s poor farmers on the land and improve their incomes and standard of living. Like the FSC, BASIC saw a diversified farm as the best way to do that.⁸²⁸ BASIC followed a cooperative communal model not unlike NCI. Cooper rented several 150-200-acre plots of land on which it grew a variety of vegetables, including okra, cabbage, tomatoes, and sweet potatoes. BASIC hired bootheel families to work the land, employing over one hundred families in the early 1970s. BASIC also provided marketing services to farmers who owned their own land or rented. Much of the food grown by these farmers and those who worked on BASIC-operated land was sold to the regional community action agency, which frequently purchased as much as 100,000 pounds of vegetables per season. BASIC also formed marketing agreements with

⁸²⁶ Darst, “Group Fights Poverty in Missouri’s Delta Region;” *People, Building Neighborhoods*, 868, 882.

⁸²⁷ Darst, “Group Fights Poverty in Missouri’s Delta Region;” *People, Building Neighborhoods*, 868; To Bryant George from Nancy Kolben, 7 December 1970, Reel 1690, Section 4, General Correspondence; “Background,” 8 December 1971, Folder “BASIC;” To Fred DeField from Karl Wright, 29 June 1979, Folder 25, Box 22, FSC Records; “Untitled Background Information on FSC,” ca. 1970, Folder 2084, Box 337, RBF, RAC; To Bryant George from Frank Hartmann, 1 June 1971, Reel 1690, Section 4 General Correspondence; “Agricultural Cooperative Concentrated Assistance Program,” ca. 1971, Reel 1960, Section 3 Reports.

⁸²⁸ To Bernard Rappaport from David Humes, 12 November 1973, Folder “BASIC,” Box 4C566, Bernard Rappaport Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas,

agricultural commodity buyers in midwestern and upper south states. Cooper and BASIC hoped that this program would create a stable community of farmers in the bootheel that would provide an alternative to the exploitative large farm economy, migratory labor, and outmigration from the country to the city. Moreover, BASIC's leaders hoped the group could empower an historically disenfranchised group to organize against class and racial exploitation in the bootheel.⁸²⁹

Like many of the co-ops with the FSC's organization, BASIC struggled to improve the incomes of its members. Though BASIC's records on income improvement are incomplete, what does exist does not paint an overwhelmingly positive picture. In 1969 and 1970, farmers who worked BASIC's land boosted their incomes by about \$350 on average. In 1971, about 420 people earned incomes doing farm work for BASIC. The group paid out about \$14,000 in wages, but only twenty-five people earned more than \$100. While some of these people lived in the same household, giving the income boost more weight, most people working with BASIC still earned their primary incomes through public assistance or with work performed on other farms in the region. BASIC did not keep statistics on extra income gained by farmers who used the co-op to market their produce. However, the improved access to markets for marginalized black farm owners and renters probably led to better, more regular incomes.⁸³⁰ Moreover, for people earning well below the poverty level, often

Austin; To Bryant George from Nancy Kolben, 7 December 1970, Reel 1690, Section 4, General Correspondence; Lynn, "Keep Migrant Workers at Home is Goal of BASIC."

⁸²⁹ "Proposal for a Three-Year Continuation of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives for Economic Development of Low Income People in the South," ca. 1971, Reel 1690, Section 5 Grants; "Background," 8 December 1971, Folder "BASIC;" To Bryant George from Nancy Kolben, 7 December 1970, Reel 1690, Section 4 General Correspondence; Lynn, "Keep Migrant Workers at Home is Goal of BASIC;" *People, Building Neighborhoods*, 868.

⁸³⁰ To Bryant George from Nancy Kolben, 7 December 1970, Reel 1690, Section 4 General Correspondence; To Bryant George from Frank Hartmann, 1 June 1971, Reel 1690, Section 4, General Correspondence.

less than \$1,000, working with BASIC led to a not insubstantial increase in their yearly income.

Aside from projects focusing on improving farmer income, BASIC also wanted to spur community and political organizing in the bootheel more broadly. For example, Gus Townes, BASIC's community organizer, and MDEM helped black bootheel residents create a community-owned supermarket called the Howardville Area Cooperative Enterprise (HACE) in 1971, which became the first community owned grocery in Missouri. Poverty rates were high in Howardville, a small town of 500 people, ninety-five percent of whom were black. Eighty percent of Howardville residents received food stamps, but no local supermarket existed. Instead, people travelled as far as twenty-five miles to the nearest market. Because half the residents did not own cars, they were forced to pay for taxi services to shuttle them back and forth. HACE formed in 1971 in response to this farmland food-desert, and soon after residents began buying stock shares to finance the purchase of two and a half acres of land on which to build their supermarket. One hundred fifteen Howardville families purchased stock, and with additional assistance from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and the Danforth Foundation, the 5,000 square foot HACE supermarket opened in October 1973 and joined the FSC a year later. HACE provided not only a place for area residents to purchase fresh food, but also created full time jobs.⁸³¹ HACE reflected the FSC's broader, black cooperative vision for rural America. Reform of rural America would occur through cooperative organizing and community ownership of essential services and businesses.

Perhaps the most ambitious project of political organizing pursued by BASIC was the

⁸³¹ "FSC Annual Report, 1975-76," Folder 2094, Box 339, RBF, RAC; "Co-op Supermarket Planned for Black Poverty Community," 24 July 1973; Joiner, "Bootstraps for the Bootheel;" "Cooperative Supermarket Project, Application for Funding," 16 April 1971, Folder BASIC, Bernard

formation of a new city in the bootheel called Hayti Heights. Just to the west of Hayti, Hayti Heights had existed as an unincorporated community since the 1940s. Most of its 2,500 residents were black farmers, some of whom owned land. Most, however, either rented land from white farmers or followed a pattern of migratory farmworker labor throughout the region. Though the bootheel economy pushed many people into a precarious economic position, Hayti Heights was poor even by bootheel standards. In the early 1970s, Hayti Heights was the poorest place in Missouri, with an average yearly income of only \$751. Around eighty percent of the homes in Hayti Heights had no running water, and the unincorporated area lacked sewage facilities, paved streets, and many other amenities that other small towns and cities enjoyed.⁸³² By incorporating, the residents of Hayti Heights would gain a political platform to begin fixing many of these problems.

David Humes led the drive to incorporate Hayti Heights as a city. At first, though, Humes and BASIC tried to get neighboring Hayti to annex Hayti Heights in 1971. The leaders of Hayti balked, leading Humes to suspect that the white leaders of Hayti did not want to take on a relatively large black population. When BASIC turned away from annexation and toward incorporation, Humes framed the creation of a new city as a way to not only improve services but achieve political and economic equality as well. By becoming a city, Hayti Heights would gain access to funds for the construction of essential pieces of public infrastructure. Moreover, it would place the people of Hayti Heights in positions of local political power. Humes argued that the people of Hayti Heights had been exploited by

Rappaport Papers; "Community Owned Market Observes 1st Anniversary," *The Daily Standard*, 1 October 1974; "In a Jubilant Gesture," *The Daily Standard*, 27 July 1972.

⁸³² "Submitted by Hayti Heights Development Corporation," ca. 1972, Folder BASIC, Bernard Rappaport Papers; "Sample Survey of Heights Area," 25 April 1972, Folder BASIC, Bernard Rappaport Papers; Jeanne Fox, "Hayti Heights: How a Town was Born," *The Kansas City Times*, 12 August 1976; To Bernard Rappaport from Arthur Stephenson, 3 August 1972, Folder BASIC, Bernard Rappaport Papers; Kevin Horrigan, "Dirt-Poor, Dirt-Rich Bootheel," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 11 June 1978.

“selfish interests, both political and in the agribusiness community.” Incorporation would provide these people with a measure of self-determination and autonomy. By the end of 1972, after a vote that showed overwhelming area support for the town’s incorporation, Hayti Heights became an official city. Humes became the mayor and Ruben Ruff, BASIC’s field foreman, became one of the town’s aldermen.⁸³³

Humes and Hayti Heights immediately set to work on improving the situation for the new town’s black farmworkers. In order to provide adequate services for its residents, whose low incomes meant they could pay relatively little in taxes, Humes told a local paper that “what we have to do in this community is hustle.” Humes therefore spent a lot of time trying to squeeze money from the federal government. Funds from the 1971 Emergency Employment Act, signed into law by President Nixon, provided funding for the employment of eighty-four Hayti Heights youths to clean up the city and make way for improvements. Further, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, created by the Johnson Administration in 1968, paid the salary of Hayti Heights’ sheriff and provided him with police equipment. A \$375,000 grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) in 1974 financed the construction of much-needed water lines and facilities. HUD also granted the city \$92,000 to repair and upgrade twenty-six homes. And in 1979, the EDA, FmHA, the EPA, and HUD contributed \$2 million in loans and grants to expand the city’s water infrastructure and provide sewage services. While Charles Sherrod and NCI had attempted to establish a “new community” in southwest Georgia, Humes and the bootheel’s farmworkers had succeeded in doing just that. The incorporation of Hayti Heights therefore

⁸³³ “Submitted by Hayti Heights Development Corporation,” ca. 1972, Folder BASIC, Bernard Rappaport Papers; “Hayti Heights Plans to Incorporate,” *The Daily Standard*, 25 April 1972; To Bernard Rappaport from Arthur Stephenson, 3 August 1972, Folder BASIC, Bernard Rappaport Papers; “Proposal for Funding Hayti Heights Community Development Corporation,” ca. January 1974, Folder BASIC, Bernard Rappaport Papers; “Court Names Heights Mayor,” *The Daily Standard*, 2 January 1973; “Town Fights for Life,” *The Daily Standard*, 17 June 1975.

fulfilled a critical element of the FSC's land reform vision: it provided a home for marginalized farmers.

As FSC's member co-ops in Georgia and Missouri undertook ambitious programs to meet the rural crisis, the FSC's central organization faced a crisis of its own. Funding had been a major issue with the FSC from the very beginning. The OEO financed the group starting in 1968, and the following year the Ford Foundation began supporting the group as well. Together, they made up ninety percent of the FSC's nearly million-dollar budget.⁸³⁴ Additional support came most substantially from the "southern program" of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, which aimed to reverse rural outmigration by supporting small farms.⁸³⁵ Prejean, while not ungrateful for OEO and foundation support, consistently asked them to make multi-year grants instead of requiring the group to annually apply for funds. Prejean reasoned that such assurances would allow him to hire the staff, particularly agricultural experts, necessary to build prosperous co-ops. In the FSC's first funding request to Ford, Prejean asked for a five-year, \$30 million grant. In Prejean's words, Ford rejected the request as "absurd" for a concept that "hadn't been tested."⁸³⁶ When Prejean invoked the long and successful history of farming co-ops, Ford responded by cited budgetary constraints, and the FSC was forced to shape its program around one-year funding cycles.

By 1970, only a year after Ford began funding the FSC, tensions arouse between the two groups about the FSC's program. Mitchell Sviridoff and Bryant George, the Ford officials who oversaw the FSC grants, worried the group stretched its funds too thin across

⁸³⁴ "Memorandum to Dana S. Creel from Thomas A. Waman," 1 October 1970, Folder 2085, Box 337, RBF, RAC.

⁸³⁵ "Rockefeller Brothers Fund Southern Program," 29 January 1974, Folder 2090, Box 338, RBF, RAC.

⁸³⁶ To McGeorge Bundy from Charles Prejean, 14 June 1971, Reel 1690, Section Four, General Correspondence.

too many co-ops, which by 1971 numbered nearly 110. George and Sviridoff wanted Prejean to target Ford funds to a “concentrated” group of co-ops, including East and West Georgia and BASIC, in order to create replicable models that could be exported to other places.⁸³⁷ George also criticized Prejean himself. George claimed that the FSC’s leader lacked “the ability to perceive reality,” which he defined as coming to terms with the fact that foundations would not support a large number of co-ops. In contrast to Prejean’s supposed idealism, George argued that Ford needed to be “result-oriented.” Personal animosity also seems to have played a part. Letters among Ford officials sometimes framed Prejean as difficult to get along with, and that he failed to cultivate “a certain rapport” with the foundation.⁸³⁸ In 1972, after Sviridoff and Prejean made several requests to Prejean about changing his operations, which Prejean all refused, Ford defunded the group.

While Sviridoff framed the decision as a “conscientious disagreement on policy” – Ford wanted concentrated funding, the FSC did not – this reading masked the rather large gulf that separated Ford and the FSC.⁸³⁹ The decision in fact highlighted two competing visions of rural renewal.⁸⁴⁰ Ford officials clearly believed that raising the incomes of black farmers was a good thing, and that it could be done by helping them diversify their crops, implement new techniques, and join co-ops.⁸⁴¹ However, Ford saw success in terms of measurable results that could be produced quickly. Focusing on a few co-ops promised to do

⁸³⁷ To Charles Prejean from Mitchell Sviridoff, 15 June 1972, Folder 2088, Box 338, RBF, RAC.

⁸³⁸ To Vivian Henderson from Bryant George, 15 June 1972, Reel 1690, Section Four, General Correspondence.

⁸³⁹ To Charles Prejean from Mitchell Sviridoff, 15 June 1972, Folder 2088, Box 338, RBF, RAC.

⁸⁴⁰ “Ford Foundation Terminal Grant to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” 24 July 1972, Reel 1690, Section One, Grants.

⁸⁴¹ “Ford Foundation Grant to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” 15 September 1971, Reel 1690, Section One, Grants.

this in the shortest possible time.⁸⁴² However, Ford's focus on creating exportable models divorced the FSC from the broader political and economic struggles from which it arose. For Prejean and the FSC, those struggles assumed critical importance. Rural renewal and black prosperity would not occur by isolating support for a few co-ops. Instead, those aims could only be achieved by uniting together as many small farmers as possible. Prejean and the FSC wanted a broader economic revival of the black rural south, and not just immediate results. Prejean knew this would require massive investment, not unlike that received by larger farmers from the USDA.

In the midst of the FSC's conflict with Ford, the group also became embroiled in a funding battle with the OEO. In the summer of 1971, the OEO began planning a study of its support of rural co-ops in order to evaluate their impacts.⁸⁴³ Prejean objected to the study, which he saw as a pretext to justify a decision already made by OEO officials to defund the rural co-ops, a suspicion shared by Bryant George as well.⁸⁴⁴ Prejean criticized the study, arguing that the OEO would rather "study" black people than "feed them, clothe them, and give them medicine." Further, he told George that the study represented a "flagrant waste of OEO dollars," particularly in light of Nixon's proposed budgetary cutbacks.⁸⁴⁵ According to Carol Khosrovi, director of the OEO's office of program development, the FSC's grant came with a stipulation that required that it participate in any OEO-led evaluations, or facing losing

⁸⁴² To Bryant George from Milton Page, 17 March 1972, Reel 1690, Section Four General Correspondence; To Eamon Kelly from Bryant George, 27 March 1972, Reel 1690, Section Four General Correspondence.

⁸⁴³ To Charles Prejean from Gene Bradford, 23 August 1971, Folder 53, Box 61, FSC Records; To Charles Prejean from Carol Khosrovi, 9 November 1971, Folder 53, Box 61, FSC Records.

⁸⁴⁴ "Annual Report from the President to the Stockholders, September 1, 1971 to August 31, 1972," Folder 28, Box 85, FSC Records; To Mitchell Sviridoff from Bryant George, 24 January 1972, Folder 2087, Box 337, RBF, RAC.

⁸⁴⁵ To Carol Khosrovi from Charles Prejean, 24 January 1972, Reel 1660, Section Four, General Correspondence; To Bryant George from Charles Prejean, 7 October 1971, Reel 1690, Section Four, General Correspondence.

government support for its programs.⁸⁴⁶ In January 1972, Prejean told Khosrovi the FSC would not participate, and the OEO subsequently cut off the FSC's funding.⁸⁴⁷

This loss of financial support forced the FSC to search for ways to become more self-reliant. While the group had always sought to make its co-ops profitable, Prejean and others reasoned that the FSC would have to focus even more on income-generating programs in order to fund its programming.⁸⁴⁸ One of the group's most ambitious efforts in this regard was the formation of business ties with Japan. Thomas Wahman, a program officer with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund who worked with the FSC, had been pushing Prejean toward the idea of international markets as a potentially major source of income for FSC farmers.⁸⁴⁹ The project developed further when Jim Jones met with Seiho Tajiri. Japanese born, Tajiri made his fortune in oil and had lived in California since the 1950s.⁸⁵⁰ Tajiri's interests revolved around fostering greater ties between Japan and African Americans under what he called the "third world concept." Tajiri hoped to unite "non-white countries" together through economic relationships. In Tajiri's formulation, Japan would lead the way because it was the most advanced "industrialized, non-white nation of the world."⁸⁵¹

With a \$40,000 grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Jones and other FSC staff travelled to Japan in the fall of 1973 to meet with several Japanese firms interested in

⁸⁴⁶ To John Brown from Carol Khosrovi, 18 May 1972, Reel 1690, Section Four, General Correspondence.

⁸⁴⁷ To Carol Khosrovi from Charles Prejean, 24 January 1972, Reel 1960, Section Four, General Correspondence; To Jacob Kaplan from Charles Prejean, 26 June 1972, Folder 2088, Box 338, RBF, RAC.

⁸⁴⁸ "Basic Support Program for the Federation of Southern Cooperatives," 5 February 1974, Folder 2090, Box 338, RBF, RAC.

⁸⁴⁹ To William S. Moody and James Hyde from Thomas Wahman, 18 October 1973, Folder 2089, Box 338, RBF, RAC.

⁸⁵⁰ Frank McCoy, "Black Business Courts the Japanese Market," *Black Enterprise*, June 1994.

⁸⁵¹ To Charles Prejean from Jim Jones, 25 February 1974, Folder 42, Box 17, FSC Records.

American farm products.⁸⁵² These meetings led to the formation of a joint business with Taiyo, a large Japanese fish enterprise, in the summer of 1974 called United Venture Marketing Corporation (UVMC).⁸⁵³ For Ralph Paige, the West Georgia co-op manager who became president of UVMC, the deal appeared as a lucrative way to bolster the FSC and help black farmers.⁸⁵⁴ For Prejean, the deal with Taiyo was about “independence.” Prejean argued that OEO and Ford funding forced the FSC to ignore its goals in favor of those from the funding agencies. The profits generated from its agreement with Taiyo, however, would allow the FSC to put its goals first.⁸⁵⁵

The contract between Taiyo and the FSC had two major components. First, the FSC would serve as a wholesaler and marketer of Taiyo’s fish products, with the initial market being the Georgia co-ops. For example, the East and West Georgia Co-ops would purchase Taiyo fish products and sell them to members. Paige believed this model would almost certainly produce enormous profits when expanded to the FSC 30,000-member families.⁸⁵⁶ In return, Taiyo would purchase farm products from the Georgia co-ops, particularly soybeans, pigs, and vegetables. Here again, the potential for profits seemed quite high. The Japanese market for soybeans was rather large, and Japanese swine consumption had been increasing throughout the postwar period.⁸⁵⁷ The UVMC, composed of FSC staff and Taiyo

⁸⁵² To William S. Moody and James Hyde from Thomas Wahman, 18 October 1973, Folder 2089, Box 338, RBF, RAC.

⁸⁵³ To H. Hatamoto from George Howell, 12 August 1974, Folder 1, Box 22, FSC Records.

⁸⁵⁴ To J.O. Wyatt from Ralph Paige, 12 March 1975, Folder 1, Box 23, FSC Records.

⁸⁵⁵ To Leslie Dunbar from Charles Prejean, 10 April 1974, Folder 9, Box 17, FSC Records.

⁸⁵⁶ To Charles Prejean from James Jones, 4 June 1974, Folder 42, Box 17, FSC Records; To H. Hatamoto from George Howell, 12 August 1974, Folder 1, Box 22, FSC Records.

⁸⁵⁷ To Charles Prejean from Otis Williams, 20 September 1975, Folder 18, Box 29, FSC Records; To Charles Prejean from Otis Williams, 20 September 1975, Folder 42, Box 17, FSC Records.

representatives, would oversee the purchase and distribution of the frozen fish, while Taiyo Americas, a subsidiary of Taiyo, would purchase and market FSC farm products in Japan.⁸⁵⁸

While Prejean and Paige had invested great hope in UVMC, optimism in the project quickly vanished. One major problem emerged from the FSC's lack of distribution infrastructure. The FSC, established to provide financial and technical assistance to agricultural co-ops, did not have the structure in place to distribute frozen fish because it lacked an adequate number of trucks and affordable warehouse space. According to L.R. Swanger, the vice president of finance and planning at UVMC, the FSC and Taiyo never considered these issues when planning the venture.⁸⁵⁹ Another problem stemmed from the quality of products provided by Taiyo. While Paige assured potential customers that UVMC had high quality, affordable products, he complained to Taiyo representatives that their fish was too expensive for its quality.⁸⁶⁰ Paige tried hard to sell Taiyo products to Georgia's community action groups, state penitentiaries, and schools, but he rarely succeeded and the co-ops sold far less fish than Paige predicted.⁸⁶¹ Very quickly, UVMC reports showed consistently low sales coupled with high levels of debt.⁸⁶²

The problems forced UVMC to shutter its doors in October 1976. The FSC recognized that its failure reflected substandard product quality and its inability to sell that

⁸⁵⁸ To John Zippert from Ralph Paige, 19 September 1975, Folder 42, Box 17, FSC Records; To Robert Saunders from Ralph Paige, 21 April 1975, Folder 1, Box 23.

⁸⁵⁹ To Ralph Paige from Ralph LaPorte, 8 April 1975, Folder 1, Box 22, FSC Records; To Charles Prejean from Ralph Paige, 23 June 1975, Folder 3, Box 77, FSC Records; To Charles Prejean from L.W. Swanger, 16 April 1975, Folder 3, Box 77, FSC Records.

⁸⁶⁰ To Hisao Hatamoto from Ralph Paige, 7 April 1976, Folder 1, Box 22, FSC Records; Folder 1, Box 23, FSC Records.

⁸⁶¹ To Lenny Mattis from Ralph Paige, 29 May 1975, Folder 1, Box 22, FSC Records; To Ronnie Stokes from Ralph Paige, 31 January 1975, Folder 22, Box 26, FSC Records; To UVMC Board from Ralph Paige, 11 November 1975, Folder 2, Box 77, FSC Records; To Charles Prejean from L.W. Swanger, 16 April 1975, Folder 3, Box 77, FSC Records; To Ralph Paige from Seiho Tajiri, 6 August 1975, Folder 1, Box 23, FSC Records.

⁸⁶² "United Venture Marketing Corporation Balance Sheet," 30 April 1976, Folder 1, Box 22, FSC Records; "United Venture Marketing Corporation Balance Sheet," 31 May 1976, Folder 1, Box 22, FSC Records.

product.⁸⁶³ Paige and Prejean also believed, however, that Taiyo took advantage of them. Paige complained that Taiyo representatives tried to get him to sign a contract that would obligate the FSC take on all of UVMC's debt without informing the group's board of directors.⁸⁶⁴ Additionally, Paige suggested that Taiyo dumped fish on the FSC. The accusation had some merit. According to Paige, he "did not expect" Taiyo to immediately provide UVMC with 200,000 pounds of fish after the group's founding. Though the FSC would have had a difficult time distributing any amount of fish given their poor planning, Taiyo's actions here compounded their problems. Even when sales were low, Taiyo continued to send UVMC fish.⁸⁶⁵ Prejean concluded that the FSC was "guilty of being overly naïve" and trusting people who had "ill-intentions and their own ulterior motives." For Prejean, the demise of UVMC reflected another example of a "very sophisticated multi-national corporation taking advantage of an already overly exploited people."⁸⁶⁶ Regardless of the source of blame for UVMC's demise, it ended the FSC's attempts to improve rural economies and secure new sources of funding by integrating black farmers into the international agricultural economy.

These various financial troubles culminated in a 1980 FBI investigation of the FSC that marked a critical turning point in the group's history, one in which its size and scope would be significantly curtailed. The period between the UVMC's failure and the FBI investigation proved to be middling, at best. The East and West Georgia co-ops showed some signs of improvement: both expanded their feeder pig operations, and East Georgia, with the

⁸⁶³ "Quarterly Progress Report, December 1, 1975 – February 29, 1976," Folder 2093, Box 339, RBF, RAC.

⁸⁶⁴ "Memorandum to the Files of United Venture Marketing Corporation," 25 April 1975, Folder 3, Box 77, FSC Records.

⁸⁶⁵ To Lenny Mattis from Ralph Paige, 20 March 1975, Folder 22, Box 26, FSC Records; To Charles Prejean from L.R. Swanger, 8 April 1975, Folder 3, Box 77, FSC Records; "Quarterly Progress Report, August 16, 1975 – November 30, 1975," Folder 2092, Box 338, RBF, RAC.

⁸⁶⁶ To Mizuho Ohno from Charles Prejean, 4 May 1976, Folder 3, Box 23, FSC Records.

help of a \$130,000 grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, started a meat and vegetable canning plant.⁸⁶⁷ In contrast, NCI's operations shrunk. Saddled with \$1.6 million dollars of debt in 1977, NCI sold 1,600 acres of its land for \$814,000 to pay some of it off.⁸⁶⁸ At an organization wide level, the funding structure shifted as well. While this change began with the end of the FSC's relationship with Ford and OEO, over the course of the mid-1970s, the group came to rely on a more diverse group of funding sources that generally provided less money. State governments, smaller foundations, and federal programs such as VISTA and President Carter's Comprehensive Employment and Training Act supplied the FSC with operational and programmatic funding.⁸⁶⁹

The FBI's investigation into FSC revolved around the way it handled those federal funds between 1976 and 1979. In November 1979, Alabama Congressman Richard Shelby passed on a complaint from Drayton Pruitt to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) alleging misuse of federal funds by the FSC. Pruitt and the FSC had clashed years earlier, when Pruitt and other local white elites in Epes, Alabama tried to block the group from purchasing land for the demonstration farm. The GAO's preliminary audit of the group found no evidence of any wrongdoing.⁸⁷⁰ However, Elmer Staats, the comptroller general of the GAO, suggested to Shelby that other federal agencies might investigate the FSC if they

⁸⁶⁷ "Annual Report of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, 1980-1981," Reel 1690, Section 5 Grants; To Harold Parker from Ralph Paige, 20 December 1977, Folder 22, Box 16, FSC Records; To Wilfred Nolan from Ralph Paige, 29 June 1978, Folder 22, Box 16, FSC Records; To Richard Mullen from Ralph Paige, 4 April 1978, Folder 37, Box 17, FSC Records; To Julian Griffith from Ralph Paige, 25 April 1979, Folder 22, Box 16, FSC Records.

⁸⁶⁸ "New Communities, Inc. Board Meeting," 2 April 1977, Folder 48, Box 59, FSC Records; "New Communities, Inc. Board Meeting," 23 July 1977, Folder 48, Box 59, FSC Records; To Board Members from Shirley Sherrod, 7 August 1978, Folder 48, Box 59, FSC Records.

⁸⁶⁹ For some examples, see "Audit Report for the Twelve Months Ended August 31, 1975," Folder 2092, Box 338, RBF, RAC; "Audit Report, Federation of Southern Cooperatives," 27 November 1979, Folder 2097, Box 339, RBF, RAC; "Audit Report, Federation of Southern Cooperatives," 30 October 1980, Folder 2098, Box 340.

⁸⁷⁰ On Pruitt's early interaction with the FSC, see "In Defense of Freedom's Victory," 29 October 1982, Folder 2099, Box 340, RBF, RAC; on the GAO investigation, see "Monthly Bulletin, January-February 1980," Folder 2098, Box 340, RBF, RAC.

wanted, and in December 1979 the FBI began sending the FSC a series of subpoenas for its funding proposals and payroll records.⁸⁷¹ Prejean sent twenty-two file drawers worth of records and attempted to conduct FSC business as usual. The FBI complicated Prejean's tasks, however, by interrogating over two hundred FSC co-op members. More importantly, Prejean found it incredibly difficult to secure funding until the FBI's investigation concluded. In May 1981, nearly eighteen months after the investigation began, it was concluded with no evidence of wrongdoing on the part of the FSC.⁸⁷²

The FSC survived the FBI's investigation, but in a diminished form. Legal fees alone amounted to over \$70,000, and the inability to attain much funding during the investigation forced Prejean to lay off seventy five percent of the FSC's staff.⁸⁷³ As a consequence, FSC support to member co-ops declined dramatically. By the middle of the 1980s, the group experienced chronic operating deficits and found itself going deeper into debt. Writing at the end of 1986, while farmers across the U.S. experienced debt and foreclosures, Prejean stated that black farmers had been in a "continuous crisis" for fifty years. By 1980, he wrote, the number of black farmers dropped to less than 100,000 from its height of one million in 1910.⁸⁷⁴ While the FSC ultimately failed to mitigate this crisis, the height of the group's activity in the 1960s and 1970s suggested that black farmers confronted issues of economic and racial inequality in rural America. At the center of these actions was a vision of rural life that postulated that, through cooperative organizing, the farm economy could be made to work for small farmers.

⁸⁷¹ "In Defense of Freedom's Victory," p. 57; To Charles Prejean from J.R. Brooks, 17 June 1980, Folder 2098, Box 340, RBF, RAC.

⁸⁷² "In Defense of Freedom's Victory," p. 58; "Monthly Bulletin, April, May, and June 1980," Folder 2099, Box 340, RBF, RAC; "Monthly Bulletin, Spring 1981," Folder 2099, Box 340, RBF, RAC.

⁸⁷³ "Monthly Bulletin, Spring 1981," Folder 2099, Box 340, RBF, RAC.

Although the efforts of the FSC and CRLA by and large did not succeed, they nonetheless illuminate an essential aspect of twentieth century agricultural history. The actions of grassroots farm activists reveal that the question of agricultural reform, in its many aspects, did not die out with the shuttering of the Resettlement Administration during the New Deal. Instead, they show that, during a period of deep uncertainty about the rural future, more democratic and equitable ways to organize the American farm economy were not just debated but actively fought for and implemented. These various programs did not follow a uniform pattern, but instead reflected the diversity of American agricultural economies, as well as the diversity of the people who worked in that economy and their own struggles and visions.

Because of their limited successes, it would be tempting to dismiss the efforts of CRLA and the FSC as hopeless, pie-in-the-sky challenges to the industrial agriculture economy. However, they mounted challenges to an industry propped up by billions in federal funds. The large farm economy did not come into being because it is the most rational or efficient. Instead, it is a creature of public largesse. It is not a stretch to imagine that if similar resources and political will had been put behind the program of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, for example, that a more democratic farm economy, one that better met the dietary needs of the nation, could succeed.

Moreover, despite their limited success in fully implementing their programs, these grassroots farm activists presaged the critiques of large scale, industrialized agriculture that began to become more prominent in the 1970s and 1980s. While Jim Hightower would publish his highly influential critique of American farming, *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times* in

⁸⁷⁴ To Rev. Dearbake from Ralph Paige, 12 May 1982, Folder 22, Box 23, FSC Records;

1973, local farm activists in the middle of the 1960s paved the way. The end of the 1970s also saw a series of Congressional hearings on the historical role of the USDA in shaping the farm economy to the detriment of small farms. Even the USDA, in 1981, published a series of articles that addressed “structure issues” in American agriculture.⁸⁷⁵ Thus, the impact of these grassroots farm struggles of the 1960s and 1970s opened the way for a much larger, and still ongoing and unfinished, critique of American agriculture.

“Annual Report, 1984-85,” Folder 20, Box 83, FSC Records; “Annual Report, 1985-86,” Folder 21, Box 83, FSC Records.

⁸⁷⁵ Jim Hightower, *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times, A Report of the Agribusiness Accountability Project on the Failure of America's Land Grant College Complex* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing, 1973); *Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1981; Priorities in Agricultural Research; Agricultural Research of the U.S. Department of Agriculture: A Summary Report of the Hearings; Structure Issues of American Agriculture* (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1981).

Conclusion

A “Better Country”? Ronald Reagan and the End of Rural Development

The inauguration of Ronald Reagan to the presidency marked an important turning point in the nearly three decade struggle to stop the rural crisis. Beginning in the mid-1950s, policymakers, social scientists, and rural communities across the U.S. tried in various ways to reverse the economic devastation and population decline that had threatened to erase small towns. The ramping up of the farm debt crisis in the early 1980s, ensured that the question of rural America’s future would not disappear. However, by the time Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981, and as his pro-market administration unfolded, far fewer tools existed to meet rural America’s problems. As chapters five and six demonstrated, grassroots activists who pursued land reform and farm labor organizing had already seen their sharpest weapons against rural poverty and decline blunted by counter organizing at the local, state, and federal level by the end of the 1970s. Reagan played an important role as governor of California in undermining the War on Poverty, which supported agricultural reform, however fleetingly, in the 1960s and 1970s, and his presidential administration did not seek to rekindle federal support for it. His administration had a for more direct effect on federal rural development policy, which remained an important policy goal through the 1970s. Reagan’s presidency effectively marked the end of rural development policies as they had been conceptualized by postwar liberal policymakers.

This consideration of the Reagan administration’s rural development policy aligns with recent re-valuations of its overall effects on public policymaking in the U.S. While earlier scholarship on Reagan focused on his character and portrayed the man as a starkly right wing ideologue or the great conservative hero, newer scholarship on the period has focused more on the administration’s public policy and the more limited, yet still significant,

shifts it enacted.⁸⁷⁶ Ronald Reagan did not make rural development or the rural crisis mainstays of his campaign rhetoric or promises. Nor did his administration's actions in regard to rural problems garner the attention of his actions in more high-profile policy domains such as the Cold War, crime and punishment, or AIDS. Nonetheless, the Reagan administration enacted important changes in rural development policy at the rhetorical and programmatic level that subsequent administrations, both Republican and Democrat, did not reverse.

During the Reagan years, rural development policy became submerged under the administration's broader policy goals of privatization, decentralization, and deregulation. "Rural development" as it had come to be defined between the 1950s and 1970s – federal investment in infrastructure, industry, and tourism – no longer appeared as the best or primary method of improving rural areas. Instead, administration officials argued that devolving authority to state and local governments, expanding the role of the private sector, and removing federal rules governing rural development would do the most to spur rural revival. The notion of a public, federal responsibility to addressing problems stemming from rural economic decline largely disappeared in the 1980s.

⁸⁷⁶ For examples of the first wave, see Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Life Time* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Robert Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); for more recent work, see *Reassessing the Reagan Presidency*, ed. Richard Conley (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003); *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and its Legacy*, eds. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003); Meg Jacobs and Julian Zelizer, *Conservatives in Power: The Reagan Years, 1981-1989* (Cambridge, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010); Robert Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture in the Reagan Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Marissa Chappell, "Reagan's 'Gender Gap' Strategy and the Limitations of Free Market Feminism," *Journal of Policy History* 24, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 115-134; Kirsten Swinth, "Post-Family Wage, Postindustrial Society: Reframing the Gender and Family Order through Working Mothers in Reagan's America," *Journal of American History* 105, no. 2 (Sept. 2018): 311-335; Gail Friedman, "Dumping the Pump: Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Community Activism, and Eco-Politics in the Age of Reagan," *Pennsylvania History* 85, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 299-325; Jonathan Bell, "Rethinking the 'Straight State': Welfare Politics, Health Care, and Public Policy in the Shadow of AIDS," *Journal of American History* 104, no. 4 (Mar. 2018): 931-952.

Major cuts to rural development programs accompanied this deemphasis of rural development as a federal policy goal. Throughout the early years of the Reagan administration, key officials, including Reagan himself, regularly argued that the EDA should be defunded and disbanded and that the USDA's rural development programs needed to be scaled back dramatically, if not done away with entirely. The administration never succeeded in fully implementing its far-reaching roll-back of the rural development state. It did, however, dramatically reduce the amount of money the federal government spent on rural development by slashing EDA and USDA budgets. These cuts turned out to be more or less permanent. A shift to the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton in 1992 did not bring about a reversal of Reagan's cuts to rural development policy. The Reagan administration's emphasis on the private sector and decentralization of federal programs as rural development strategy also remained prominent features of rural development in the years following 1988.

To be sure, the actions of the Reagan administration in regard to rural development policy do not represent a fully clean break from the liberal past. Postwar liberals constructed a decentralized rural development state, one devoted to using the public funds to create private sector jobs on troubled small towns. Though federal money was a crucial element of the postwar liberal framework, proponents of rural development always stressed the central role that local and state governments would play. This same emphasis on private sector development and local and state responsibility would be mimicked in the Reagan administration's approach to rural development. However, the differences between the agendas of postwar liberals and the Reagan administration represented a large enough chasm that it makes sense to "end" the story of rural development, to say nothing of grassroots agrarian reform, with Reagan. Rural development, insofar as it continued to exist, would no longer be a federal responsibility.

Before examining the changes made by the Reagan administration, it will be useful to evaluate the legacy of rural development policy and then the agrarian reform movements. The rural development apparatus attacked by the Reagan administration developed over the course of the 1950s and 1960s into a relatively stable system. Its first manifestation was the USDA's rural development program, began in 1955, and it reached its mature form in the 1965 Public Works and Economic Development Act. This system was thoroughly public-private in character. The federal government supplied public capital in the form of loans and grants to local and state governments, businesses, and nonprofit development corporations. This aid typically went toward the following purposes: infrastructure and public facilities, industrial attraction, and tourism. The immediate goal of this aid was to spur private sector expansion and create new jobs. Its broader, long term goal was to reverse rural decline and provide a new economic base for ailing rural communities that could no longer depend upon the traditional extractive industries. Postwar rural development aimed to revive and reconfigure America's rural towns.

This rural development policy illuminates an important, yet underexamined, component of postwar liberalism. Rural development offered an alternative to the more limited policy of tax cuts and demand management embraced by moderate postwar Keynesians. While moderates believed that "fine tuning" would smooth out the wrinkles of industrial capitalism, proponents of development policy saw rural America's problems as stemming from a deeper economic restructuring that produced unemployment and long term decline. This more "muscular" liberalism, which existed at the federal government as well as at the local and state level, saw jobs and federal investment appeared as the best way to solve the rural crisis. Moreover, these remaking of the rural economy would have to be planned,

albeit largely at the regional and state, not federal, level. Like their more moderate counterparts, this strand of postwar liberalism embraced growth, but argued that the federal government would have to take on a more interventionist role in ensuring that the distribution of growth and its benefits was more widely shared. Rural development and its proponents formed a link with the more activist state of the New Deal. Rural development policy helps us appreciate the extent to which a concern over jobs and economic restructuring shaped postwar policymaking, and that local and federal actors sought to leverage the power of the state to revive rural America.

Though postwar liberals constructed a development program that aimed to fix problems of unemployment and poverty stemming from a restructuring of rural America's economy, it did so without seeking to reform the agricultural economy that produced many of those changes and the racial discrimination and exploitation that upheld much of that economy. Postwar liberals saw rural development policy as a compliment to the increasingly large scale farm economy. Though this economy produced an agricultural bounty, it consolidated political and economic power in the hands of a white elite and pushed small farmers, renters, and sharecroppers out of agriculture, an outcome that fell particularly hard on black and Mexican American rural communities. The rural development policy constructed at the federal level overwhelmingly ignored their needs. In federal debates about rural development, the particular plight of these communities was largely ignored. To be sure, rural development programs helped Mexican-American businessmen in Calexico and the massive investment in Bacon County undoubtedly provided some black Georgians with new homes and jobs. However, by and large, local white elites controlled rural development projects, and those projects often occurred in white rural areas.

Despite these limitations, the rural development system constructed by postwar liberals yielded results, however mixed they may have been. Take population, for instance. The dramatic decrease in rural population levels during the first couple decades after 1945 appeared to many as a potent symbol of the rural crisis and as a justification for crafting development programs. Calvin Beale, a demographer in the USDA's Economic Research Service, charted this population drop. Between 1950 and 1960, 5.5 million more people moved out of rural areas than into them. Between 1960 and 1970, this figure shrank somewhat, but net rural outmigration still surpassed three million. In the 1970s, though, rural areas witnessed a population turnaround: 3.3 million more people moved in than out. Beale showed this trend was particularly pronounced in the Southern Coastal Plains Region and the Ozarks. For example, the population of Bacon County, Georgia, located in the former region and the object of significant federal investment, declined from 8,940 in 1950 to 8,233 in 1970. By 1980, however, the population increased to 9,379. A similar story could be told for the Missouri Ozark county of Douglas. There, the population dropped from 12,638 in 1950 to 9,268 by 1970. By 1980, the population had risen to 11,594.⁸⁷⁷ These population gains, while they appear small, constituted a relatively large proportional increase in these low-population areas.

Rural development policy also had an impact on the economic structure of rural America and on rural poverty levels. The mechanization of many jobs in agriculture, timber, and mining constituted a major element of the rural crisis. These changes pushed many people out work, leading to high rates of rural poverty. In 1959, 33% of rural people lived in poverty. By 1979, though, that number had dropped to 13.3%. Part of the reason for this

⁸⁷⁷ Calvin Beale, *Rural and Nonmetropolitan Population Trends of Significance to National Population Policy* (Washington D.C.: Economic Research Service, USDA, 1972), 3-4; Calvin Beale, "Rural America Today: Progress and Problems in Achieving Development Objectives," *Agricultural*

decrease was job growth in nonfarm sectors of the rural economy. Nonfarm employment made up an important segment of rural employment before World War II, but it grew dramatically after the 1960s in the wake of rural development policy. Half of all nonfarm job growth in rural areas in the 1960s was in the manufacturing sector. In the 1970s, rural job growth occurred in different sectors, particularly, services, retail, and government. By 1982, only ten percent of rural people worked in agriculture or a related field.⁸⁷⁸

To be sure, these changes in population, poverty, and employment, cannot be solely attributed to postwar rural development programs. People moved to rural areas for a variety of reasons, many no doubt for reasons having nothing to do with Commerce or Agriculture Department rural development policy. Similarly, businesses, especially manufacturing, moved to rural areas with or without investment from the federal government. Indeed, many states incentivized industrial relocation with tax breaks, a strategy that postwar liberals focused on rural development did not necessarily support. Moreover, the 1960s and 1970s saw a significant expansion of public assistance programs and old age insurance that contributed greatly to reductions in poverty rates. Beale concluded that determining the precise impact of rural development programs on these broader postwar trends would be impossible. However, he was also right to conclude that they did play “a significant role.”⁸⁷⁹ Taking a more micro-perspective, postwar development programs created new jobs and improved public infrastructure and facilities in localities in Georgia, Missouri, and California. The results may not have been as overwhelmingly positive as local boosters

Outlook 1980, Folder Outlook 1980, Box 1, National Agricultural Library; “National Advisory Council on Rural Development, Meeting,” 14-15 April 1982, Folder ORDP 1981-84, Box 29, NAL.

⁸⁷⁸ “Better Country: A Strategy for Rural Development in the 1980s,” p. 3, 1 November 1982, Folder 111833, Box 2, AG 080769-123599, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California; Beale, “A Further Look at Nonmetropolitan Growth Since the 1970s,” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 58, no. 5 (Dec. 1976): 954; Beale, “Rural America Today.”

⁸⁷⁹ “National Advisory Council on Rural Development, Meeting,” 14-15 April 1982, Folder ORDP 1981-84, Box 29, NAL.

expected, but highly sought-after jobs were created that served ailing rural communities and allowed people to remain in rural places.

Finally, postwar rural development policy contributed to reevaluations of conceptions of rurality, or rural identity and culture. Despite the diversity of rural experiences, rurality has often been linked with agriculture and, in particular, the small, independently owned farm. Though the values associated with this farmer have never been settled, he (it is always a he) has been seen as the embodiment of American independence and individualism, a virtuous defender of republican values, and a paragon of hard work. The dramatic changes in population and economic structure of the mid-twentieth century suggested to many that the small farmer would disappear forever. To many rural sociologists in particular, this change meant a disappearance of rural identity. Many rural sociologists, for example, believed that an identifiable rural identity or community no longer existed. The alleged values and behaviors associated with small town life, particularly agriculture, seemed to disappear in the face of an increasingly mechanized, large scale farm economy, the desertion of many small farm communities, the increased prevalence of nonfarm work in rural areas, and the spread of a “mass” culture shaped by the city and industry. These changes signaled the end of “rural” America.

Rural development policy ultimately salvaged some aspects of rurality while dispensing with others. The major proponents of rural development believed the days of the small farm were gone and maintained that any prosperous rural society would need new economic foundations. Development policy bent the meaning of rurality to serve the goal of restructuring rural America’s economy. In order to remake their economies, small towns and federal policymakers alike bolstered images of rurality conducive to development.

Conceptions of rural people as hard workers filtered into strategies aimed at luring new

industry to small towns. Rural landscapes, noted for their open space and scenic beauty, were also deployed in order to attract potential industrialists. On the other hand, small towns attempted to undermine long held assumptions about rural isolation from mainstream culture and society. This reimagining of rurality was most apparent in regard to tourism projects. Small towns mobilized a vision of a pastoral rural life in order to attract urban and suburban people alienated from their nation's rural past. Rural development policy ultimately helped to bolster a sense of rurality, however idealized it may have been, at a moment when its economic foundations seemed to slip away.

Though the grassroots reform campaigns led by CRLA and the FSC faced significant resistance, they too left an impact on the rural communities in which they worked. Though each group represented a distinct vision of rural reform, they diagnosed the rural crisis in similar ways, and in opposition to the framing of the crisis put forth by many policymakers and social scientists. CRLA and the FSC not only highlighted the ways a changing economic structure produced rural poverty and decline but linked that economic restructuring to policy decisions and the power held by large landowners. While policymakers ignored agricultural policy, grassroots reformers critiqued the way the New Deal empowered large farmers and impoverished farmworkers and small farmers. And in a way unseen at the federal level, agricultural reformers in CRLA and the FSC exposed the racial exploitation and discrimination that undergirded the rural crisis. For these reformers, any solution to the rural crisis would have to deal with the intertwined economic, political, and racial inequality of rural America.

While their strategies differed, they each attacked political and economic inequality and improved the lives of farm-based workers. Though the New Deal had extended collective bargaining to industrial workers, compromises with southern legislators left farmworkers out

of that framework. In California, CRLA's legal activism led to the recognition of farmworker unions in the state and helped spur further organizing among those workers. Its attacks upon growers who misused worker importation agreements to undermine collective bargaining strengthened the overall position of the state's agricultural workers. In Georgia, the co-ops associated with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives made it possible for black farmers to stay on the land and to earn more money doing it. A similar story can be told about BASIC in the Missouri bootheel. Taken together, these grassroots rural reformers laid the groundwork for the criticisms of large-scale American agriculture that would become prominent features of late-twentieth century political discourse. Nonetheless, a lack of institutional support, particularly from the federal government, and concerted opposition from agricultural elites and their political allies prevented the more far-reaching aspects of these various reform programs from fully flowering.

Reagan and Rural Development

Ronald Reagan rode a wave of discontent with postwar liberalism into the presidency. Reagan campaigned hard on a message that mixed anti-statism, in particular the inability of the government to solve social problems, with a valorization of the market. The administration's approach to rural development reflected Reagan's broader critique of government programs and postwar public policy. By the time Reagan took office in 1981, federal support for CRLA and the FSC, always contested to begin with, had mostly dissipated. His administration therefore focused primarily on cutting rural development programs. In the early days of his administration, Reagan proposed doing away with the EDA entirely and gutting the rural development activities of the USDA.⁸⁸⁰ Malcom Baldrige, the Secretary of the Commerce Department under Reagan, argued that the EDA's

record of success was “inconclusive” and that “fiscal austerity” would be required to stimulate economic recovery.⁸⁸¹ As such, the administration proposed its outright elimination because of its costliness and because the subsidies it provided were not needed to stimulate private sector economic activity.⁸⁸² Additionally, according to Reagan’s Secretary of Agriculture John Block, the USDA has become too bloated, its programs too expensive, and rural communities too dependent upon it for grants and loans. The solution, then, was to make drastic cuts to its programs, particularly those in rural development.⁸⁸³

To be sure, Reagan’s policy was not guided simply by a desire to cut government programs. His administration articulated its own understanding of rural problems, and solutions to them, that differed quite dramatically from postwar liberals. “Better Country,” a policy guide crafted at the USDA, articulated the Reagan administration’s rural strategies. Here, the source of rural problems lay less in the widespread economic changes remaking rural economies, but in an overbearing federal government that imposed rural development strategies on beleaguered state and local governments. Rural economic advancement would be served not by federally subsidized capital investment, but by restoring “political authority and flexibility” to state and local governments; removing regulations for how federal money should be spent in rural places; and centering private enterprise in job creation efforts. Importantly, these goals would not be achieved through specific “rural development” programs designed to create jobs or improve infrastructure, but with fiscal policy and government-reducing measures. The document maintained that a better country would be

⁸⁸⁰ “Memorandum for the Economic Policy Council on Rural Economic Policy,” 13 May 1987, Folder Economic Policy Council Meeting, Box 15, Crippen, Dan L. Files, Office of the Chief of Staff, Reagan Library.

⁸⁸¹ *Annual Report of the Economic Development Administration, 1981* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1982).

⁸⁸² “Reductions to Economic and Regional Development Programs,” ca. April 1981, Folder 009999, Box 9, Dept. of Commerce Files, Reagan Library.

made through “tax relief, regulatory reform, more aggressive trading practices, control of inflation, reduction of interest rates, and the improvement of productivity through basic research and development.”⁸⁸⁴ Most of the administration’s solutions to rural problems were “negative” in that they involved the removal of supposed barriers that got in the way of rural prosperity. In the place of a positive rural development policy, the Reagan administration offered conservative, market-centered economic policy.

The administration did, however, offer one “positive” solution to rural troubles, one that contrasted sharply with rural development. In place of rural development, the administration offered a policy of support to “enterprise zones.” By encouraging state and local governments to offer tax incentives to the private sector, the administration believed that rural economic decline could be solved. It was precisely this tax-base destroying policy to which proponents of rural development, at both the federal and local level, sought an alternative. In Alma, Georgia, for example, local rural developers knew that the broader vision of rural development they embraced – one that included a more robust public sector and modern infrastructure and services – would never come about if the government was starved of taxes.

Though the Reagan administration’s approach to rural development departed in important ways from the framework born in the 1950s, it did share important key assumptions with it that prevents one from arguing that the Reagan administration represented a sharp break from previous modes of policymaking. First, postwar liberals always planned for the renewal of rural America to be accomplished through the private sector. Indeed, these policymakers crafted a public policy that explicitly subsidized private

⁸⁸³ “Streamlining USDA,” ca. April 1985, Folder Block April-June 1985, Box 20, Series 1.5, NAL.

⁸⁸⁴ “Better Country: A Strategy for Rural Development in the 1980s,” 1 November 1982, p. iii, 20, Folder 111833, Box 2, Agriculture Subject Files, Reagan Library.

sector economic growth through federal loans and grants. The Reagan administration and postwar liberals disagreed only on the relative weight of federal involvement in spurring private sector activity in rural places. Moreover, postwar policymakers never intended, nor did they achieve, the creation of a rural development state shaped by the grip of the federal government. Instead, postwar rural development would be crafted in significant ways at the local and state level. The sort of overbearing federal authority created by EDA and USDA rhetoric never really manifested in rural development programs.

Despite the clear agenda put forth by Reagan and administration officials in the Commerce and Agriculture departments, his administration faced some opposition that prevented a full-scale deconstruction of the postwar rural development state. Congress, for example, mobilized against some of the deep budget cuts proposed by the administration. For example, Reagan hoped to dismember the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), created in 1936 to bring electricity to rural places. The agency continued to fund the spread of rural electrification into the postwar period, and the infrastructure it helped to finance laid the groundwork for rural industrialization. By the mid-1980s, ninety-nine percent of rural places had electricity, and the Reagan administration wanted to disband the REA to save money. According to Reagan's budget director David Stockman, it had outlived "its usefulness." Throughout the 1980s, however, Congress flouted administration calls to defund the REA.⁸⁸⁵

Opposition to administration plans for rural development also surfaced at the local level, even in places that supported Reagan during the 1980 election. This criticism revealed the limitations of administration rhetoric, particularly about the EDA. For example, Virgil Covington, a lifelong Republican who helped fundraise for the Barry Goldwater presidential

campaign, wrote to Reagan expressing concern over the plans of “Mr. Stockman” to cut the EDA. Covington lived in northern California and his family had a timber business that, like many, shuttered its doors in the early 1960s. After the passage of the Economic Development Act in 1965, Covington worked on rural development projects throughout the region, including in Siskiyou County. In contrast to administration rhetoric, Covington argued that the EDA had been essential to job creation in the region. He maintained that the program allowed for “home rule decisions and actions by local communities.”⁸⁸⁶ Larry Carter, the mayor of Alma, wrote a similar letter. Carter supported the administration’s goals of reducing inflation and unemployment but argued those goals would “not be reached through self-defeating measures such as the elimination of the EDA.” While the administration criticized the costliness of the EDA, Carter argued that the EDA was money well spent. He wrote that each new job created, in Alma at least, cost just over \$4,000, and that dollar of public money leveraged nearly six dollars in private investment.⁸⁸⁷ Covington and Carter implied that the EDA actually fit within the administration’s “Better Country” plans: it was decentralized and geared toward private sector development.

While Congress prevented the scrapping of popular USDA programs, and local opposition suggested the continued popularity of programs like the EDA, these two forces failed to halt the broader deconstruction of the rural development state. By placing figures sympathetic to his anti-government message in the bureaucracy, Reagan succeeded in dismantling many rural development programs. At the USDA, example, Reagan appointees cut the rural housing assistance program of the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) by

⁸⁸⁵ On plans to cut the REA, see Folder REA, 1985-88, Box 28, Series 1.5, NAL; on the EDA, see Howard Kurtz, “EDA Chief Criticized on Grants,” *Washington Post*, clipping in Folder 040000-079897, Box 9, Commerce Department Files.

⁸⁸⁶ To Ronald Reagan from Virgil Covington, 9 January 1981, Folder 009999, Box 9, Commerce Department Files.

nearly seventy percent. Even with a smaller budget, the FmHA made fewer loans and grants than ever before and consistently had money left over. The USDA also cut rural water and waste disposal loans, which, as we have seen, played important roles in constructing key elements of rural infrastructure, by sixty percent in 1983.⁸⁸⁸

The EDA suffered a similar fate. Reflecting Reagan's opposition to the agency and its mission, his administration did not appoint a director to the agency for Reagan's first three years in office. During the first year of the Reagan administration, Reagan cut the leaderless agency's budget by thirty percent, from \$624 million to \$454 million per year. The following year, the agency's budget was reduced to \$228 million. By the administration's end in 1988, the EDA's budget had been reduced to \$182 million.

The Reagan administration's defunding and delegitimizing of rural development continued into the administration of George H.W. Bush and, more importantly, his Democratic successor Bill Clinton. Though the Clinton administration gave the EDA a budget boost to deal with emergency flooding and hurricane damage in the early 1990s, these new funds were temporary and largely did not support the EDA's broader mission of infrastructure and business development. The cuts proposed by the Reagan administration turned out to be more or less permanent.⁸⁸⁹ If the budget cuts pushed by the Reagan administration continued on into the 1990s, so too did his administration's new rhetoric around rural America's problems. The Clinton administration continued the Reagan administration's sidelining of "rural development" as a policy goal and its embrace of the market as a solution to rural America's problems. Instead of reenergizing the EDA, the

⁸⁸⁷ To Ronald Reagan from Cleon Carver, 7 April 1981, Folder 015000-039999, Box 9, Commerce Department Files.

⁸⁸⁸ Ward Sinclair, "Rural Development Being Neglected, Hill Critics Assert," *Washington Post* 7 August 1982, Folder 090000-091999, Box 2, Agriculture Subject File, Reagan Library.

⁸⁸⁹ For EDA budget levels, see *Annual Report of the Economic Development Administration* (Washington D.C.: Commerce Department,) for the 1980s and 1990s.

Clinton administration touted its decentralization of the program, the cutting of EDA regulations, and slashing the program's costs. Moreover, the Clinton-era EDA framed ailing communities in market terms as "customers" of EDA programs. Gone was the notion that rural communities deserved federal investment, or that the federal government had a responsibility to help resolve some of the economic problems that devastated small towns.

The Clinton administration also made good on Reagan's plans to create rural enterprise zone. Reagan failed to get such legislation passed in the 1980s, but Clinton succeeded in doing so in the 1990s. In 1995, the Clinton administration passed legislation that supported the creation of "empowerment zones" in struggling rural and urban communities across the U.S. Instead of the investment of public capital in new infrastructure and jobs, Clinton's empowerment zone legislation offered \$3.5 billion in tax breaks to encourage industry to locate in declining rural and urban communities.⁸⁹⁰ Thus, in terms of rural development, the actions of the Clinton administration represented a continuation, and even fulfillment, of Reagan-era policy.

The abandonment of rural development policy at the federal level after 1980 erased many of the small improvements in rural life that it had achieved. Higher poverty rates offer one example. To be sure, a number of factors, including deindustrialization and cuts to social welfare spending during the Reagan years, can explain this trend, but a pattern of disinvestment in rural development must be seen as contributing to the rise in rural poverty rates. Between 1959 and 1980, rural poverty rates declined from just under thirty five percent to about fourteen percent. During the 1980s, rural poverty rates rose to around eighteen percent, and the latest statistics hover around seventeen percent. Rural poverty rates are once again higher than those found in cities and suburbs. Current urban and suburban poverty rates

lay at thirteen and nearly eleven percent, respectively.⁸⁹¹ Moreover, rural areas have had a much worse recovery from the economic crash of 2008. While urban areas have seen employment expand 8.2% above pre-recession levels, rural areas have yet to recover: estimated rural employment levels for 2018 was still 1.8% below the pre-recession level.⁸⁹²

Other deleterious trends continued in the wake of the decline of rural development and the disappearance of agrarian reform movements. Concentration of rural land ownership, which accelerated dramatically after the 1940s, continued apace after 1980. A census report published in 1993 revealed that nearly two million fewer people owned farmland in 1945 than at the end of the 1980s.⁸⁹³ As we have seen, public policy, economic change, and new technologies drove much of this restructuring of agricultural landownership patterns. As a result, fewer people owned increasingly large plots of land. Because statistical methodologies vary among farm surveys, comparisons over time, particularly at the national level, can be difficult, but a few numbers can nonetheless illustrate this middle to late-twentieth century trend. Between 1982 and 2002, the number of farms over 1,000 acres increased by seventeen percent. That year, these large farms constituted two-thirds of all farmland, while farms under fifty acres made up only two percent.⁸⁹⁴ By 2014, farms over 1,000 acres used seventy percent of all farmland. Single individuals or families owned the majority of this farmland.⁸⁹⁵ Moreover, whites held much of it. While the FSC catalogued dramatic losses of black land in

⁸⁹⁰ Sarah F. Liebschutz, "Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities: Reinventing Federalism for Distressed Communities," *Publius* 25, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 117-32.

⁸⁹¹ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/#historic>, accessed 28 December 2018; <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/six-charts-illustrate-divide-rural-urban-america>, accessed 28 December 2018.

⁸⁹² *Rural America at a Glance, 2018 Edition*, 3.

⁸⁹³ *Who Owns America's Farmland?* (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1993).

⁸⁹⁴ Nigel Key and Michal Roberts, "Measures of trends in Farm Size Tell Differing Stories," *Amber Waves* 5, no. 5 (Nov. 2007) 1-2.

⁸⁹⁵ Daniel Bigelow, Allison Borchers, and Todd Hubbs, *U.S. Farmland Ownership, Tenure, and Transfer* (Washington D.C.: Department of Agriculture, 2016), 18-20.

the 1960s and 1970s, this trend only worsened in the early twenty first century. In 2016, whites owned 98% of farmland, while blacks owned less than 1%.⁸⁹⁶

While the shifts in public policy enacted during the Reagan administration and carried on by his successors certainly worsened the status of rural America, the rural development state constructed during the postwar years cannot be removed from blame. Rural development policy in particular created a fragmented approach to the rural crisis that pitted declining rural communities against each other and ensured that many would lose out. Moreover, the construction of industrial parks did not automatically draw in manufacturers. And although rural tourism might appeal to some communities, it helped to enshrine a caricature of rural life that created at best low-wage jobs held to the mercy of the whims of urban and suburban tourists. Given the recent acknowledgement that rural places suffer from serious deficits in social services, particularly access to medical care, rural development policies might have done more in this regard as well. Finally, the turn away from the War on Poverty, which gave money to a cohort of radical rural reformers who took on some of the major elements of political and economic inequality, sundered one of the best hopes for creating a more prosperous and democratic rural America.

Given these shortcomings, is there anything that can be learned from the response of postwar rural development and agrarian reform movements to the rural crisis? It is clear that rural America continues to suffer from poverty, a lack of good jobs, massive inequality in landownership, and a deficit in social services. A more concerted rural development policy is needed now perhaps even more than before, but we should not restrict ourselves with only a single solution. Despite popular imagery, rural America contains a diverse group of communities and economic bases that cannot be served without a similarly multi-pronged

⁸⁹⁶ Antonio Moore, “Who Owns Almost All America’s Land?”

public policy. Nonetheless, a few things must be included. The focus on building infrastructure characteristic of rural development should be taken up once again, but this time with even more federal funding to ensure that the needs of people across rural America can be met. The massive infrastructure needs of rural places would alone serve as an important economic boost. Investing further in social services, operated by the government, should be another element of a new rural development policy. Finally, local people must be included in the planning and implementation of these development programs. While postwar rural development included some, primarily elite, local people, a new rural development policy must be democratized even further.

Much of this new development program should focus on economic activity outside of agriculture, but the farm must be a focus for reform as well. A more widely and evenly distributed base of land ownership would go a long way in ameliorating some of the worst aspects of rural inequality. Recent evidence suggest that most new farmers rent, and that many of them find it difficult to own their own land because the risks involved are too large.⁸⁹⁷ Clearly more needs to be done to help these young farmers up the tenure ladder. Accomplishing this task will require a new farm policy. Since the 1930s, our farm policy has benefited primarily large landowners and effectively transfers huge amounts of money to them. Moreover, these large-scale farms contribute to environmental decline and generally produce lower quality, less nourishing food. A new farm policy should provide massive support to small and medium sized farmers who produce things people can eat and which nourishes their bodies without destroying the environment. Moreover, a new farm policy should encourage and nurture small cooperatives, much in the same way the FSC attempted to do with southern farmers. These cooperatives could take form not just along commodity

<https://inequality.org/research/owns-land/>, accessed 2 January 2019.

lines but could pool together individual farm families on commonly owned plots of land. With a Republican Party controlled by market ideologues and a Democratic Party only marginally open to true reform ideas, the political landscape does not appear particularly amenable to these nonfarm and farm program suggestions. However, the political, economic, and racial inequality characteristic of the twenty-first century and the many problems and instabilities they have created show us that such radical reform is needed now more than ever.

⁸⁹⁷ <http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/land-tenure-beginning-farmers/>, accessed 2 January

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