

# The General Environment of The South<sup>1</sup>

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## Highlight

The best laid plans often fail if human (socio-cultural) factors are not taken into account. Certain socio-cultural factors, particularly those which are significant in the emerging mass society, are indicated in the following sketch of the general environment of the South. Changes are occurring in the region that are certain to have direct bearing upon the social and economic situation in which the stockman will carry on his activities. Furthermore, a new kind of agricultural operation is emerging and with it a new type of agricultural man—the farm businessman.

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A potential that is exciting enough to quicken the pulse of any far-sighted individual is present in the southern United States. Some of the potential takes the form of large tracts of land no longer utilized for intensive agriculture and now available for other use. The potential takes the form of expanding mass markets. The potential also takes the form of manpower resources—people who each year migrate to other regions, reluctantly, because of limited employment opportunities within the South.

Generally, it is still a potential—not yet a reality. And, as with all potentials, foresight, planning, and effort are required before goals are realized.

What is the South like? That question can best be answered by replying that there are many Souths. There is the South of history—the Confederate South that included Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi,

South Carolina, Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. There is the South of tradition, a pleasant land of moonlight and magnolias, endless fields of cotton, gentle sweet womanhood, courageous men and loyal slaves. There is the South of tobacco road; the South of the television and Hollywood stereotype.

There is the South as seen by outsiders—a dangerously violent region of moral ruin, of wayward women and degenerate men, of smoldering racial hatreds, and inescapable poverty. There is the South as seen by Southerners—a misunderstood region, the whipping boy of the nation. Politicians see it in one light, historians in another, sociologists in yet another.

To see either of these pictures alone is wholly misleading. The region is too complex for any naively simple interpretation. In the South there are sharp contrasts of wealth and poverty,

tolerance and intolerance, progressivism and reaction, of cultural achievement and ignorance.

Ideally, the sociologist aims at an objective picture of the South as a social system. He attempts to tone down the distortions that both insider and outsider alike may read into the picture. He recognizes that emotions—often highly charged—are a very real part of the situation and, while he tries to take them into account, struggles not to become so involved with them that his facts become twisted.

#### Social Change and the Emerging Mass Society

Perhaps the best way to gain a correct perspective of the South as a region is to conceive of it in terms of social change. It is at this point that the discipline of sociology can be of assistance to a group of technical specialists who must carry on their work in such a context. Sociologists, for a number of years, have conducted systematic research in the area of the human factors involved in social change so that now there is a considerable fund of research knowledge to draw upon.

Looked at in this way, the South is seen as a region confronted by the mass society, (Bertrand 1965). The mass society—which has for its characteristic features urbanism, mass production, mass marketing, mass psychology, and mass communication — exerts strong and continued pressure upon Southerners to change certain ways of behaving.

Changes are indeed occurring—some dramatically abrupt, others quiet and continuous. Let us look at some of them.

One of the most noticeable processes contributing to the situation is the rapid urbanization of the South. While all of us know that the cities are growing, it is instructive to determine the

**Table 1. Money Income of Families by States.<sup>1</sup>**

State	Distrib. of families under \$3000 (%)	Median income (\$)		Increase 1949-59 (%)
		1949	1959	
U. S.	21.4	3,083	5,660	83.5
Ala.	39.1	1,820	3,937	116.3
Ga.	35.6	1,902	4,208	121.2
Miss.	51.6	1,228	2,884	134.9
Texas	28.7	2,716	4,884	79.8
La.	35.6	2,140	4,272	99.6

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1963*. Eighty-fourth edition. (Washington: GPO, 1963), p. 340.

extent to which the city has become a feature of the Southern way of life. Within 100 years the population of the Deep South has shifted from 90% rural to less than 50% rural. In 1960 only 2 states had more rural inhabitants than urban ones—Mississippi and South Carolina. And within these two the trend toward urbanism was unmistakable (Patrick 1964).

Florida became urban in the 30's, Louisiana in the 40's, and Alabama and Georgia in the 50's. Most of the Southern city dwellers, however, are less than one generation from the farm environment. These people, more often than not, retain rural values beneath a very thin urban veneer.

Not only is the place of residence being changed, but the racial composition of the population continues to be altered. Many rural people are moving from the farms and a significant number of nonwhite rural people are migrating to cities outside the region. Today Illinois has more Negroes than Mississippi, New York more than Georgia, and California more than South Carolina. The population of the South was about 50% Negro in 1860. Today, Negroes constitute about 29% of the population (Patrick, 1964). They are not a majority in any Southern state though Negroes are un-

evenly distributed and do predominate in some counties.

A rise in income and levels of living has been dramatic in the region. This is all the more remarkable when contrasted with the desperate poverty of the 1930's. At that time though the South had 29% of the national area and 27% of the population, it had less than 5% of the great corporations, less than 19% of the wholesale firms, and paid less than \$5 out of each \$100 paid in income taxes. This prevailed despite the fact that the South produced 45% of the oil, 40% of the coal, 46% of the lumber, and nearly 37% of the 64 leading crops (Webb, 1964).

The South has been steadily narrowing the economic and occupational differentials between itself and the rest of the nation, especially during the last two decades. The increase in per capita income has been above the national average. Nevertheless, the South still included in 1960 disproportionately large numbers of persons in the lower income categories (Table 1).

At the end of the 19th century the South was a tragic figure with many afflictions. One by one the handicaps have been removed. Once it was said that the South could not industrialize because it lacked fuel. Then came oil with the South having about 50% of the nation's supply.

Once it was said that the South was handicapped by its hot humid climate. Air conditioning is now virtually universal.

It used to be said that the South could not grow beef cattle because of its lack of grass and its abundance of ticks and flies. Now bulldozers clear the land for grass and improved insecticides have been introduced to kill the flies and ticks.

The South's soil was once said to be depleted. Then scientific agriculture rebuilt the soil and chemical fertilizers repaired the destruction.

Another process of major importance in the changing situation is that of the legislation, programs, and policies which originate from various levels of centralized government and are applied to the South. These controls, ranging over such areas as regulating race relations, controlling livestock and crop production, retraining unskilled manpower and promoting community development, bring local people face to face with others from outside the region who can and do impose new norms. The situation is structured by the fact that these new ways carry the sanction of authority.

Many of the social characteristics associated with the South are those which are typical of rural social structures in other parts of the world. Sociologists, in analyzing rural social systems and urban social systems, sometimes treat these characteristics as opposites on a kind of continuum. In a rural society there are usually tendencies toward social homogeneity, primary or face-to-face associations, narrower ranges of social tolerance, primary means of social control, restricted social mobility, and a conservative outlook on life. As the South becomes more urbanized these characteristics will be overshadowed by their opposites on the rural-urban continuum.

#### Characteristics of Urban Living

City living, as a way of life, involves a wide acquaintance with things and people, and a tolerance born of this acquaintance. The urban person aims at mastering the art of external conformity and superficial politeness. He learns how to lead different lives in different contexts. In general he treats the multitude of people he meets in daily contact as animated machines rather than as human beings.

The city is too large to be a primary group, thus it is a sec-

ondary one. People associate constantly and at close quarters with strangers who are different in background and interests. As a result the limits of tolerance are usually wider than those found in rural areas.

Primary social controls such as those imposed by the family, the neighbors, etc. can be evaded in the city. The city then must resort to secondary forms of social control such as police, courts, and legal restrictions.

The groups one finds in the city are usually voluntary associations. Here are all kinds of cliques, clubs, and interest groups. The individual counts for little. The group must organize or the cause will perish.

As the South becomes urbanized these characteristics of the city and of mass society generally will gradually become a way of life for the region. The hinterlands of the city will not escape the influence because of the increased interaction of the hinterlands with the cities. This process will be augmented by means of an expanding highway system, increased specialization of occupations with a corresponding interdependency of country to city, and increased exposure to urban ways via mass communications media. The mass society will not fail to leave its imprint upon the region.

#### Resistance to Change

Like most rural social structures, the South has tended to have a conservative or traditional orientation. It seems to be a characteristic of human society that once a way of behaving manages to become established, it is difficult to uproot. Quite often the practice persists long after the factors that brought it into being have vanished. People seem to feel comfortable with old ways and old things; they are supports—certainties in a world of uncertainty.

It is in respect to the conserva-

tive outlook of the South that the human problems of technological change are brought into focus. At first glance it would appear that all people would be willing to support the objectives of soil conservation in the United States. But it is well known that the application of these objectives to concrete situations has not always been a simple task.

In certain parts of the South technological change has been met with fierce resistance because of conflict with traditional patterns of behavior. This is illustrated by the experience of some pulp mills in buying and leasing land for pine production. As a part of their program of developing pine, the hardwood which had previously provided food for wild game was systematically removed.

Though these pine plantations were the essence of conservation of trees and soil, it was not a form of conservation acceptable to local residents. Resistance was expressed in incendiarism and threats. On a post in a country lane this bit of poetry was found: You may cut out the hardwoods,  
And string up new lines  
But we'll tear down your fences  
And burn up your pines.

(Corty, 1962).

Elsewhere, similar problems were encountered when new ways came into conflict with traditional practices. Spring burnings to "freshen up" the grass had become annual events in some areas. A social structure built around this custom was resistant to change and conflict was inevitable when it was threatened.

Long-range reaction to government programs of Southern cattle owners is illustrated by the following research. In 1941 George Weltner studied attitudes in Vernon Parish, Louisiana, toward the U. S. Forest Service and its program of fencing the range—an act by which the Forest Service gained control of

range utilization. At that time 70% of the residents were unfavorable toward the regulations, 22% were favorable and 8% were neutral. A total of 67% of those interviewed felt that the fire regulations made for worse conditions for grazing cattle. (Jones, 1962). There is evidence that a number of fires were deliberately set as a result of the controls imposed by the Forest Service.

In 1963 Arthur Jones studied the same area and found that the proportion of cattle owners who approved of regulations had increased to 65%. This change is explained by the fact that in the interaction between the two systems (cattle owners and government agency) the Forest Service was able, through legal sanctions, to achieve a significant measure of social control over the local residents. (Jones, 1962).

During this era of change in the South a large number of rural people have not benefited either socially or economically. These are the ones displaced by technology in agriculture and related fields who have not migrated out of the region or have failed to make a successful adjustment within the region. Changes, however, are taking place to alleviate the low income problem. Large numbers of rural people are migrating and industry is moving into some of the problem areas.

The South continues to lag behind the rest of the nation in the educational attainment of its people and in expenditures upon education. The gap still persists between the region and the na-

tion though improvement has been made in both of these categories.

In 1950 the average annual expenditure per pupil in the South was \$165 whereas the national average was \$224 (U.S. Census, 1955). In 1960 the national average had increased to \$375/pupil whereas the Southern average had increased to \$279 (U.S. Census, 1963).

Religion had a large part in daily life in the Old South. God counted in Dixie. He counted in various ways—according to one's persuasion. People believed in a personal God, sought his favor, prayed with fervor and conviction. Preachers carried the Word with zeal and energy. Religion had stronger flavor in the South than elsewhere. It still does.

As for politics, it seems apparent that the South is moving into a more realistic mood. Southerners who, more than other Americans, are having to endure the effect of wrenching changes in race relations, are coming to realize that this is not the only issue that matters.

These, then, are some of the more salient features of the changing situation where rangers and other agriculturalists will work. In the midst of a technological revolution, where modernization in agriculture brings about the same economic and social changes that occur in industry, efficiency is more and more crucial. Small, inefficient agricultural enterprises, characterized by limited capital and unskilled labor, are passing from the scene. Large-scale operations are emerging and, with them, a

new type of agricultural man—the farm businessman.

The general environment of the South is thus a unique social complex of old ways standing against technological innovation where conservatism, reactionism, fatalistic realism, and optimism are the prevailing attitudes according to area and personal inclination. It is a region which will assume, perhaps a bit unwillingly, increased importance in the emerging mass society of which it is a part.

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