MAYFIELD

A STUDY OF RURAL COMMUNITY LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY, GEORGIA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The objective of this paper is to present an ethnographic study of a rural community, specifically Mayfield in Hancock County, Georgia, by presenting social facts which describe life as it is today (1976) by examining social and cultural changes that have shaped present social and cultural patterns, and by supplying social scientists with current data in answer to the question: Why is life like it is in Mayfield and other rural communities? This data will contribute to the available literature considering the social structure and culture of rural communities.

Review of the Literature

Numerous sources were available for study such as Dollard's Caste and Class in a Southern Town, Hylan Lewis's Blackways of Kent, Ulf Hannerz's Soulside, Sprout Spring, Small Town in Mass Society, Deep South and others, which are examples of ethnographic studies, and the

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1 Ethnography is the task of describing a particular culture. James Spradley and David McCurdy, The Cultural Experience (Kingsport: Kingsport Press, 1972), p. 3.

study of which provided the author with knowledge of the methodology of community studies. *Deep South*, in particular, is very similar to this study, in that it is a thorough study of a biracial rural community, which examines the economic, political and social systems of a historically cotton producing county.

Additional sources of related materials were two Atlanta University Master's theses, "A Suggested Plan for the Development of Rural Life Among Negroes in the Cotton Raising Section" and "Midway", a sociological study of blacks in Midway a community of Liberty County, Georgia.¹

Lastly, there were numerous articles in various sociological journals that provided theoretical and methodological frameworks.

**Major Concepts and Theories**

This study employs six major concepts: class, community, culture, role, rural and status. Each of these terms have varying meanings, depending on the author's intention. Therefore their conceptual usage in this study should be discussed here.

Class generically is synonymous with category and is frequently used that way by social scientists. It is a categorizing in which people are ranked. Therefore class is very closely associated with stratification.² A social class is a group of people within a society distinguished by social and economic characteristics such as type of

¹Samuel Hubbard, "A Suggested Plan for the Development of Rural Life Among Negroes in the Cotton Raising Section" (M. A. thesis, Atlanta University, 1933), and Clarence Williams, Jr., "Midway" (M. A. thesis, Atlanta University, 1974).

residence, occupation, income and other social characteristics.¹

Secondly, the concept of community is crucial, because it defines the area of study. Conrad Arensberg stated that communities are the basic unit of organization and transmission of social heritage that reflect a culture.² Implying each culture has a characteristic community. Arensberg does not define a community by its size, population, location or economics. Instead he agrees with Mumford's view as presented in The Culture of Cities (1937). Mumford showed that for each cultural advance in European life a new form of city developed.³

Likewise, in American culture, there exist many sub-cultures which vary regionally and historically, with a corresponding community, which Arensberg, feels are discernible above incidence of location, function and size. Arensberg, goes further in pinpointing three community patterns in the United States which were: (1) the New England Town; (2) the Southern County, and (3) the Crossroads hamlets and main street towns. It is with the Southern County that we shall be concerned in this study.⁴

The distinctive community form of the South is the county, according to Arensberg. To treat the county and county seat as separate parts or to seek the community in the Old South at any other level is a mistake. For purposes of this study Arensberg's definition

³ Ibid., pp. 533-534.
⁴ Ibid., pp. 538-549.
of county was accepted. In this study area concentration is the county, Hancock. However, a sample sub-community, Mayfield was the actual area the author lived in.

Equally important is the concept of culture, since it influences how one investigates and describes a community. In this study we shall restrict the term culture to mean, "the knowledge people use to generate and interpret social behavior" as Spradley and McCurdy defined it. That is all which are nonbiological, and but by the socially transmitted ideological, social artistic, and religious patterns of behavior which are its culture. This knowledge is learned and shared by members of the community. This concept of culture of culture enables the ethnographer to discover the knowledge a group of people use to organize their behavior. Ethnography is not merely describing objectively what one sees, but also discerning what the insider or culture member sees subjectively.

This concurs with Keith Otterbein's definition, that culture is the way of life of a particular group of people, their culture being everything they think, do, or say. Otterbein states further that culture consist of four sub-systems: economic; social; political and belief systems, each dependent upon the other. This study adopts Otterbein's concept of culture in analyzing the county as a community

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1 "The community-study method has been fairly widely used in studies of American culture. In that method it has become traditional to use local samples or microcosms of cultural." (Ibid., pp. 532-533), and Ibid., pp. 541-542.

2 Spradley and McCurdy, Cultural Experience, p. 6.

3 Ibid., p. 8.

4 Winick, Dictionary of Anthropology, p. 144.
and by delineating the various cultural systems within it. ¹

The concepts of role and status will be treated together because they are closely related. While status relates to one's comparative rank in the community, it is the collection of rights and duties characteristic of an individual. These rights and duties being attained in one of two ways: ascription and achievement. Ascribed status the most common, consists of rights and duties gained through inheritance from one's parents. On the other hand, achieved status are rights and duties obtained through individual effort.² Role is considered the dynamic aspect of status, according to Ralph Linton's usage. In a role one exercises the rights and duties of a given status. Thus, to understand the behavior of individuals within the community the concepts of role (behavior) and status (position) are used.³

Lastly, the concept "rural" has numerous shades of meaning. For example, Sorokin and Zimmermann define rural on the basis of occupation. For the resident of a rural area, his occupation is the cultivation of plants and animals. On the other hand, the general current practice among social scientists is to define rural utilizing two demographic variables—absolute size and density of a settlement. The United States Census Bureau is the source of this generally accepted definition. Thereby, the distinction between rural and urban is arbitrary. An incorporated area having

² Winick, Dictionary of Anthropology, p. 503.
³ Ibid., p. 463.
2,500 persons or more is designated as urban.¹

While this dichotomous division of society is frequently used by researchers, this is not to imply there is a clear separation or line of demarcation between rural and urban aggregates in this usage.² In addition to density as a factor of indiffer- entiation between rural and urban there are other criteria that differentiate the two used by some social scientists. One is social interaction, the nature of contacts individuals have with one another. The other, the division of labor, the classification and allocation of people by occupations.³ This brings us to the three major approaches one may employ to study this kind of modern society: (1) the rural-urban dichotomy; (2) the rural-urban continuum or (3) rural-farm, non-farm, urban trichotomy.⁴ In this study the author will be using the trichotomous definition primarily, except when data is not available for this approach. We recognize the urban, rural-farm, and rural non-farm populations in Hancock County, Georgia.

Data Collection

Differing from most current social research, which requires gathering enormous amounts of empirical data through surveys, questionnaires and/or census data, the data obtained in this project primarily relied on the participant observer approach. Two major methods were used: documentation for historical information and

² Ibid., p. 583.
³ Ibid., p. 582.
⁴ Ibid., p. 583.
observation for ethnographic data. While some empirical data is utilized, such as census data to describe the population, the majority of the data was gathered through the author's participation within the community obtaining formal and informal interviews with some of the residents. In addition, family records, letters, speeches, books, and newspaper articles provided data used.

The participant observer approach has disadvantages, relating to the credibility of the informants and the objectivity of the observer. This method is best suited to describe a community, providing data for more detailed research at a later time. In this situation, the writer was faced with a community suspicious of non-residents as a result of a series of investigations carried out by various government agencies just before and during this research.

**Methodology**

For approximately seven months the author lived in the community under study and several times thereafter revisited the community. This approach has some drawbacks, probably paramount is the problem for the observer presenting things as they are, rather than as he or she perceives them. Another difficulty is in the community's perception of the "newcomer", which greatly influences the responses of individuals to the participant observer. Yet another problem is the initial entrance into the community: establishing communication links that will enable the researcher to become acquainted with all of the community, not a mere "clique" within it. On the other hand, through participant observation one can see, feel, and learn, what a mountain of books may never
reveal about a people.
CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY

The history of Hancock County, Georgia reveals the occurrence of numerous changes in the cultural and social past of the community. That is, the community which existed in the late 1800's is quite different from the community which confronted the observer in 1976. Each of the community's significant historical eras contributed a set of conditions which are woven into the fabric of current community life.

For example, the one-crop system of producing cotton eventually caused soil exhaustion in Hancock County, resulting in an exodus of its residents and the failure of its economy. Both results had an effect upon social and cultural conditions such as work opportunities and general living conditions.

Therefore, it would be difficult to understand Hancock County as it existed in 1976 without presenting its historical background. Moreover, the attention to a time dimension provides an important mechanism for viewing the community in a dynamic rather than a static perspective.

Colonial Times

Like many other counties in Georgia and the United States, the first inhabitants of Hancock County were American Indians, specifically those of the Creek Nation. The early colonists were sent to Georgia to protect the English Carolinas from both the Indians and Spaniards, who then
inhabited Georgia and Florida territories.¹

Nonetheless, during the colonial era the number of colonists migrating to Georgia continued to increase. When the Counties Greene and Washington became densely populated the County of Hancock was formed. In 1793 Hancock County, named in honor of John Hancock, the President of the Continental Congress, was formed from lands previously included in Greene and Washington Counties. At this time the town of Sparta was made the county seat, as it still remains in 1976.² The county had a variety of soils—rich red hills, fertile valleys alongside rivers and creeks, and heavily timbered with oaks and hickories. The Oconee river was its western boundary, Greene County the northern, Washington County the southern and the Ogeechee river its eastern.³

As early as the 1740's the beginnings of the plantation system could be found in Georgia. Then, more than one hundred people owned blocks of land as large as five hundred acres, the marketable products were timber, tobacco, and skins. The population consisted of about two thousand whites and one thousand slaves.⁴ Until 1800 tobacco was the staple. With cotton's arrival, tobacco ceased to be cultivated. Throughout that time, Hancock residents migrated from Virginia and North Carolina


⁴Meadows, Modern Georgia, p. 18.
forming two classes: the slave owner and the yeoman.¹

The 1800’s

During the antebellum period Hancock was a representative community of the plantation cotton belt. Its major economic enterprise was cotton growing and subsistence agriculture. Present were the large plantations with colonial style homes (white mansions) and the sharecropper’s huts.

At that time Hancock County began a planter’s club, which was one of the first successful agricultural societies of middle Georgia. The new cotton strains, culture methods and tools developed there became widely used wherever cotton was grown extensively.²

Due to soil exhaustion and the farmer’s inability to adapt to new agricultural practices, a significant out-migration of whites began. While the white population was decreasing, the number of slaves was increasing. Since the farming industry was deteriorating, only large landholders were able to survive, once the impact of the technological revolution began, because they could afford the equipment. So the whites who did not own land migrated out and more slaves were brought in.

Likewise, the system of tenancy for landless farmers was the means of "keeping everyone in his place" economically. Consequently, blacks, who were at the bottom of the totem pole continued to provide a cheap labor force for the landholders when the "yeoman" farmers and poor whites

¹Smith, The Story of Georgia, p. 209.

began migrating out.¹

In the early 1900's, the black migration from the South to the North and West was rapidly increasing. Since Hancock County like its rural counterparts, was primarily populated by blacks, this migration accounted for its declining population. This era was the beginning of what became known as the "exodus". This migration was a result of various factors such as lack of employment of job opportunity, attractiveness of the city and the growing urbanization of the United States.²

Perhaps most influential was the socioeconomic and racial stratification present in the South during that time. An apartheid-like system, "Jim Crow", existed, segregating blacks and whites socially and economically.³ Although the black population exceeded the white in numbers, the blacks did not possess economic or political control and held prescribed low social positions.

Although the Emancipation Proclamation declared the end of slavery, the relationship between blacks and whites in the rural South did not change much after the Civil War.⁴

The Civil War destroyed the prewar social structure of the South. The formerly aristocratic planters had to yield power to the increasing influence of small farmers, bankers and merchants. From Virginia to Texas,

¹Ibid., p. 33.

²Lewis W. Jones and Everett S. Lee, "Rural Blacks-A vanishing Population" (Athens: University of Georgia, 1974) pp. 5-6.


⁴Jones and Lee, "Rural Blacks", p. 1.
barns, farmhouses, and mills were burned; railroad tracks and bridges were destroyed; towns were looted and residents run out. Lastly, the changing of the black's status from slave to wage earner, created serious economic difficulties and social tensions.¹

The system of "Jim Crow" was preserved from pre-Civil War times when the "peculiar institution", slavery, enabled whites to inbreed their racist ideology to "keep the negro in his place".² Blacks played an important part in the political scene during Reconstruction, sometimes preventing whites from achieving status as leaders in the new government. The Southern whites, however, committed themselves to the restoration of White Supremacy to counteract the change in social status of the blacks.

Whites turned to nonpolitical methods such as the secret societies of the Ku Klux Klan(KKK) and the Knights of the White Camillia to undo the results of Radical Reconstruction. The organizations were instruments of terrorism designed to scare blacks and force them to renounce their new political power.

Those whites who disliked the violent tactics of the secret societies used more subtle means of coercion. Blacks were denied jobs and kept from the polls, by intimidation rather than by force.³ Through non-violent means, the Democratic leaders steadily reduced the number of blacks who


met the qualifications for suffrage. This was carried out through three main devices: (1) literacy test; (2) "grandfather" clause; and (3) poll tax.¹

After Reconstruction the social custom of the South was still to treat blacks as inferiors to whites. This was achieved through disenfranchisement and the creation of a second class citizenship based on racial boundaries. Blacks were required to use rear exits and entrances to places of business; they were required to wait in separate waiting rooms at offices; the white's needs superceded the black's and the list could continue indefinitely. The maintenance of these racial boundaries permitted the survival of white control both economically and socially throughout the South as well as counties like Hancock.²

The 1900's

Nevertheless, the impact of the technological revolution, which created machines that cultivated more acres in less time replaced men and mules.³ Crops changed as a result of soil exhaustion, the boll weevil and the fact that the climate, soil and topography did not endow Hancock County with unusual agricultural possibilities beyond cotton growing.⁴ All were contributing factors to the exodus of blacks from Hancock County, and the South in general, to points North and West. This migrating trend has continued through the current decade.

¹Ibid., p. 11.
²Meadows, Modern Georgia, p. 41.
³Jones and Lee, "Rural Blacks," pp. 5-6.
The first significant shift occurred in the decade 1910-1920.\textsuperscript{1} In the decade of 1910-1920, the urban population exceeded the rural in the United States. While the rural to urban trend was slower for the black population, by the 1940-1950 decade, the black urban population was greater than the black rural population and as a result of migration rather than natural increase.\textsuperscript{2}

Between 1920 and 1940, we find the development of cattle growing a major industry in Hancock. Trees and grass, planted where cotton once was, yielding food for cattle and wood for naval stores and pulp. The soil which had become unsuited for row crops, was undergoing planned production and diversified farming.\textsuperscript{3}

Consequently, during this era of economic change Hancock and most "cotton belt" counties experienced an economic depression. These counties had an insufficient economic base, unable to employ many of their residents. Therefore, it is easy to understand the low median income and large number of welfare recipients in Hancock County.

While these conditions were true for the majority of the population, there were exceptional families. One such exception was the Hubert family, which had a community center erected in the Springfield Community. The idea for a community center was conceived by Benjamin F. Hubert for blacks in his native county, named in honor of his parents,

\textsuperscript{1}Jones and Lee, "Rural Blacks," p. 4.
\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 7.
Camilla and Zack. The blacks in this community owned their own farms, practiced diversified farming, improved their homes and constructed the center. The center's purpose was to serve as an instrument for improving rural life of blacks through home economics and agricultural instruction, general education and providing a central location for recreational, educational and community meetings.

Indeed, this community was symbolic of what wholesome life in a rural county could mean. Springfield was the first large community of blacks to own their own farms, owning and operating ten thousand acres of land collectively.

Even with this wholesome community example, blacks continued to migrate out of the county and the South to escape peonage, unjust administration of laws, dwindling farming resources and unsatisfying social conditions.

Until the late sixties and early seventies Hancock County remained in an apartheid-like state. As in many other "cotton belt" counties, the whites maintained political and economic control of the county even though they were outnumbered by the black population. Secondly, blacks long continued to endure social indignities such as entering back doors to enter public places or doctor's offices. In addition, blacks were

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1 J. G. Lemon, *Negro Rural Community Center, Hancock County Georgia* (Savannah Evening Press, No Date) pp. 4-8.

2 Ibid., pp. 5-13.

3 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

4 Ibid., p. 7.
violently dealt with whenever they got out of line. Lastly, blacks were only able to compete for the most undesirable jobs with the lowest pay.¹

"While the long experience of slavery in America left its mark on the posterity of both slave and master and influenced relations between them more than a century later. Slavery was only one of several ways by which the white man has sought to define the Negro's status, his place and assure his subordination. Exploitation of the Negro by the white man dates back to the beginning of relations between the races in modern times, and so do the injustices and brutalities that accompany exploitation. Along with these practices and in justification and defense of them, were developed the old assumptions of Anglo-Saxon superiority and innate African inferiority, white supremacy and Negro subordination."²

This quote of Woodward's from The Strange Career of Jim Crow, very adequately describes the social conditions present for blacks in Hancock County and throughout the South. Woodward continued expressing concurrent conditions as cited previously by McCowan and Kroch earlier in this text.

Yet in the face of apparent solidarity of Southern resistance to change, it had become increasingly clear that another era of change was upon the South. Beginning prior to the Second World War, achieving full momentum afterwards, the Second Reconstruction as Woodward calls it showed no sign of having run its course.

It had not one but many sources. Probably the most influential was the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision. Some others were pressure and propaganda organizations for Civil Rights—both black and white, Northern and Southern. There were also acts of Congress, executive orders of Presidents, acts of labor unions, professional organizations, churches and educational leaders.

The Second Reconstruction addressed all aspects of racial relations including economic, political and civil rights. Few sanctions of the segregation code were not attacked; an assault was made against the "Jim Crow" systems on trains, buses and other public transportation systems; in restaurants, theatres and hospitals, to mention a few.¹

As stated by Hogan and Featherman, social stratification changes for blacks in the South, occurred at a slower rate than blacks in the North. Similarly, the transition was yet slower in rural areas.² Explaining the transition occurring in Hancock County during the early seventies versus the sixties when it began for blacks in the North.

As the Civil Rights Movement had a charismatic leader in Martin Luther King Jr., so did Hancock County in John McCowan who in the late sixties and early seventies led a social movement for change. While one finds differing responses to how the residents of Hancock viewed McCowan, the majority of people considered him their leader.

McCowan, who like many other public figures was a man capable of error and subject to human greed and other human weaknesses. He died leaving some residents with a feeling of loss and others with a feeling of relief. Nonetheless, after one sifts through the newspaper coverage about the events surrounding the McCowan era, as this writer refers to it, at that time one thing became clear: there was initially great opposition to McCowan and the East Central Committee for Opportunity (ECCO), which he founded.

¹Ibid., pp. 8-10.
The primary objection involved the growing importance of Mayfield, a community built up by ECCO's operation versus Sparta, the original county seat and focal point of all county activities heretofore. Roosevelt Warren's statement, that appeared in a *Creative Loafing* article, clearly points this struggle out. Warren said:

"There was a very complete plan. You've got your water and sewer here (Mayfield), the only water and sewage treatment in Hancock County except for the City of Sparta. At the time the investigation started, we were well on the way to attracting some people into the area. We had some negotiations with corporation owners and business heads who were interested in Hancock County. That's why they (meaning whites) put the hammer down."1

In 1966, John McCowan, a civil rights worker from Lorris, South Carolina, came to Hancock County to register blacks to vote. Two years later he had become the chairman of the Hancock County Commission. By 1970, ECCO, an antipoverty agency had begun operation under his direction.

While McCowan was in charge, ECCO purchased one hundred acres of land surrounding Mayfield, then a hamlet of less than one hundred people, to develop a new community. There was to be a new Mayfield, which would provide such services as a clinic, a housing project, a library, and several businesses. The latter included a concrete block plant, a catfish farm, and a sheet metal plant to name a few.2

Considering the economic plight of this county as discussed previously, one would think the projects and proposals of McCowan's ECCO would be welcomed, but this was often far from true. From ECCO's conception there was opposition by whites who were resisting the shift of political power from whites to blacks and the fear of Mayfield replacing


2Ibid., p. 6.
Sparta as the county seat.\footnote{1}

Beginning in 1966, when two black officials were elected to county office through 1975 when ECCO's operation was diminishing; various enterprises had faltered, many changes took place in Hancock County. In 1974, Hancock County had become a black politically controlled county, with increasing economic strength but not control. Surely, this activity influenced racial relations in the county, but also the relations among blacks as well. Whites primarily resisted the acceptance of blacks as equals and as officials of government. Blacks who were in opposition to ECCO maintained a state of friction amongst the Commissioners, which resulted in little being accomplished. This raises the question: What has black-controlled government done for the county's welfare?\footnote{2}

Well, like most things in life, black controlled government had its good and bad effects upon the residents of the county. One good point was the effect upon the spirits of black residents through the following shifts: (1) hopelessness was replaced with optimism; (2) powerlessness with control; (3) indignity with respect; and (4) joblessness with employment. While all residents did not enjoy these transformations some did and it gave others hope for something better.\footnote{3}

However, the racial tensions created by black controlled government probably were most influential in the failure of many ECCO's enterprises.

It appears that the many investigations subsequently launched against

\footnote{1}{Levinson, pp. 6-7.}
\footnote{2}{Ibid., p. 7.}
\footnote{3}{Interview with Mrs. A., 9 November 1976.}
ECCO were initiated by the whites contacting federal agencies like the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), to discredit the ECCO agency. The investigations led to the closing of many ECCO projects not making a profit, where one after another was foreclosed. By 1976 only the housing project and the cut-and-sew plant remained in operation. After McCowan's death in January, 1976, the investigations continued against several ECCO officials and McCowan although he was dead.
CHAPTER III

MAYFIELD 1976

County Relationships

The preceding events set the stage for the conditions found when the author took up residence in the county. When one thinks of "rural" America, one generally thinks in terms of agriculture--of the open road with its wide farm lands. One is apt to forget that millions, who reside in the country are not farmers. This non-farm population seeks grasslands to feed livestock and/or timber to be converted into various wood products rather than corn, cotton and wheat from the soil for produce.

Hancock County, Georgia is located in the pine barrens of middle Georgia about one hundred twenty-five miles from three different commercial and industrial centers, in a region that is primarily rural. From Hancock County it is an easy trip over interstate or modern highways to Augusta, Atlanta and Macon. Unless one is aware of where Hancock County is he could easily pass through or by it without knowing it. However, traveling along the highways running through the county, one notices the abundance of trees growing alongside the road, cattle grazing and deer in the forests.

A closer look at the community brings forth the image of the typical Southern rural area: a county seat, Sparta, the center of all activity in the county; a small shopping district--"main street"; white colonial style houses, mingled with houses of various architectural eras up to and including the modern ranch house.
One can not escape the impression of the small town with one main street that lacks the general hustle and bustle typical of American urban life. The Atlanta University students, who visited the county during the research, demonstrated this through their bewilderment at Sparta's "main street", especially since it did not include one of the popular fast food places: such as Church's or MacDonalds.

To see the substance of the community, one has to travel along the county roads, viewing the beautiful forests, grasslands, rivers and streams. Each has its own significance to the community, the forests yielding lumber; the grasslands food and cattle; and the rivers and streams, electricity and fish.

In Sparta we find the high school, a modern building, servicing the entire county, a visible representation of the trend to centralize education. Though the school is new and large, there still is insufficient classroom space, even though most white students in the county now attend a private high school. The school is very important to community life, for many social and cultural activities take place there.

Ordinarily, on a weekday, few cars and few people will be seen on the streets. The greatest activity occurs around the school when children and teachers come and go. Another time is during the late afternoon when workers, do their shopping on their way home. On Saturday mornings activity is greatly increased. This is always a day of high commercial activity, it is when town business reaches its peak.

According to 1970 census data, Hancock County has an area of four hundred square miles, with about nine thousand residents. Fifteen hundred live in Sparta and the remainder live in the hamlets or open country throughout the county. For enumeration purposes the United
States Census Bureau has divided the county into four districts: (1) Devereux; (2) Linton; (3) Sparta and (4) Mayfield. Within each division we find residential communities.\(^1\)

While each community possesses its own communal gathering places, churches and stores, a considerable amount of interaction between them occurs. For example, it is not unusual for one to be in Springfield, a residential community in the Mayfield division, and encounter someone from the Mayfield community there.

Since the Census Bureau's division of the county was for enumeration purposes, the residential communities within a division were not necessarily alike in other respects. The Mayfield division was a good example of a diversified division. Within the Mayfield division were three residential communities each was a distinct subcommunity of the county, Mayfield proper, Springfield, and Powellton. Mayfield and Springfield communities were most alike, each inhabited by predominately black populations. Powellton, the third community was predominately white. The residents of Springfield and Powellton are similar economically, each community being composed of working people. In comparison Mayfield was primarily composed of non-working people. Lastly, Powellton and Springfield had land owners or renters, while Mayfield's population were residents of government subsidized housing.

Just as there was diversity within a division, there existed differences between the divisions. The Sparta division was the most unique, because it has the one city in the county, and it was the controller of county affairs. Indeed the power to levy taxes, to

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enforce laws and to allocate funds was in the county seat, Sparta. The Devereux division was a middle-class area, predominately black populated, with a residential community settlement. Linton in comparison had no recognizable settlement, for its residents were scattered throughout its area. Linton really appeared to be an appendage of Baldwin, a county adjacent to Hancock.

The preceding description, notes that Hancock County, is the political and economic community, whereas Sparta, Springfield, Linton, Mayfield, Devereux and Powellton were residential communities in the county. In particular, Mayfield was the residential community in which the author lived. No residential community can be understood without knowing its relationship to the county.

Mayfield Proper

Mayfield was about twelve miles east of Sparta, bordered by the Ogeechee river on the east, south of Springfield and north of Linton. By 1976, the former hamlet was transformed into a modern community, with a housing development replacing shacks for many. The community's population increased from one hundred in 1966 to approximately five hundred in 1976. The racial composition was about ninety-eight per cent black and two per cent white. The females exceeded the number of males, at a ratio of five to one. The majority of the residents were non-farmers, except those who had gardens for their family needs. Children ranging from infancy to late teens comprised a great portion of the population.

Considering these factors, we see Mayfield as a predominately black community, with little racial tension within its functioning. When the residents had to deal with government officials, some racial tension existed. There was an abundance of non-working age residents,
children and the elderly. Since there was an excessive number of women compared to men, women as head of households were very commonplace. Finally, the residents were not farmers, therefore their employment or unemployment was dependent upon non-agricultural economic enterprises throughout the county and surrounding counties, rather than the soil.

Economic Conditions

ECCO, the East Central Committee for Opportunity, had a few enterprises in operation during this time which employed some Mayfield residents, such as the garment shop, the housing development and ECCO's administrative offices. For the most part, residents who were employed there usually were commuters to work either in Sparta or in industries located in surrounding counties.

The majority of Mayfield's residents were receiving some form of financial assistance--social security for the disabled and aging, and welfare for the jobless. Since the industries in Mayfield and Hancock County were few in number, many of the residents were recipients of public assistance in both locales.

Those who were employed often were underpaid or worked seasonally, which contributed to their low income. The median income for the residents of Mayfield was 2,500 dollars annually compared with the national median income for blacks of 8,500 dollars cited in a 1974 census special report. In addition, many of the workers experienced irregular employment as a result of lay offs and the seasonality of some work, such as the lumber business. Many who worked during ECCO's fruitful

times were unemployed at the time of this study.

Since Sparta was the seat of control of most economic ventures throughout the county other than ECCO, the unemployment situation was not surprising. Particularly, when one considers that whites continued to maintain control of Sparta, even though blacks controlled the county government. It appeared racial discrimination was the root cause of the poor economic status of blacks. Overall, the residents of Mayfield were poor with a few exceptions. The majority of the people were unemployed, with only a few working. The workers who were employed were primarily white collar workers, the rest were blue collar workers. Since blacks gained control of the county political process this unemployment was alleviated to some extent.

Social Life

The paramount change in Mayfield was the construction of the housing development, often referred to as the "projects". Any urbanite would call it the same, probably, because it was built on the model of urban housing projects—all houses were similar in structure and very close together. Most apartments had two, three or four bedrooms, but there were a few with five bedrooms. Perhaps, it was also called the "projects" since the government subsidized the people living there as in the projects in cities. Even so, many residents appreciated having a house with running water, heat, and indoor baths to call their own. Many recalled the conditions they had lived in prior to the development—shacks with no windows, with no heat or indoor bath facilities.

Since the educational and health systems were county operated, no buildings for either system existed in the Mayfield community. Nor did any doctor maintain an office there. The students traveled daily to
Sparta for school on county buses. When one needed medical care, he traveled to Sparta to consult either the doctor or the clinic and for hospital care to Milledgeville or Athens.

While some residents of the community were members of a lodge, the majority were not. That is, there were no fraternal organizations within the Mayfield community. Recreation such as swimming and tennis was provided in the apartments. But, fishing and hunting were more popular for many of the residents. Still others were attracted by the night club in Mayfield and the theatre in Sparta. Both of the latter were made possible through small business loans from ECCO to black entrepreneurs.

Politics

No political structure existed in Mayfield. The roles of the sheriff and the fireman was played by one of the housing development officials. There was a fire truck but it was parked at the home of the manager of the housing development. There was no organized fire department, even of a voluntary nature. The political structure operated solely on the county level, Sparta being the center of it all. Although a county commission existed to govern the county, Sparta also had its own government with a City Council and Mayor. Law enforcement was carried out by county police in the county and the sheriff's office in Sparta. Yet another arm of the political structure was the probate judge's office. Mayfield residents like the other residential communities were subject to this political structure, only through the votes of the residents were they able to express their approval or disapproval.

Religion
Throughout the county, there were numerous churches of every denomination. But, only two churches of the Baptist denomination were located in the Mayfield community. Contrary, to the belief of most urbanites that all rural people attend church more regularly than urbanites and stay in church all day, the majority of Mayfield's residents did neither. Perhaps this was the result of a hopeless sentiment by a lot of the residents. Ms. W's statement put it, "Why go to church—it ain't gonna get me job or put food on my table, is it?" This is not to imply no one attended church, but the majority did not. Enroute to church one sees all the cars still parked and children playing outside. Those who attended were usually the older residents and the middle-class residents.

Culture

Kunkel and Kennard expressed cultural similarities in the Sprout Spring community through the use of subcultural themes. Subcultural themes are statements that summarize the salient trends of values, behavior, and attitudes. This concept will be used here to present the general culture of Mayfield.

The following themes are expressions of behavior observed in Mayfield as in Sprout Spring. There were:

1. Anti-Organization people were opposed to group activity;
2. Anti-Strangers residents avoided contact with outsiders or exercised caution, until the outsiders have been checked out by the community—as a whole;
3. Anti-Government residents, were suspicious of government at all levels, even though they accepted federal funds to live.

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1 Kunkel and Kennard, *Sprout Spring*, p. 70.
2 Ibid., p. 71.
With regard to the Anti-Organization Theme, we found the residents were not interested in formal organization. A tenant's committee existed, whose purpose was to deal with problems regarding one's home in the housing development, yet less than one fourth of the tenants attended the meetings. The only exceptions to this theme were the church organizations, for example, those of the two Baptist churches. As is usually noted, the middle-class women were more prone to associate in voluntary organizations such as bridge clubs, and the Flower Club. They also had better church attendance.

The Anti-Stranger Theme was most obvious to this researcher. The author's first trip there her car was followed, probably since it had Fulton County tags. While the author experienced being checked out by the residents, it caused no problem in establishing a rapport with the residents. There were a few people, however, who remained very cautious in their relations with the author throughout her residency. Therefore, the acceptance of some does not invalidate the theme.

With respect to the Anti-Government Theme, we find the residents most receptive to funds distributed by the federal government or state government, such as welfare, social security and Head Start. People remained very suspicious of the motives of government officials when they visited people's homes to ask questions. Probably, if the people could obtain the money or government funded programs and not be bothered with government other than that, they would be most content. Middle-class people, of course, were beginning to take advantage of opportunities to participate in the government. Of the twelve county commissioners, however, only one lived in Mayfield. Most lived in either Devereux or Sparta.
Summary and Conclusion

This study is an attempt to present an ethnographic study, using Hancock County, Georgia as the unit of focus, the community of Mayfield as a sample of one of its residential units. First came a review of the historical past, which helped shape the community that existed in 1976.

Overall this is a community of simple peoples, black and white, living in a rural area. At one time they had hope of a society where farmers would live in substantial equality. These hopes were destroyed by: (1) military preoccupations with the Indian warfare; (2) the expansion of slavery and plantations, which destroyed the foundations of economic survival for the class of small farmers; (3) the collapse of the social system during the Civil War; (4) the development of farm tenancy and sharecropping which furthered the destruction of the small farmers' economic base; (5) development of the "one-crop" system--cotton, which resulted in soil exhaustion--rendering the land unsuitable for farming; (6) the introduction of a new technology in terms of machinery so productive that the demand for farmers was drastically reduced and (7) finally, the ravages of the boll weevil which preyed on the cotton crops.

John McCowan who arrived in Hancock County, in 1966, provided a new kind of leadership. He began working with voter registration, realizing the black population, which exceeded in numbers the white population, had no political control. By 1968, the county government was black controlled, but blacks did not have economic power. Then McCowan formed the East Central Committee for Opportunity (ECCO) with Federal funds, with the intent to strengthen Hancock County economically.
The East Central Committee for Opportunity, under McCowan's leadership (he was Executive Administrator), developed numerous enterprises, by two methods: (1) acting directly in its own right as an agency; and (2) by granting loans to entrepreneurs. Overall, ECCO was only moderately successful, because several ventures, such as the catfish farm and the block plant, failed. In 1976, we only found the housing development and the garment shop still in operation. Likewise, the entrepreneurships were only moderately successful, because although several businesses foreclosed, the theatre and night club remained in operation, at the time of this study.

The entrance of McCowan and the formation of ECCO were influential in initiating social change in Hancock County. Two major changes were: (1) the election of more blacks to public office and employment and (2) the construction and operation of a federal subsidized housing project. These changes altered the life styles of blacks in Hancock County, through improved social status and improved living conditions.

On the other hand, the actions of McCowan and ECCO stimulated increased racial tensions within the county. Primarily, the whites in Sparta feared Mayfield's growing importance, because they felt Mayfield would replace Sparta as the county seat, under the new government. In addition, whites resisted the shift of political power from whites to blacks, in the county government. Much opposition existed toward McCowan and ECCO, which probably initiated the numerous federal investigations of ECCO officials and supporters in the community. The investigations affected the success of ECCO ventures: once the investigations began the monies, from government and private industries, were withheld.
It is difficult to evaluate objectively the impact McCowan and ECCO had upon the county, because mixed emotions existed among the residents, both black and white, regarding the changes in the county. Those who supported McCowan and ECCO, but experienced little change in their personal lives, felt it was all a farce. Other supporters, whose lives were altered by improved living conditions and employment considered the programs successful. Lastly, the whites considered McCowan and ECCO's projects a failure. In their opinion the county was not strengthened economically since only a few individuals benefited.

Overall, less change occurred than was hoped. For example, there was the failure of McCowan's idea to have an extension of Atlanta University Center in Hancock County. But the political changes affected a significant portion of the population, because for the first time in Hancock County history, blacks became public officials, controlled the county government and were actively involved in the political process. This was especially significant, when one considers, the decisive powers which the black population gained: the county government controlled the power to levy taxes, administer justice, and oversee the educational system.

Economically, changes were moderately successful. In 1976, Hancock County was still one of the poorest counties in Georgia. Only a small portion of the black population materially improved its economic status. The housing project employed a small staff, approximately twenty people, but its greatest contribution was the improved living conditions it provided for its residents.

Mayfield was a unique community in Hancock County, to some degree, but shared a number of similarities with the other communities. The
Mayfield population increased during the decade 1966-1976. While the other communities in the county were experiencing population decline and out-migration. The increase was, of course, the result of the construction of the housing development.

The out-migration of Hancock County residents was attributable to several factors: the poor economic situation—not enough jobs; generally poor living conditions; past treatment as second class citizens; and the attractiveness of city life offering better job opportunities and better living conditions. This was the case for most county subdivisions except Devereux and to some extent Springfield.

Prior to the political transfer of power, residents in Mayfield shared the economic poverty and poor social conditions, but due to the presence of the housing development, their living conditions became essentially the same as those of the middle-class workers. The development housed two distinct socioeconomic classes: the middle-class and the lower-class. Since the development was government subsidized, the amount of rent charged was based on one's income. Therefore we found lower-class and middle-class people sharing like living conditions. While some paid only two or three dollars per month, others paid as high as a hundred and fifty dollars per month.

The residents of Mayfield and Hancock County are similar to most people who still live in the former "cotton belt" counties throughout the southeast. These people are primarily a rural non-farm population, living in poverty and predominantly black. While this population continues to decline, through out-migration, thousands are still left behind. It is the future of that remaining population which is questionable: What will be the socioeconomic trends for Hancock County in
the next decade?

However, one classifies oneself--urban, suburban or rural, one has a stake in Mayfield and all the communities like it. Firstly, we all share an agricultural and rural heritage. We must carry the economic burden of supporting any people or area, who cannot support themselves. Therefore, we must stay attuned to what is happening, seeking answers to problems of poverty in rural life as we have in urban life. Many residents say they want to work, contrary to popular opinion, that the poor do not want to work, but the sincerity of that statement may be questioned: for some residents seemed to be saying what they thought the writer wanted to hear.

American rural life is radically changing, and has been for decades. Changes have created a greater similarity between rural and urban life, in material possessions, educational levels and general life styles. The impact of technology was most responsible for bringing the two closer--through increased mobility via improved communication.\(^1\) The problems of rural life are as much non-farm as farm at present.

Whereas, the blending of rural and urban cultures in the past was the result of rural people migrating to the urban areas, infusing agricultural traditions and modes of living there. This was viewed as a one-way track, since reverse migration from city to farm or rural has been a mere trickle.\(^2\) Subsequently, the rural population was more aware of urban life, than the urbanite was of rural life. Today many urbanite's


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 13.
concept of rural life remains stagnant, feeling that rural means farming, social backwardness and sereneness.\(^1\) Suburban life styles and values predominate.

The best way to close this gap of ignorance about rural life today is to study it. That is the underlying reason the author decided to do this study: to describe rural life "like it is" in 1976. Using a sample rural community to describe rural life. Reading about rural life was necessary, but the researcher derived greatest value from living and participating in it herself. It is hoped that the essence of this experience will be passed on to the reader of this thesis.

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UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS


A current work which analyses the impact of the East Central Committee for Opportunity (ECCO) upon Hancock County.

