

POVERTY AND OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE IN RURAL AMERICA

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Abstract

Rural areas have a disproportionate share of the US poverty population. Like poor urban communities, the persistence and severity of poverty in rural America can be linked to a limited opportunity structure which is the outcome of both past social and economic development policies and current economic transformation. Many rural communities lack stable employment, opportunities for mobility, investment in the community, and diversity in the economy and other social institutions. They are increasingly socially and spatially isolated and particularly vulnerable to adverse effects from structural economic change. This study reviews research on rural poverty and traces its relationship to its historical roots in social, political, and economic inequality and to current economic restructuring. Relevant sources of information on rural poverty include classic community and regional analyses, studies of rural-urban migration, regional development and underdevelopment, economic restructuring, and labor market analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Political and economic forces in the 1980s have prompted a resurgence of poverty research. Initially, new research efforts emphasized growing poverty

in urban areas, especially among predominantly black, inner city ghetto residents (Wilson 1987, Wilson & Aponte 1985). Researchers sought a better understanding of the dynamics of poverty, using the rich data accumulated from panel studies to explore who was poor, for how long, and why. At the microlevel, household structure and labor force attachment emerged as the most fundamental explanatory variables (Bane & Ellwood 1986, Duncan 1984). These findings stimulated further research which included much greater attention to local economic conditions and the social and cultural milieu at the community level.

New research on the dynamics of poverty coincided with the realization that the national economy had undergone permanent, structural change. The global reach of the economy signaled a shift from goods-producing to service-producing industries in advanced industrial nations, and a consequent restructuring of economic opportunities (Levy 1987, Harrison & Bluestone 1988). Some economists argued that a service-based national economy would result in greater inequality as the skilled blue collar jobs that offer occupational and social mobility evaporate, and the occupational structure becomes skewed, with low-skill, low-wage jobs at one end and highly paid professional service jobs at the other (Leigh-Preston 1988, Bluestone & Harrison 1988, Thurow 1987).

These trends have stimulated concern about rural poverty, where restructuring has exacerbated long-term economic distress (Brown & Deavers 1988, Deavers 1989, Duncan & Tickamyer 1988, Levy 1987, Tickamyer & Duncan 1990). Rural America has long had a disproportionate share of the nation's poverty population. Currently communities located outside metropolitan statistical areas have one fifth of the nation's population but one third of the poor. Jobs have been scarce and unstable in most rural communities for decades, and people have responded by combining different kinds of work or by migrating to cities for better employment opportunities. Now that the central cities and rural areas are experiencing a decline in jobs that offer a stable future for those with limited skills and education, scholars and policymakers again recognize the importance of better understanding the poverty population. New studies emphasize the diverse circumstances of the poor, distinguishing between the working poor, who suffer from low wages or underemployment, and the nonworking poor, who are disabled, elderly, or trapped in chronic poverty areas (Auletta 1982, Cottingham & Ellwood 1989, Dunbar 1984, Ellwood 1988, Levitan & Shapiro 1987, Sandefur & Tienda 1988).

This review examines research on rural poverty, tracing its relationship to inequality and economic transformation. We show that despite the lack of a well-defined tradition of rural poverty research, there have been relevant studies embedded in classical regional and community analyses, work on

migration, development, and more recently, on economic restructuring and labor market analysis. At micro and macro levels, these studies demonstrate that the structure of work opportunities has prevented poor rural people and communities from escaping poverty. The spatial dimension of limited opportunity has created and perpetuated a social structure that reinforces poverty and underdevelopment.

PAST NEGLECT OF RURAL POVERTY

Preoccupation with urban poverty follows a long tradition in American social science (Wilson & Aponte 1985). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, poverty was viewed as one of many social pathologies associated with urbanization, mass immigration, and industrialization, and it drew the attention of both scholars and reformers (Bremmer 1956, Katz 1983, 1986, Patterson 1981, Wilson & Aponte 1985, Wirth 1938). During this period, many rural poor left marginal farms and hard times in more remote areas to join immigrants and other low-income groups in growing urban centers (Byerly 1986, Hareven & Langenbach 1978, Riis 1890).

Others remained poor in rural areas, but rural poverty did not receive the same attention as urban poverty, and until very recently, rural poverty has been the direct focus of only a small number of sociological studies. Baldwin (1968) argues that lack of visibility and widespread belief that all rural residents could prosper in farming obscured rural poverty until the Depression. After some attention from New Deal policymakers, interest again waned. A content analysis of 50 years of *Rural Sociology* from its inception in 1936 showed that articles on poverty declined from a high of 3% in its first decade to virtually nothing by the 1980s (Christenson & Garkovich 1985).

Rural poverty has also been neglected by mainstream and rural sociologists because of uncertainty about the validity of "rural" as a separate analytic category for understanding modern industrial societies (Falk & Gilbert 1985; Gilbert 1982; Newby 1982; Pahl 1968a, 1968b; Stein 1972; Wirth 1938). When urban sociologists discovered family and kin networks thriving in urban neighborhoods (Bott 1957, Gans 1962, 1968, Whyte 1981), the old *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* categories appeared to lose their "spatial" dimension. Many urban sociologists regard spatial and ecological variables as descriptive rather than explanatory, and they therefore assume that "rurality" is a matter of degree on a linear rural-urban continuum. They attribute differences between rural and urban communities, and consequently rural and urban poverty, to a residual, almost atavistic, rural culture with little contemporary sociological significance. Conversely, the idea that the rural economy, culture, and lifestyle differ significantly from urban environments often arises from a nostalgic romanticization of agrarian society that ignores rural poverty.

Sociological neglect of rural poverty has left us with an incomplete understanding of poverty in advanced, industrialized, capitalist, and *urbanized* society. The conditions that generate rural poverty in the 1980s and 1990s are more severe and clearly more permanent than in previous decades, but they are not fundamentally new conditions. While growing numbers of working poor and a shortage of jobs offering upward mobility to low-skill workers are contributing to a new crisis in central cities, this lack of opportunity is not new to rural areas. Similarly, the deepening socioeconomic and cultural isolation of urban ghettos described by Wilson (1987) has been the experience of generations of the rural poor, especially in the South, where rigid social stratification has kept them out of the mainstream. Thus, understanding the circumstances of the rural working poor who are trapped by tight labor markets, or probing the chronically dependent poor in remote and isolated areas, can deepen our understanding of the poor in both urban and rural areas.

POOR RURAL PEOPLE AND PLACES

In the 1950s rural poverty was far more severe than urban poverty, with over a third of rural residents in poverty compared to 15% in urban areas and 18% in central cities. The combination of national economic growth and substantial outmigration from depressed areas brought a precipitous drop in rural poverty, and by the late 1960s rural poverty had fallen to 18% (compared to 13% in central cities). During the mid-1970s the poverty rate in rural areas continued to decline to a low of 14% in 1978, but hard economic times in the late 1970s and early 1980s brought new increases in rural poverty, until the rate reached 18% in the mid-1980s. The 1980s saw a significant increase in all poverty rates. By the decade's end the 17% poverty rate in rural America nearly equaled the 19% rate in the central cities. Although there are compositional differences between the rural and urban poor (the rural poor are more likely to be white, elderly, or in two-parent households with at least one worker), those who are most vulnerable in the central cities—blacks, children, and those in female-headed households—are even more likely to be poor if they live in rural areas. Regional differences are also important. Rural poverty has always been most severe and most heavily concentrated in the South, a fact recognized by both New-Deal and War-on-Poverty policymakers. In addition to plaguing the deep South, chronic poverty and underdevelopment have troubled communities in the Ozark and Appalachian mountains, and on American Indian reservations.

By and large, characteristics of the rural poor have been documented over the last decade by researchers associated with the Economic Research Service of the Department of Agriculture (see Brown et al 1988, Davis 1979, Deavers & Hoppe 1990, Ghelfi 1986, Hoppe 1985, Morrissey 1985, Oliveira 1986,

Ross & Morrissey 1987, Ross & Rosenfeld 1988). In addition, the persistence of severe rural poverty even during a national economic recovery has stimulated attention from several leading public policy-oriented organizations, including the Population Reference Bureau (O'Hare 1988), the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (1989), and the House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families (1989). Like their influential predecessors *The Other America* (Harrington 1962) and *The People Left Behind* (President's Commission on Rural Poverty 1966), these reports are aimed at raising public concern and spurring policymakers to action.

Community Studies

Few studies probe the dynamics of rural poverty, and researchers interested in understanding rural poverty in the past must make their own interpretations of classic ethnographic studies and journalistic accounts. Studies for such interpretation were made from the Depression era through to the present time and cover poor rural households in most regions of the country. Earlier studies are densely descriptive, personalized accounts. Although there are exceptions, authors frequently accept popular stereotypes about low-income, non-middle class groups. Taking the potential biases of the writers into account, we find significant differences between poverty in the rural South and poverty in other rural areas. Southern rural poverty among both blacks and whites is rooted in a rigidly stratified political and economic system that perpetuated landlessness and dependency. Elsewhere rural poverty was the result of unstable, seasonal employment or marginal agriculture.

THE DEEP SOUTH AND APPALACHIA Work about southern poverty through the 1930s includes a number of classic community studies and social histories that describe an entrenched social structure in which lines were clearly drawn between the haves and the have-nots (Agee & Evans 1941, Baldwin 1968, Conrad 1965, Davis et al 1941, Dollard 1957). The combined disdain and paternalism of white elites characterized an oppressive system that blocked opportunities for advancement and encouraged dependent behavior for both white and black laborers and tenants. In the late 1930s, three monographs from the Works Progress Administration provided detailed descriptions of the oppressive nature of Southern rural poverty. For example, Zimmerman & Whetten (1971) found that southern children on relief were much more likely to have dropped out of school than were poor rural children in the north, midwest, and west. Conrad (1965) and Baldwin (1968) show how Southern white farm leaders successfully blocked federal efforts to diversify and democratize the structure of Southern agriculture in the 1930s. Without access to land or education, these rural poor had no way to escape poverty, although

both white and black tenants moved from plantation to plantation every couple of years, in search of some better opportunity.

When Stein (1972) compares Davis et al's findings in *Deep South* to community studies in large northern cities, he points out that in the southern communities every institution was focussed on keeping blacks subordinate to whites, whereas in Chicago, even though "officialdom" was controlled by middle and upper class white elites, "they were at least 'formally' dedicated to defending and protecting the individual." The Southern rural poor never had such protection. These community studies report that Southern white elites treated the rural poor like incompetent children, who deserved their low status because they were ignorant and shiftless. Although similar attitudes about the poor are found in all areas (see Steinberg 1981, Lemann 1989), in the South these middle-class prejudices against lower-class behavior were undergirded by a repressive, almost feudal economic system. Each of these early studies describes a system in which the poor were denied basic educational, economic, and political opportunities. The distinct political economy of the plantation-based south left a legacy of rural poverty for those who did not migrate (Billings 1979, 1988; Cobb 1982; Mandel 1978; Wright 1986).

More recent work suggests little has changed. Studies by Marshall and Godwin (1971), the Southern Regional Council's Task Force on Southern Rural Development (1977), and Rungeling et al (1977) document the rural poor's continued lack of job and education opportunities and their dependence upon the entrenched white power structure. Racism and elitism among white administrators undermine welfare programs and corrupt implementation of the meager employment and training programs that exist. Preliminary results from new ethnographic studies of poor households headed by females in the rural South show the same patterns. Dill et al (1988) find racism and lack of political power to be key factors in the perpetuation of rural poverty among black women. Beckley (1988) shows how plantation system dependency is transferred to dependency on the elite-controlled welfare system in small Southern communities.

Appalachian poverty has received almost as much scholarly attention, and certainly as much popular attention, as that of the Deep South. The most influential study is Kentucky lawyer Harry Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* (1962), a rambling, undocumented account that feeds stereotypes held about Appalachia since the turn of the century (Walls 1978, Shapiro 1978). Caudill describes Appalachians as ignorant, hopelessly discouraged and fatalistic, their spirits broken by ruthless coal barons. Similar descriptions followed (Ball 1968, Fetterman 1967, Lantz 1971), each suffering from sentimental hyperbole, a deficit of evidence, and an overdependence on culture of poverty theories. However, in the absence of more serious study, many subsequent analysts have treated these works as scholarship (see Duncan 1986).

Some recent works remain strongly influenced by these predecessors while simultaneously offering contradictory accounts (cf Deloria 1984, Auletta 1982). Despite stereotypes about shiftless Appalachians, Auletta's anecdotes actually describe individuals who hate the stigma of living on welfare and long for independence. In an area with few employment opportunities, finding work is even more difficult because they are stigmatized by their families' lack of success.

There are also alternative portraits of persistent poverty in Appalachia that connect the structure of the national and regional political economy to inequality and powerlessness in mountain communities (Billings 1974, Gaventa 1980). Similarly, at the local level authors in Hall & Stack's collection (1982) show how kinship and landholding patterns perpetuate existing social divisions and factional politics, ostracizing poor families. Duncan (1988) found that in coal communities, the few stable jobs available go either to family members or to political supporters, locking out those whose families "never amounted to anything." Studies of noncoal communities portray self-sufficient people who cannot find stable work that frees them from poverty, and consequently many migrate to seek jobs elsewhere (Beaver 1986; Coles 1971a,b; Schwarzweller et al 1971).

COMMUNITY STUDIES IN THE NORTH In contrast, the high value placed on independence is a recurring theme in ethnographic and community studies in the Northeast. Studies of a New Hampshire dairy farming area (MacLeish & Young 1942) and a Maine fishing community (Hughes et al 1960) portray a relatively unoppressive social structure in which good schools were provided for the children of laborers and hard work sometimes permitted escape from poverty. In the rural farm economy of the 1940s and 1950s, mobility was possible and frequently achieved by individuals who started with very little. While these studies report examples of ethnic and racial prejudice, elitist attitudes were not reinforced by an economic system with no opportunity for improvement as they were in the South.

Fitchen's case study of the rural poor in a declining community in upstate New York (1981) is a contemporary version of these northeastern community studies. Her historical review of the social class structure before farming declined also indicates that hard workers could achieve land ownership and upward mobility. However, the poor she describes in the 1970s face limited economic opportunities. Although they are not trapped by an explicitly oppressive social system as are their southern counterparts, their inability to find and keep stable jobs has become a chronic problem. Their behavior and circumstances resemble that of marginal workers in cities who cannot break out of poverty (cf Liebow 1967, Stack 1974).

The structure of economic opportunity in a given place or time provides the context for the behavior of the rural poor. In a recent study of two poor fishing

communities on Maryland's eastern shore, Ellis (1986) describes isolated, almost self-contained island communities in which people work mostly for themselves. Independence is highly valued in this culture, and working for wages, like being illiterate or having an illegitimate child, condemns one to the lowest status on the island.

NATIVE AMERICANS, HISPANICS, AND POOR FARMERS Although several new ethnographic studies are underway on poverty among Native Americans, Hispanics, and marginal farmers, most previous work consists of either statistical or journalistic descriptions. Exceptions are Snipp & Summers' (1988) analysis of Native Americans using the special Indian Census from 1980, Sandefur & Scott's (1984) comparison of black and American Indian labor force participation, and Palerm's (1988) study of low-income Hispanics in California agricultural communities. In these works, the limited opportunity structure, for both work and acquisition of assets, clearly explains the persistent poverty experienced by these minorities. Montejano's (1987) social history of Mexican-anglo relations along the Texas border, like earlier Southern studies, attributes the chronic rural poverty that plagues that region to rigid class stratification emerging from the structure of the political economy. Those who migrated to cities escaped these constraints and had opportunities for upward mobility.

In every region, the rural poor seek stable, secure support but are handicapped by isolation and limited opportunities. Like the inner city poor described by Wilson (1987), the rural poor have little experience outside their small communities (Duncan & Tickamyer 1988, Williams & Kornblum 1985). Like Liebow's (1967) streetcorner men, they value work and self-sufficiency, but years of disappointment and unsteady work have made them cautious about trying new avenues or venturing out from the world they know and the family on whom they rely. In the South these limitations are compounded by rigid class and race stratification that discourages efforts to become self-sufficient and upwardly mobile.

Migration and the Rural-Urban Poor Linkage

Migration literature is extensive and beyond the scope of this review, but several studies contribute an important dimension to understanding rural poverty because they link patterns of economic success in migration to the industrial structure (Levy 1987; Lieberman 1978, 1980; Long 1974; Long & Heltman 1975; Richey 1974). There has been some renewed debate recently about the extent to which rural migrants contribute to urban poverty, and more specifically, the extent to which rural Southern blacks bring lifestyles and culture that perpetuate inner city poverty through dependency and out-of-wedlock births (G. Duncan 1988, Lemann 1986, Wilson 1987). Most schol-

ars insist that these debates about culture and life style are best analyzed in terms of economic opportunity, both past and present.

Generally, past studies indicated that migrants have done better than non-migrants, whether they were white Appalachians, Native Americans, or blacks. But as Levy (1987) points out, success was possible because cities could absorb in-migrants from rural areas when cheap housing and steady manufacturing jobs were available. By the mid-1980s production jobs that offered opportunities for rural migrants were disappearing, especially for poorly educated black men. G. Duncan and his colleagues (1988) see evidence that rural Southern migrants now in their middle ages have not fared so well in the cities, a phenomenon explained by recent analyses of industrial restructuring. The same factors that constrict opportunities in the central cities now contribute to further decline in rural areas, and the emergence of a "new rural poor" (Stinson 1988), making it clear that growing inequality has a spatial as well as social dimension.

SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Spatial analyses of poverty draw from a variety of disciplines and theoretical perspectives, and these have been reviewed extensively elsewhere (Henry 1989, Kale 1986, Rees & Stafford 1986, Snipp & Bloomquist 1989, Summers 1986, Summers & Branch 1984, Weaver 1984, Walton 1987). They are important because they provide the economic underpinnings for understanding rural poverty and form key links between old and new forms of rural poverty. During the postwar period of economic growth and prosperity, many rural areas remained pockets of poverty and deprivation. Reorganization of agriculture, federal farm programs and subsidies, new technology, and the opportunities and costs of international markets and competition reduced employment in the traditional agriculture and resource extraction sectors. At the same time, relocation of mature and footloose industries to rural areas indicated that rural industrialization might bring revitalization to these communities. By the late 1970s, regional economists were analyzing the spatial dimensions of economic development, hoping to learn how to stimulate chronically depressed rural economies.

Initially a *laissez-faire* model of rural industrial development prevailed. Capital's pursuit of cheap labor would induce firms to locate in rural areas, bringing new jobs, income, and tax revenues, diversifying economies, and reversing the flow of outmigrants and the decline of small communities. Later, national, state, and community intervention policies provided programs to improve rural infrastructure and provide subsidies, tax breaks, and training facilities for relocating firms (Lyson 1989, Summers et al 1976). While these efforts to attract firms to rural areas never constituted a coherent

policy, the combination of such initiatives has constituted a defacto industrial policy (Falk & Lyson 1988).

Since new jobs were the outcome of a "filtering down" process in which mature, labor-intensive industries at the bottom of the product cycle reduced labor costs by moving to low-wage, nonunionized areas, the impact on rural poverty was minimal in most areas (Bloomquist 1987, Lonsdale & Seyler et al 1979, Seyler 1979a,b, Thompson 1965). The rural South was particularly vulnerable to this type of development because of its legacy of political and labor repression, and numerous studies document the pitfalls of this strategy in the South (Beaulieu 1988; Cobb 1982, 1984; Falk & Lyson 1988; Horan & Tolbert 1984; Malizia 1978; Molnar 1986; Rosenfeld et al 1985, 1988). Few of the new industries created enough forward and backward linkages to greatly assist local economic growth, and major financial transactions which might boost local development frequently occurred outside the region. In the rare cases where new industries brought higher skilled, better paid jobs, they also imported outside workers who, unlike indigenous residents, had the qualifications necessary for such positions. Subsidies and tax breaks used to lure firms ate into or negated anticipated tax revenues. Finally, since the primary goal of relocation was to reduce labor costs, many rural plants have been quick to remove operations in search of still cheaper labor offshore. The definitive summary of the outcome of rural industrialization suggests that few of the predicted benefits actually were realized (Summers et al 1976).

On the other hand, in the most depressed areas, any job creation may improve community economic viability (Seyler 1979, Summers et al 1976, Summers & Selvik 1979). In rural Appalachia, areas with substantial manufacturing employment have higher quality of life and lower poverty rates even though they may have lower aggregate income than comparable areas with little manufacturing (Tickamyler & Duncan 1984). In the Ozarks, jobs created by new industry were judged beneficial to local residents, reducing poverty status for some residents and permitting the return of outmigrants (Kuehn 1979). In Georgia, industrialization has decreased some forms of income inequality, although it has increased black-white differences (Colclough 1989). Studies of other chronically depressed areas also show mixed results with some places and groups improving while others do not (Seyler 1979, Shaffer 1979). The mixed results suggest that industrial growth is beneficial to communities to the extent it improves the amount and diversity of employment opportunities and the distribution of income across different groups (Duncan 1985). This in turn depends on political and social factors, as well as the economic structure of the region.

The deficiencies of rural industrialization policies prompted a search for alternative models of rural development. Analysts from a variety of theoretical perspectives shared a critical stance toward traditional economic models,

demonstrating that economic growth in itself does not necessarily benefit either persons or places. Large-scale economic growth, if it is not well distributed or if it is imbedded in a repressive political economy, may do little to change patterns of persistent poverty of rural areas, as has been found in the Deep South and Appalachia. Rapid growth, resulting in boom/bust cycles may create new problems and new poverty as in western energy boomtowns (Markusen 1980). New jobs, in peripheral industries and the secondary sector may create new forms of working poverty (Duncan & Tickamyer 1988, Tickamyer & Duncan 1990, Shapiro 1989).

Critical analysts looked beyond the inadequacies of growth to locate the origins of regional poverty in the spatial dimensions of the political economy of advanced capitalism. In this view, regional inequality arises from the dynamics of the capital accumulation process itself (Howes & Markusen 1981, Markusen 1985, Weaver 1984). The exploitive nature of capital-labor relations is reflected in the way capital exploits rural areas for natural resources and cheap labor. Movement of industry into remote areas cannot alleviate rural poverty; it creates or exacerbates it, just as movement of capital out of particular regions continues the impoverishment of dependent areas.

RURAL WORK AND POVERTY AFTER RESTRUCTURING

Even as development officials ardently pursued new industries, profound changes in the US economy suggested that critics of this policy were right. In the 1980s, industrialization became an increasingly unlikely remedy for rural poverty as the United States moved from a goods producing economy dominated by mass production techniques and mass markets to a service economy based on new technology aimed at specialized markets in a global setting (Noyelle 1986, 1987).

Economic Restructuring

These changes have reverberated throughout the economy, changing the industrial and occupational mix, the organization and technologies of production, and the distribution of jobs and income. Analysts vary on whether they emphasize the negative impacts of deindustrialization such as rising unemployment, income inequality, deskilled and degraded labor, declining union membership, and blue collar employment (Bluestone & Harrison 1982, Harrison & Bluestone 1988) or the positive opportunities offered by restructuring, including innovative technologies and management techniques, improved productivity and efficiency, and the growth of professional and paraprofessional occupations (Piore & Sabel 1984, Reich 1983). All agree, however, that the dislocations resulting from these changes not only have created

immediate hardship for numerous persons and places, but also will have long-term effects on the social and spatial organization of economic life.

Initial attention to the spatial dimension of restructuring focussed on the internationalization of the division of labor, the declining significance of national boundaries, and the presence of regional disparities and competition. However, the aftermath of the recessions of the early 1980s made it increasingly apparent that there was an important urban and rural dimension as well. While many urban areas had renewed growth in income and employment and a significant drop in poverty rates, unemployment remained high in rural areas, and there was little reduction in poverty through the end of the decade (Deavers 1989). Less diverse rural economies have been hard hit by restructuring and slow to recover. Workers displaced from agriculture, manufacturing, and resource extraction became newly poor (or poorer), augmenting already large poverty rolls (O'Hare 1988).

It should be no surprise that rural areas have fared badly. Restructuring has meant a shift from the resource extraction and low-wage manufacturing industries, which make up the backbone of most rural economies, toward service industries that depend on agglomeration in urban economies. Long-term decline of employment in the agriculture, mining, and timber sectors coincided with the rapid decline in mature manufacturing (Bloomquist 1988, McGranahan 1988, Singelmann 1978, Tienda 1986). Industries located in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to foreign competition and unfavorable exchange rates, and as employees of peripheral industries, workers have little protection. Although there has been considerable service sector growth in rural areas, jobs are disproportionately located in low-wage consumer and personal services which have limited development potential (Deavers 1988, McGranahan 1988, Miller & Bluestone 1988). More desirable producer services generally prefer urban locations.

In sum, structural changes in the 1980s have intensified chronic economic instability in rural areas where industries have always been volatile, unstable, and vulnerable to cyclical trends. Markets in resource industries and low-wage manufacturing change according to endlessly varying conditions of production, including weather conditions, labor relations, and the effect of international relations on trade. Rural workers in resource industries expect booms and busts in their local economies, and most families working in the agriculture, mining or timber industry can recount ups and downs experienced by each generation. During the 1960s and 1970s, manufacturing provided some stability for rural workers, but this ended with the upheavals created by restructuring. Substantial numbers of "new poor" joined the chronically poor in remote, depressed areas. These "new poor" made it clear that rural poverty would persist as long as there were few job opportunities, and existing employment was unstable and poorly paid.

Labor Market Analysis

The changes in employment which accompanied restructuring have prompted attention to the characteristics of labor markets. New work on rural labor markets has had to overcome an urban bias, partly because most economic development theories emphasize the centrality of urban markets even for rural areas, and partly because data collection problems limit availability of rural labor market data (Tickamyer 1988). Recently, however, there has been expanded interest in rural labor markets, including new techniques for studying how they operate (see Falk & Lyson 1989).

Most recent labor market research investigates the social division of labor and the organization of the workplace with relatively little attention to labor market ecology (Snipp & Bloomquist 1989). However, just as variations in economic structure and development entail a spatial dimension, the concept of a labor market implies that the wage-labor exchange takes place in a particular locale. With the exception of those few privileged workers who enter national labor markets, this locale is circumscribed by residence. To understand the way labor markets structure opportunity, it is necessary to provide geographic delineation of a labor market area (Horan & Tolbert 1984; Tickamyer & Bokemeier 1988, 1989; Tolbert & Killian 1987).

Researchers concerned with spatial components of labor markets generally take one of two approaches. Either they use existing administrative boundaries as the primary unit of analysis for labor market studies, or they aggregate over the characteristics of the primary unit to locate individuals in certain types of areas. In the first approach, counties, metropolitan statistical areas, or even states are used as the units, and researchers examine differences in their characteristics such as size, population structure, industrial employment and diversity. A number of recent studies analyze variation in rural poverty and economic structure at the county level (Colclough 1988, Reif 1987, Tickamyer & Tickamyer 1988, Tomaskovic-Devey 1987). They find significant variation in aggregate income and poverty levels by type of rural economy, with resource-based economies consistently showing the worst performance. The second approach begins with individuals in a particular locale and then treats characteristics of these areas such as unemployment rates and type of industrial employment either as controls or as structural level influences on individual outcomes in multilevel models (Horan & Tolbert 1984). Most research in this tradition remains oriented toward urban areas. However, new studies using Census journey-to-work data permit examination of rural local labor market areas (Killian & Hady 1988, Tolbert 1989, Tolbert & Killian 1987). Multilevel models confirm that rural resource-based economies have a negative impact on individual poverty levels, earnings, and income (Tickamyer & Bokemeier 1988, 1989).

Studies of rural labor markets parallel current urban poverty research on the

ecology of opportunity (Wilson 1987). For rural areas, labor markets provide the link between the economic outcomes for individuals, families, and households and the macro-level operation of the economy described by the application of theories of uneven development at regional, national, and international levels. It is becoming clear that the socioeconomic characteristics of communities have an impact on the economic success of residents regardless of their own socioeconomic background. Location in social space affects economic opportunity and life chances of persons in that locale, providing the parameters for aspirations and opportunities.

Regional and local labor market research confirms that rural poverty is not simply the result of lack of economic growth or the lack of income and employment, but it is also the result of inequality in the distribution of income, jobs, and resources within communities as well as regions (Bluestone & Harrison 1982, Leigh-Preston 1988). The type of employment available can generate patterns of inequality and poverty (Reif 1987, Tomaskovic-Devey 1987). Rural areas are dominated by low wage employment in agriculture, service, and manufacturing sectors. Where relatively high wage employment exists, such as in mining and other resource extraction, these industries tend to be highly volatile, leading to great instability in employment even though jobs may command high pay when they exist (Tickamyer & Duncan 1984). Many other jobs are part-time and seasonal such as in agriculture and construction, making underemployment a chronic condition for the "working poor" (Lichter 1988, 1989, Tickamyer & Duncan 1990). While some farm families combine off-farm employment with farm labor to raise income, many are still unable to earn enough to escape poverty (Lyson 1986, Molnar 1986, Thompson et al 1986).

Minorities and women are especially vulnerable to job insecurity and limited opportunities. For example, counties with a large black population were more likely to suffer plant and employment losses in the decade between 1970 and 1980 (Colclough 1988). Large gaps between white and black workers in rural areas persist in all economic sectors (Cho & Ogunwole 1989). Southern rural blacks are particularly vulnerable to underemployment with rates 39% higher than for urban blacks in the same region (Lichter 1989). Women have much more limited employment opportunities, much flatter earnings curves, and higher poverty rates in rural counties and labor market areas dominated by agriculture and mining (Tickamyer & Bokemeier 1988, Tickamyer & Tickamyer 1988). Recent studies suggest that the scarcity of work and the inadequacy of wages are becoming even more serious for young people. Poverty for young rural adults increased at double the rate for older workers between 1979 and 1986 (O'Hare 1988).

People respond to the depressed state of rural labor markets in a variety of ways. Outmigration has increased, and those remaining often work intermittently in odd jobs, bartering goods and services in the informal sector to

piece together a living from miscellaneous sources (C. M. Duncan 1988, Beckley 1988, Sherman 1988). A growing trend toward informalization of the labor market has been observed in rural as well as urban areas, with an increase in industrial homework, low wages, and sweatshop conditions (Portes et al 1989, Davidson 1989).

Finally, these problems are exacerbated even further when the welfare system parallels labor market opportunities. Persons who are privileged in the labor market also fare better when they are unemployed. For example, a dual system of social welfare programs mirrors the segmented labor markets in which women typically work (Folbre 1984). Because women frequently are not employed in the formal labor force, have part-time and intermittent employment, or have jobs in peripheral industries and in secondary occupational labor markets, they are often not eligible for entitlements such as unemployment compensation, but must rely on a secondary welfare system where coverage is stigmatized, uncertain, and variable from place to place. These disadvantages are common to many rural workers for whom lack of opportunity in the labor market extends to inadequate protection by the "safety net" of social welfare programs.

CONCLUSION

Rural poverty has always been linked to the limited opportunity structure in rural communities. These limits are both a legacy of past social and economic development policies and practices and of current restructuring. There is too little work, and the lack of diversity in the economy extends to social and political institutions, creating a highly stratified and unequal social structure.

Like poor urban communities, poor rural areas lack stable employment, opportunities for mobility, diversity of social structure, and investment in community. Instead, these poor communities are becoming more isolated economically and socially. If the trend toward greater polarization on the national economy continues, there is a real danger that even those rural communities that had stable and diverse social and economic structures will face decline. In 1988 we wrote of the need for more community studies and longitudinal research to explore the dynamics of poverty, labor markets and political structures in rural America. While some progress is being made, this review demonstrates that greater research effort is needed.

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