



Mid-American Review of Sociology

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Alessandro Benimio
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and the State: A Reinterpretation
of the Farm Crisis in the U.S.

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The Social and Ecological Consequences
of Ranching During the Farm
Economic Crisis, 1870-1987

Rev. David Ostendorf
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Social Action in Rural America

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Community Services

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A Regional Approach to
Community Development

SPRING 1987, VOLUME XII, NUMBER 1

Mid-American Review of Sociology

Edited at the Department of Sociology, University of Kansas

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ISSN:0732-913X

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Contributors

PATRICK MOONEY is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Kentucky. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1985. His general interests are in rural sociology, and his most recent research focuses on farmers' movements and agricultural credit policy.

ALESSANDRO BONANNO is an Assistant Professor of Rural Sociology at the University of Missouri. His primary areas of interest include the sociology of agriculture, regional development, and the role of the state in the farm economy. His current research is on informal economies in rural regions of the U.S. Dr. Bonanno is the author of *Small Farms: Persistence with Legitimation*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987.

JOHN P. SMITH is a visiting Assistant Professor at Clemson University. He was previously an extension sociologist at North Dakota State University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Missouri in 1979. Dr. Smith is the author of approximately 20 articles on rural sociology.

REVEREND DAVID L. OSTENDORF is the Director of Prairiefire Rural Action, Inc. He has been engaged in a wide range of rural advocacy and organizing work since 1974, and he has written widely on rural economic and public policy issues. He is a graduate of Elmhurst College in Illinois, and holds Master's degrees from Union Theological Seminary in New York and the University of Michigan.

DANIEL LEVITAS is the Research Director for Prairiefire Rural Action, Inc. He has been active in economic and public policy research, and rural community organizing efforts, since graduating from the University of Michigan in 1982.

SUSAN MYERS received her Master's degree from Kansas State University in 1982. She is currently Executive Director of Mainstay, a southwestern Minnesota regional career counseling center for women in transition. She is also Co-Director of Community Quest, a pilot collective leadership program for rural communities.

BRUCE DREWLOW received his M.Ed. from the University of Minnesota at Morris in 1986. He is on the faculty at Morris, and is Director of Graduate Studies. He is also a leadership specialist with Community Quest.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

JACKIE ZERR received her Master's degree from South Dakota State University in 1971, and is an elementary school counselor. She is also Co-Director of Community Quest.

JERRY KNOX is an Associate Professor in the department of community and regional planning at Iowa State University. He is the principal investigator for Project SIDD (Southern Iowa Development District). This is a three year program funded by the Northwest area Foundation of St. Paul. His current teaching and research interests are in small town and regional development.

This special issue of the *Mid-American Review of Sociology* is dedicated to analyzing the nature of, consequences of, and responses to the farm crisis. The issue is divided into two sections. The first section includes three articles prepared by sociologists reflecting different aspects of a sociological approach to the problem. The second section includes three papers prepared by persons engaged in various types of rural action -- ranging from political activism to regional economic development. The perspectives offered on the nature of the "crisis" and the suggestions on how to deal with it differ substantially. There is no "consensus view" on the farm crisis. Our goal is for this issue to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the range of issues which constitute the crisis of American agriculture. In particular, we hope that this issue of the *Review* enriches the dialogue between academic sociologists and those engaged in rural action. If sociology is to be useful in addressing the farm crisis, theoreticians and analysts must consider the "real world" applicability of their ideas. On the other hand, as Knox (this issue) notes, current programs dealing with the problems of American farmers "can be enhanced if supported by a theoretical undergirding."

The first three papers were prepared by academic sociologists, each of whom takes a different approach to the problem. Mooney's paper deals with the development of the "farm crisis" issue within the discipline of sociology itself. He addresses reasons for a delayed response and suggests paths for further development. Bonanno discusses the relationship of the crisis to the "underdevelopment" of rural regions. He identifies a host of factors affecting the development of particular types of industry and labor force participation in areas affected by the crisis. Smith analyzes the "fiscal" problems of American farmers in recent socio-historical context. He also describes the rural immiseration that is a consequence of the present agricultural crisis.

The final three papers were contributed by rural activists and others directly involved in dealing with the farm crisis. The paper by the Rev. David Ostendorf and Daniel Levitas of Prairiefire documents the history of different types of political action aimed at causes and consequences of the crisis. As indicated, Prairiefire is part of a network of rural political organizations and community groups combining education and action to combat the crisis. Myers, Drewlow, and Zerr present the philosophy underlying Community Quest's efforts to counter community disintegration stemming from adverse economic conditions in rural areas. Emphasizing empowerment through practical experience, they describe the methods used and the results achieved in mobilizing the residents of a rural community to work together on a variety of community-

enhancing projects. Knox focuses on establishing regional economic redevelopment programs as one means to remedy the economic problems of rural Americans. He describes a three-year project by community and regional planners at Iowa State University which attempts to pump new economic life into a depressed agricultural region of southern Iowa.

Help in preparing this issue was obtained from the organizers of a conference entitled "The Unsettling of the Midwest: Education's Response to the Rural Crisis," held in Omaha, Nebraska, during early May, 1987. We were able to solicit a number of articles from among the papers presented there thanks to the Action Agenda for Rural Adult Postsecondary Education of Kansas State University. Also, special thanks are due to Patrick Mooney, of the University of Kentucky, who provided substantial editorial assistance and advice.

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