

CRITIQUE OF
"Manpower and Employment in Georgia"

by

Clint Rodgers
Deputy Administrator
Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Inc.
101 Marietta St., N. W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

October 4, 1969

Critique of
"Manpower and Employment in Georgia"

by Clint Rodgers

The structure of this critique on the above named manuscript will be under the three major headings of Statistics, Interpretation of Data, and Conclusions and Implications. This structure itself is indicative of the areas in the manuscript lending themselves to questions and critical analysis.

STATISTICS

Generally the statistics referenced and used in the manuscript are the best available and represent a broad spectrum of sources and disciplines. A word of caution, however, must be inserted in that practitioners and administrators in the manpower field consistently decry the lack of adequate data on which to base decisions. Furthermore, we must constantly remain aware that such data and statistics, aside from their incompleteness, represent historical situations and their use for making predictions is increasingly endangered by a multitude of social and cultural forces exerting ever accelerating change on the economics of the Nation as well as the State.

The manuscript is one of few that recognizes the existence and magnitude of what the author calls the "unidentified unemployed". This phenomenon cannot be overstressed, especially in terms of its implications for manpower and education. It probably represents the single most urgent symptom of the deeper problems in the educational and manpower systems. This will be further discussed in the later parts of this critique.

Another extremely important symptom mentioned in Dr. Fulmer's paper was underemployment. Significantly no complete statistics were given. Two major problems relative to underemployment prevent an

adequate assessment. First, a consensus on what constitutes under-employment is lacking. The U. S. Department of Labor roughly defines underemployment as placement of a person in a job which requires less skill than the employee possessed. However, most poor people and civil rights groups usually speak of underemployment as working in a job which pays less than is required to maintain a minimal standard of living. Lack of understanding and/or acceptance of a definition makes communications and data collection virtually impossible. This results in statements such as the one on page 28 of the manuscript which says, "Obviously many workers, especially among females failed to work full-time through choice...". Among poor women, what may appear to be a failure to work by choice often represents overwhelming obstacles to employment created by less than subsistence level wages coupled with a multitude of social and personal problems. Secondly, there is currently no proven adequate technique of data collection on underemployment even if the semantics were clarified. The degree of confusion on this is demonstrated by a question to this writer by a businessman who asked, "How many able bodied black men are there in the ghetto that have not been counted?" Although much speculation has been done, the only absolute response is that as soon as they are counted, there will not be any.

INTERPRETATION OF DATA

You may have noted that several times the word "symptom" has been used in this critique, whereas the same phenomenon in the manuscript was usually stated in the implied context of a "problem". Herein lies the clue to the major thrust of criticism of the manuscript. Yet this thrust is extremely difficult to communicate because it requires a frame of reference almost contradictory to many accepted values which serve as an a priori departure for the manuscript. Or

to state this another way, much of the manuscript's interpretation of the data becomes the best example of its own lack of validity. Before proceeding with examples which demonstrate the above point, please note that there is absolutely no intent to question or impugn the integrity or character of the manuscript writer. Rather therein lies the maddening frustration of our times. The interpretations are quite valid for a white, middle class orientated society, but we are faced with the growing self awareness of subculture groups comprised of both black and poor white citizens. Without arguing the relative merits of the value systems of these various groups, the fact remains that conclusions and interpretations based on majority cultural outlook are not necessarily valid for the subgroups, and plans and programs based on such criteria are in large measure failing and will likely continue to fail.

It is quite natural for anyone imbued with dominant cultural viewpoint to assume that a public school system which has been fairly successful in educating the majority of the dominant white middle class should succeed with other groups as well. Thus it follows that anyone who fails in the system does so because he is incapable or unwilling to learn. Thus the manuscript continues to the next logical step of proposing additional education, training and counseling for the dropouts and failures. This is treatment for the symptom when the cause is perhaps more related to lack of believable opportunities even with education, hostility toward the educational and economic systems which fail to recognize the minority cultural values, etc.

The paper also cites transportation as a job barrier when in reality this is often a symptom of the real problem which is the economic and social restrictions on housing patterns for the poor and

the black which separate them from job opportunities.

Other examples could be cited, but the point is that the explicit and implicit interpretations in the manuscript must be questioned since they reflect the educational and economic value systems on which program goals and directions will be based and which are, to various degrees, rejected by those to be benefitted. The purpose of this approach is to suggest that writing educational prescriptions for symptoms will not likely cure the causes of economic illness. A case can be made for treating symptoms for short range relief, but the major danger comes only if we believe that we are treating the causes.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

If the approaches to the interpretation of data suggested in this critique are valid, the conclusions and implications for education are rather extensive. Although any of the following points deserve more space and attention than is available here, the purpose of this critique is to suggest some new approaches to viewing the problem based on experiences of one involved in administering programs designed to educate and train the hard core unemployed and underemployed. Also since this discussion centers around the educational system, we must recognize that education does not exist in a vacuum, but is a part of the total social and economic value systems. Therefore education alone cannot solve all the problems or symptoms visible in its structure, but must, if it is to survive, assume more positive leadership both inside its structure as well as in the total community.

The education establishment must reexamine its attitudes, both conscious and unconscious, toward the dropout. It is easy and calming to one's ego to assume that a student who fails or drops out is incapable or unwilling to learn. It is somewhat disquieting to say that

the school system does not know or understand how to teach the student. It is easy to offer compensatory education because that implies that the system is valid and the student is just slow. To suggest that the system may not be relevant to the student is often viewed as un-American. To expell a poor performer and troublemaker is to reinforce and maintain the system's self image. To explore the possibility that the student fails to perform and misbehaves because his view of the school's image is one of hostility toward him is painful. Although the student from a disadvantaged background admittedly brings many problems, the challenge to the future of education is to learn how to succeed with him.

Dr. Fulmer suggests that more emphasis be placed on vocational education both in the existing public schools as well as through the Area Vocational Technical Schools. In the public schools such a program is needed, however, a real danger exists that this will be instituted primarily in schools with high dropout rates. This very suggestion was recently made by an Atlanta educator. If this happens, it will again reinforce the attitude that these students are incapable of academic work. This approach would insure failure and an eventual confrontation along racial lines. A quality academic program is needed in all public schools as well as vocational education.

As Dr. Fulmer points out, the Area Vocational Technical Schools have done an excellent job in training people for successful job placement — for those who can and will attend. Last year one such vocational school in the State published statistics which revealed that over 95% of its enrollees were high school graduates. Obviously this school was not serving the hard core unemployed. This fact can probably be attributed to at least two major factors, the high entrance requirements for many of the courses, and hostility toward the educational establishment

on the part of the dropout. Skills centers are being proposed to meet the needs of the hard core unemployed. Such centers have had some success elsewhere, but only where there has been a considerable departure from traditional vocational education's philosophies, attitudes and techniques.

In summary, the manuscript being reviewed did an excellent job of revealing many pertinent factors relative to the future of manpower in Georgia. The main thrust of this critique is to provide the reader with another interpretation of the data based on experience with those whom the educational system failed. The time and space restrictions in this critique made impossible the full development of the ideas and concepts outlined, but the hope is that adequate stimulation for further thought has been presented.