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Carlton R. Sollie

Frank M. Howell

Michael Lightsey

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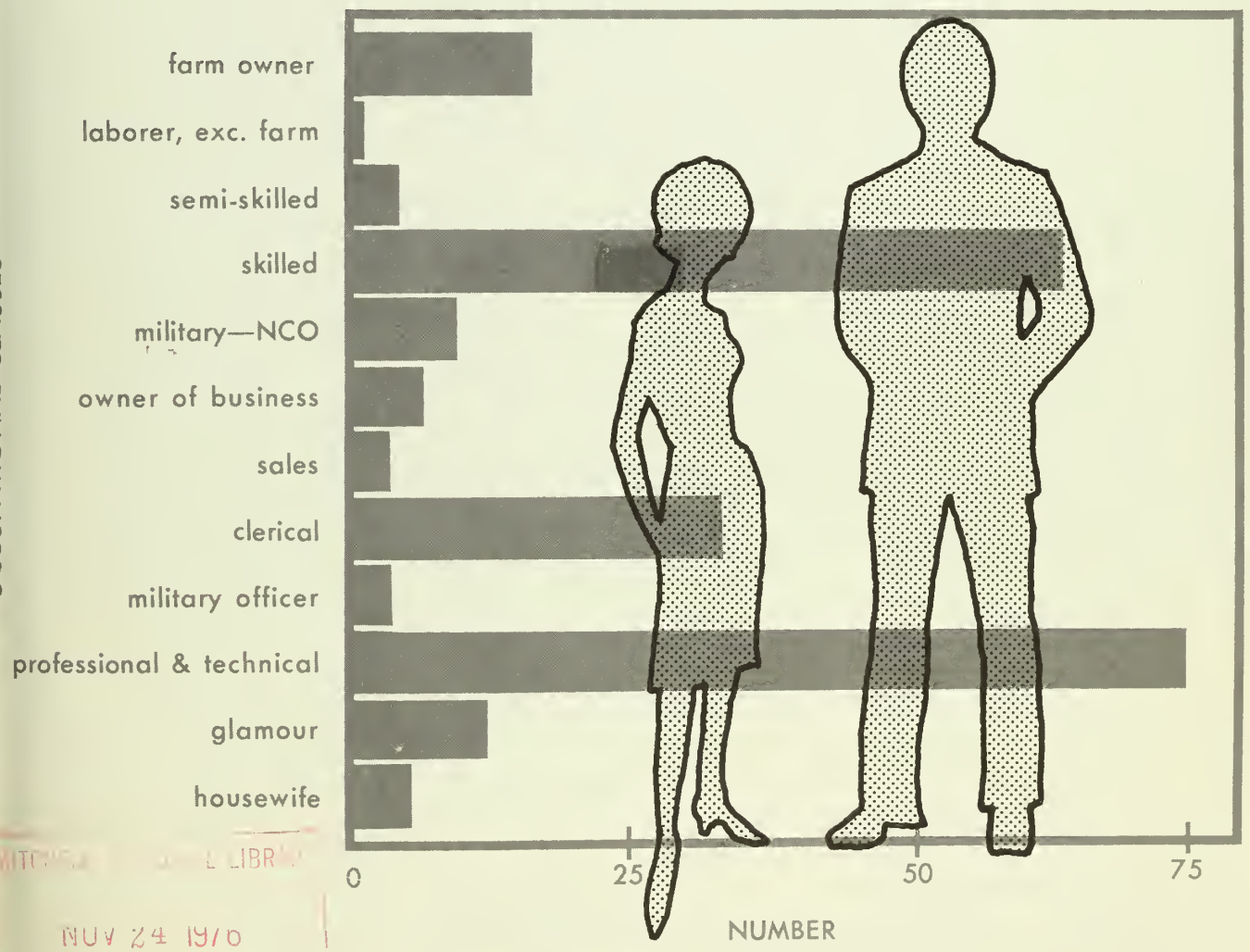
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# Occupational Aspirations and Achievements of Mississippi Youth

by  
**Carlton Sollie**, Sociologist  
**Frank Howell**, Graduate Research Assistant  
**Michael Lightsey**, Graduate Research Assistant  
all of the MAFES Department of Sociology  
and Rural Life

### Occupational Interests of 231 Tenth-Grade Students

OCCUPATIONAL CLASSES



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# Occupational Aspirations and Achievements of Mississippi Youth

One essential process of society is preparing its members for various responsibilities, including those associated with the production and distribution of consumer goods and services. This process is largely in the hands of educational institutions in American society. The result of the process is entry into the labor force of young men and women who will operate the machines, till the soil, market finished products and, in general, fill job vacancies created by retirement, new technology, migration and other changes in the socio-economic system.

Entry into the labor force becomes simply a matter of finding a job for many young persons. Others, however, have definite ideas about the kind of work they want to do. Their choices are affected by many factors and the choices they make in turn affect them and their society.

Congruence between occupational aspiration and occupational attainment---achieving what one aspires to---is the outcome of interaction between different variables, including those over which the individual exercises little if any control and about which he may be unaware. The young person, for example, who decides while he is in high school that he would like to become a

physician likely is totally ignorant of the ways in which competition is expressed among medical students for good grades.

Many youth find work to match their aspirations but there is evidence that many do not. The likelihood of frustration is greater for those who do not. Miller and Form (1951) pointed out several years ago that painful experiences result from the necessity of lowering one's aspirations to "fit the realities of the occupational world."

One aspect of quality of life is job satisfaction and a contribution can be made to the quality of life by reducing disparity between job aspiration and job achievement. Reducing the disparity is a difficult problem because so many factors affect job aspiration and achievement. It is important that vocational counselors know not only the talents and abilities of students with whom they work but also their expectations and aspirations and the factors that influence their choices. This knowledge should make the counselling process more effective.

## Purpose and Method

The purpose of this report is to present results of a study of the occupational interests and

achievements of a group of Mississippi rural and small-town youth. The report is based on panel data; i.e., data collected at two points in time from the same group of respondents. Tenth-grade students in Hancock and Noxubee County Schools were interviewed on a group basis in 1966.

Included in the study were 234 students, both black and white and male and female. A loss of cases was experienced when reinterviews were conducted in 1972. Therefore, only 146 reinterviews were completed. Most of those not reinterviewed simply could not be located, given the time and resources available for the reinterviewing phase of the study.

Elimination of incomplete questionnaires and those for respondents who were still students reduced the number of usable questionnaires to 131.

## Occupational Interests

A major concern in the 1966 survey was the kind of work students were interested in. The 234 respondents interviewed in 1966 (Table 1) were asked to list the types of job they would choose if they were completely free to make the choice. Their choices, classified according to a modified Edwards Index<sup>1</sup> are shown in Table 2.

<sup>1</sup>Modified Edwards categories represent an attempt to order occupations in a hierarchy ranging from low to high with ranks, in general, reflecting prestige, income and educational differences. The index is not perfect, but research has shown that it is fairly accurate.

Aspirations ranged across a wide spectrum of occupational types but were concentrated largely on the high side of the index; almost two-thirds of the youth chose occupations classified as skilled or professional. This pattern is not unusual among American youth; that is, given the widespread cultural values of success and achievement (generally perceived in terms of occupational achievement), American youth reflect their acceptance of these values by expressing relatively high occupational choices.

*Occupational Interests by Sex*--Female respondents were interested primarily in traditional female occupations; almost two-thirds listed teacher, nurse, or secretary as their occupational choice (Table 3). One female expressed a preference for farming by listing farm owner as her choice. Almost three fourths of the males listed a skilled or professional occupation as their choice.

Six females listed military service as their choice. An equal number of males listed the same preference but three of these wanted to become commissioned officers, whereas none of the females aspired to that level in the military ranking system.

*Occupational Interests by Race*--More than one third of the whites expressed preferences for occupations classified as professional but less than one fourth of the blacks aspired to professional careers (Table 3). Only two of the sixteen respondents who expressed a preference for farming were blacks. Forty percent of the blacks selected occupations classified as skilled compared with only 20 percent of the whites.

More blacks than whites expressed an interest in a military career, and all but one of the seven blacks listing that choice chose non-commissioned status.

None of the black female

**Table 1. Respondents by Race and Sex, 234 10th Grade Students, Hancock and Noxubee Counties, Mississippi, 1966.**

	Hancock	Noxubee	Total
	..... Number .....		
Whites			
Male	44	39	83
Female	33	30	63
Blacks			
Male	17	19	36
Female	19	33	52
Totals	113	121	234

**Table 2. Occupational Interests of 231 Tenth-Grade Students, Hancock and Noxubee Counties, Mississippi, 1966**

Occupational Classes (Modified Edwards Scale)	Number	Percent
farm owner	16	6.9
laborer, exc. farm	1	.4
semi-skilled	4	1.7
skilled	64	27.7
military-NCO	9	3.9
owner of business	6	2.6
sales	3	1.3
clerical	33	14.3
military officer	3	1.3
professional and technical	75	32.5
glamour	12	5.2
housewife	5	2.2
Totals*	231	100.0

\*Three cases eliminated because of inadequate data.

respondents listed housewife as their choice.

*Occupational Interests by Residence*--Occupational interests of respondents with different residential backgrounds (Table 3) generally agreed with findings of other studies (Kuvlesky and Ohlen-dorf, 1968; Burchinal, 1961; Haller and Wolff, 1962) and farm youth expressed lower occupational aspirations than non-farm youth. For example, only slightly more than one half of the farm youth chose skilled and professional occupations, whereas about two thirds of the non-farm youth

selected occupations in those categories. Exactly three fourths the youth with a preference for farming were from a farm background but only fifteen percent of the farm background youth chose farming for a career.

### Occupational Achievements

Occupational interests and achievements and an achievement index are shown in Table 4. This index is a measure of the relationship between interest and achievement. Achievements of the youth did

**Table 3. Occupational Interests of 231 Tenth-Grade Students by Race, Sex, and place of Residence, Hancock and Noxubee Counties, Mississippi, 1966**

Occupational Classes (Modified Edwards Scale)	Sex		Race		Place of Residence		
	Males (119)	Females (112)	Blacks (87)	Whites (114)	Farm (80)	Rural Nonfarm (56)	Town (95)
	. . . . . PERCENT . . . . .						
farm owner	12.6	.9	2.3	9.7	15.0	-	4.2
laborer, exc. farm	-	-	1.1	-	-	-	1.0
semi-skilled	2.5	.9	2.3	1.4	2.5	1.8	1.0
skilled	26.9	28.6	40.2	20.1	28.8	35.7	21.1
military-NCO	2.5	5.4	6.9	2.1	2.5	5.4	4.2
owner of business	3.3	1.8	2.3	2.8	2.5	5.4	1.0
sales	.8	1.8	1.1	1.4	1.2	3.6	-
clerical	1.7	27.7	13.8	14.6	17.5	3.6	17.9
military officer	2.5	-	1.1	1.4	-	3.6	1.0
professional and technical	43.7	20.5	23.0	38.2	23.8	30.4	41.1
glamour	4.2	6.3	5.7	4.9	2.5	10.7	-
housewife		4.5		3.5	3.8	-	2.1

**Table 4. Occupational Interests in 1966, Achievements and Occupational Achievement Index in 1972, 131 Youth, Hancock and Noxubee Counties, Mississippi.**

Occupational Classes (Modified Edwards Scale)	1966 Interests	1972 Achievements	Occupational Achievement Index*
	. . . . . NUMBER . . . . .		
farm owner	9	1	11
farm laborer	-	1	-
laborer, non-farm	1	12	1200
semi-skilled	3	19	633
skilled	23	29	126
military-NCO	2	7	350
owner of business	4	7	175
sales	1	4	400
clerical	20	21	105
military officer	1	1	100
professional and technical	56	14	25
glamour	6	-	-
housewife	5	15	300
Total	131	131	

\*Occupational Achievement Index scores were computed by the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Achievement}}{\text{Interest}} \times 100$$

This index is a measure of the relationship between interest and achievement. An index score of 100 represents a one-to-one relationship between interest and achievement, a score of less than 100 means that fewer youth achieved an occupational class than were interested in it.

**Table 5. Occupational Achievements of 131 youth, by Sex, Race, and Place of Residence, Hancock and Noxubee Counties, Mississippi, 1972.**

Occupational Classes (Modified Edwards Scale)	Sex		Race		Place of Residence, 1966		
	Males (65)	Females (66)	Blacks (36)	Whites (95)	Rural Farm (50)	Nonfarm (36)	Town (45)
	. . . . . PERCENT . . . . .						
farm owner	1.5	-	-	1.0	-	-	2.2
farm laborer	1.5	-	2.7	-	-	-	2.2
laborer, exc. farm	9.2	9.1	13.5	7.4	8.0	8.3	11.1
semi-skilled	18.5	10.6	18.9	12.7	4.0	19.4	22.2
skilled	33.8	10.6	18.9	23.4	28.0	25.0	13.3
military-NCO	10.7	-	8.1	4.2	10.0	2.7	2.2
owner of business	7.6	3.0	-	7.4	6.0	5.6	4.4
sales	3.1	3.0	2.7	3.2	4.0	-	4.4
clerical	6.1	25.8	13.5	17.0	22.0	11.1	13.3
Military officer	1.5	-	-	1.0	2.0	-	-
professional and technical	6.1	15.2	10.8	10.6	6.0	11.1	15.6
glamour	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
housewife		22.7	10.8	11.7	10.0	16.6	8.8

match the interests they expressed in 1966. For example, only 14 of the 56 youth who expressed an interest in a professional or technical occupation achieved that level by 1972. The ratio of interest to achievement, therefore, was about four to one.

The largest discrepancy between interest and achievement was in the nonfarm laborer category; only one aspired but twelve were in that category in 1972. Youth who achieved a semi-skilled occupation in 1972 greatly outnumbered those who aspired to that level in 1966. Only five female respondents indicated a preference for housewife in 1966 but 15 were classified as such in 1972.

*Occupational Achievement by Race, Sex, and Residence*--- Occupational achievement of Mississippi youth varied according to race, sex, and place of residence at the time they were first interviewed (Table 5).

1. Respondents classified as *laborers* (farm and others) were about equally divided between males and females. The proportion of blacks in the laborer category

was about twice that of whites, but residence appeared to be only a weak differentiating factor for that category.

2. Among *skilled workers*, the ratio of males to females was about three to one. Whites also outnumbered blacks but the difference was small. About one half of the skilled workers were from a town background but the difference between town and rural-nonfarm residents was proportionately small.

3. About two thirds of the *semi-skilled workers* were males. There were more blacks than whites in this category and more than one half of the semi-skilled workers were from a farm background.

4. About 80 percent of the *clerical workers* were females. More than three fourths were whites but proportionately there were about as many blacks as whites. The largest number of clerical workers came from a town background.

5. Probably the most significant finding of the study is that black youth were just as successful as whites in achieving an occupation classified as *professional or*

*technical*. Although there were more than twice as many whites as blacks in that category, the proportions were almost identical. Females were more successful than males in achieving this occupational level and youth with a farm background were more successful in this regard than those with a town or rural nonfarm background.

### Summary and Conclusions

Rural and small-town youth in two Mississippi counties were found to be similar to other Southern youth in terms of their occupational interest (Sollie and Lightsey, 1974). That is, they tended to aspire to occupations relatively high on the occupational scale, with almost two thirds expressing a preference for the skilled or professional categories.

Most of the females in the study chose the traditional female occupations of teacher, secretary and nurse. White youth had slightly higher aspirations than black

youth and farm youth had slightly lower aspirations than nonfarm youth.

Occupational achievement fell below occupational aspirations for the youth in this study, a finding that was not unexpected (Sollie and Lightsey, 1974). On the other hand, occupational achievement was measured only four years after the

respondents would have finished high school and it is possible that the difference between aspirations and achievements will decrease through time.

This report must be viewed as a limited study of the occupational interests and achievements of some Mississippi youth. Its purpose was to describe their interests

and achievements and to compare these according to sex, race and residential background differences. The findings were not significantly different from expectations but further study is needed to document the experiences of Mississippi and other Southern youth as they move into the labor force and attempt to find satisfying jobs.

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