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CLASS: AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF WATERSHED PLANNING

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ABSTRACT. A study of a watershed planning process in the Cache River Watershed in southern Illinois revealed that class divisions, based on property ownership, underlay key conflicts over land use and decision-making relevant to resource use. A class analysis of the region indicates that the planning process served to endorse and solidify the locally-dominant theory that landownership confers the right to govern. This obscured the class differences between large full-time farmers and small-holders whose livelihood depends on non-farm labor. These two groups generally opposed one another regarding wetland drainage. Their common identity as ''property owner'' consolidated the power wielded locally by large farmers. It also provided an instrument – the planning document – for state and federal government agencies to enhance their power and to bring resources to the region. The planning process simultaneously ameliorated conflicts between government agencies and the large farmers, while enhancing the agencies' capacity to reclaim wetlands. In this contradictory manner, the plan promoted the environmental aims of many small-holders, and simultaneously disempowered them as actors in the region's political economy.

KEY WORDS: Cache River, class, deliberative democracy, Southern Illinois, watershed planning

1. INTRODUCTION

Watershed planning is often viewed scientifically as a technical problem, involving as it does complicated issues of hydrology, soil erosion, and flows of non-point chemical pollutants. However, land use cannot be effectively regulated without taking into account social and political relationships. The people who inhabit and/or use the resources in a watershed can either cooperate with or oppose any comprehensive plan (Swanson, 2001; Salamon et al., 1998). Further, within a democracy, watershed planning relates to governance. Plans direct the actions of governmental agencies and, potentially, individuals. Planning efforts, including the case studied in this article, therefore, often use the rhetoric of participation to legitimate their recommendations and enlist local people in the planning process (Gutman and Thompson, 1996; Healy, 1998; Dryzek, 2000; Weber, 2000; Valadez, 2001; Brosius and Russell, 2002).

''The people,'' however, are neither undifferentiated nor predictable. Each locality is made up of people who confront watershed planning and regulatory processes as actors with diverse histories, social locations, and interests (LiPuma and Meltzoff, 1997; Brosius, 1999: 282; Kottak, 1999; Wells, 2003). In the case studied here, putative ''grassroots participation'' made the plan persuasive to governmental authorities. We found, however, that it simultaneously undermined the power of local majorities through solidifying the linkages between a local landed elite and governmental and non-governmental agencies that administered local wetlands.

This case study, therefore, reveals the gap between theories of ''place-based,'' ''community-led,'' or ''locally-led'' local planning initiatives that proliferated in the 1990s, and the realities of socially differentiated polities in which class processes (Gibson-Graham et al., 2001) harness such initiatives to sectoral power. Much of the discussion of these local planning initiatives were influenced by Habermas's theories concerning democratic deliberation (Phillips, 1995; Dryzek, 2000, 1996; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Healey, 1998; Salamon et al., 1998; Weber, 2000; Swanson, 2001; Valadez, 2001). They stressed the distinction between ''formal'' democracy, which, they argued, is too frequently captured by ''special interests,'' and ''substantive'' democracy, that allows for genuine citizen participation in the decisions that affect their lives.

Habermas stressed the distinction between ''communicative'' and ''strategic'' rationalities. Communicative action, he argues, occurs in the ''lifeworld,'' where claims can be validated and actions coordinated through communication. In contrast, strategic action requires manipulation of others toward instrumental ends (Habermas 1984, 1987, see also 1989). It is well beyond the case studied here to plumb the depths of these arguments – Habermas's theories have spurred a great deal of philosophical investigation and, more importantly for this study, stimulated a re-thinking of social activism and some aspects of governance. We stress ''some'' because many social activists, like many involved in resource management, have rather uncritically accepted Habermas's ontological assumption that free communication, unconstrained by power differentials, can occur (cf. Giddens 1987; Fraser, 1992; Long, 1992) and attempted to operationalize his ''ideal speech situation'' through variously structured local planning efforts. We argue that, rather than develop institutions that enhance the possibility of communicative action that involves the development of consensus embedded in peoples' ''lifeworld,'' these efforts have empowered the instrumental actions of new sets of actors, in this case federal and state agencies and national NGOs. In the process, rather than enhance the range of communicative action, the arena shrank, dividing off ''resources'' that could be managed using technical and bureaucratic means from other aspects of daily

life. Ironically, as Nancy Fraser observed (1992: 119), ''deliberation can serve as a mask for domination.'' In the case we studied, the deliberative planning process facilitated a transformation of class relations in the region, reconfiguring and reconsolidating the power of existing elites as a subordinate element of the increasingly dominant bureaucratic state. Our study revealed that the planning process, created and managed by governmental agencies and NGOs, ameliorated long-standing conflicts between commercial farmers, small-holders and environmentalists, and federal and state agencies charged with managing the environment (Adams et al., 2005).

The ''grassroots'' planning process, we studied occurred in the Cache River Watershed in deep southern Illinois. The planning process, initiated in 1993 and completed in 1995, created a ''Resource Plan for the Cache River Watershed.'' In 1999, a team of researchers undertook an assessment of this activity. We interviewed 29 participants in the planning process and/or associated conflicts in the region, and conducted three focus groups and a telephone survey that targeted people in the watershed who had not been part of the planning process. We drew as well on analysis of meeting minutes and other relevant documents, and long-term ethnographic research in the locale.

In the Cache River watershed, particularly in the lowland regions, smallholders, frequently descended from timber workers, opposed actions by large farmers to drain the wetlands. Several local smallholders allied with regional and national environmental organizations. Their actions initiated lawsuits that stopped drainage and brought in state and government agencies that bought large tracts of swampland. Angry farmers appealed to their political representatives. In this volatile situation, a state agency, the Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS), and a private agency, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), initiated a planning process. Based on NRCS planning procedures, the organizers limited membership on the planning committee to landowners. The organizers included the most militant of the large farmers, but excluded the most militant of the smallholders. The resulting plan, represented as a ''grassroots planning process,'' had significant consequences. Governmental agencies used it to acquire resources for swampland restoration. Channels of communication were created between large farmers and government agencies, ameliorating their hostile relationship. And the smallholders who had led attempts to restore the wetlands demobilized. In a resource-poor area, where structures of civic participation are weak, the planning process contributed to solidifying the power of large farmers, now shared with top personnel in government agencies.

In this article, we first introduce the study site, the nature of conflicts over land use, and the specific planning process. We then schematize the

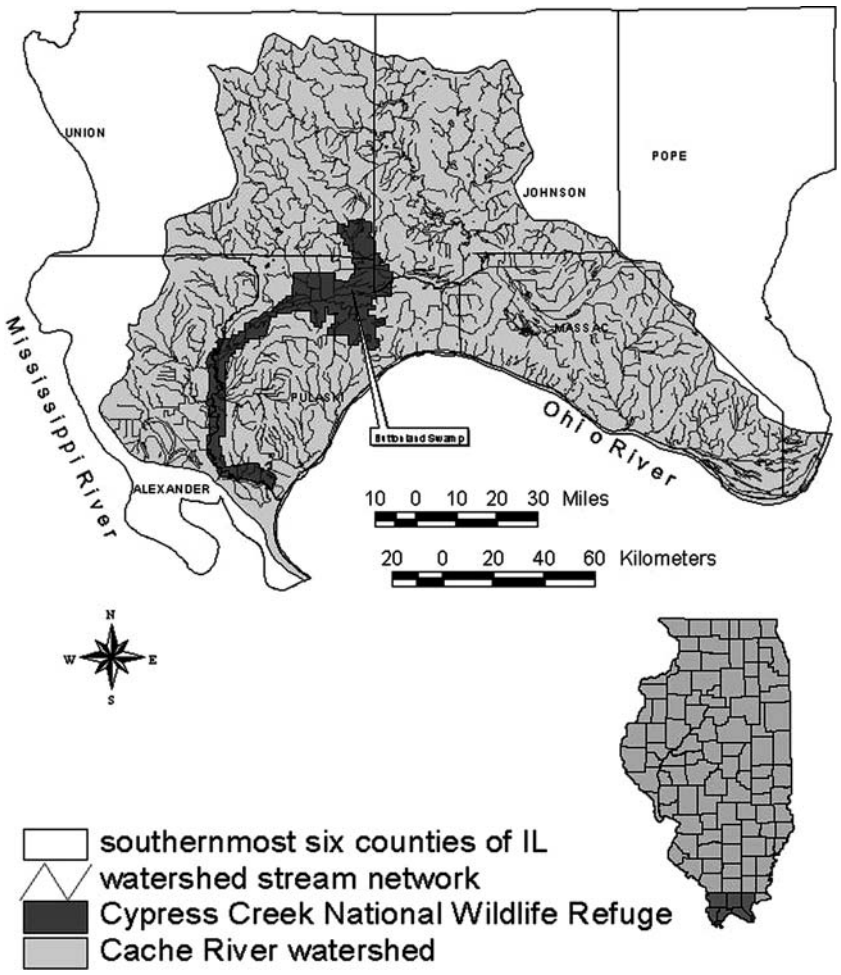
class composition of the region and examine the discourses used by participants in the planning process to speak about property, economics, and interests. Finally, we critique the assumptions on which the participants in the planning process were selected from theoretical, pragmatic, and indigenous perspectives.

2. THE CACHE RIVER WATERSHED – BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Cache River watershed includes the hilly uplands of the Shawnee Hills, where the Cache and its tributaries rise, descending to a once-navigable stream that emptied into the Ohio River about 5 miles above the confluence with the Mississippi River (see Map 1). Conflict was most acute in these lower reaches; it is also the area of the watershed where class divisions are greatest. The Cache lowlands formed from an ancient bed of the Ohio River. The river valley became a rich swampland, with stands of hardwood forests on the drier ridges and uplands, and cypress and tupelo in the swampier areas. During the 19th century, with growing demand for railroad ties, mine timbers, pilings, and lumber for construction and manufacturing, these forests began to be timbered.

The first significant drainage and ditching in the area was done by timber companies to facilitate transport of logs. Farmers, also, improved cleared land through drainage (Hutchison, 1984: 24–7). In 1913, timber companies began a major construction project, linking the Cache with the Ohio at the Post Creek Cutoff and forever after altering the stream's hydrology. This ditch drained the Cache and its eastern tributaries into the Ohio well above its natural mouth, opening large tracts to farming. What became termed the "Lower Cache"—that area below the Post Creek Cutoff – remained largely swamp and forest. For the next 60 years, reclamation work continued on both the eastern and western tributaries, including a diversion canal that drained parts of the river into the Mississippi in the 1950s. Levees, railroads, and highways further reconfigured the river basin (Hutchison, 1984: 31–33).

The region is characterized by three relatively distinct settlement patterns. The Shawnee Hills, where the Cache and its tributaries rise (predominantly Union and Johnson Counties), were largely settled by people whose roots lay in the more eastern areas of the Upland South and, particularly in Johnson County, the Mid-Atlantic states. They created a system of small, diversified farms (Adams, 1994; see also Rugh, 2001). Many of these farmers turned to fruit and vegetable production as railroads made shipping perishable products viable. The eastern bottomlands of Massac County were drained, at least in part, by German Catholics (see Salamon,



Map 1.

1994) who in the post-WWII period grew into large-scale grain farmers. German heritage remains strong. The western bottomlands in Alexander and Pulaski counties were settled by farmers who specialized in cotton, using African American labor. These two counties, therefore, share many attributes with the lower Mississippi Delta, of which they are geologically a part.

In addition to these three agricultural patterns, throughout the region logging companies cut the dense forests for timber that they sawed into lumber and milled into boxes and barrels. By the 20th century, most of the primary forests in the uplands had been cleared, although second and third growth was harvested for commercial and on-farm use into the 1950s (Adams, 1994). Specialized timbering firms remained only in the lowland

swamps (Hutchison, 1984). These logging companies recruited laborers who supplemented their wages with hunting, fishing, small-scale farming, and agricultural wage labor on the bottomland cotton plantations and upland fruit and vegetable farms, and by working the lumber mills and limestone and silica quarries. Many of these laborers, both black and white, according to oral recollections (see also Perrin, 1883: 498; Ogg and Smith, 1989) that are supported by census statistics, bought small farms in the area and retained their mixed domestic economies after the timber played out.

Cairo, once a regional manufacturing and commercial center, is located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, in Alexander County. Like the smaller towns in the watershed, most of Cairo's manufacturing involved transforming timber into useful products (Anonymous, 1976[1890]). The differences in these five counties is strikingly illustrated by the nationality and racial distribution in 1900 (see Chart 1). The regional variation is also indicated by the proportion of farms operated by tenants in 1950, a snapshot of class relations on the cusp of their transformation (Adams, 1994) (See Chart 2).

In the decades following WWII, all three agricultural production systems shifted. Hill farms became increasingly marginal; fruit and vegetable production, in particular, declined (Adams 1994). State and federal governments purchased large tracts of the hilly uplands for forests and wildlife reserves. At the same time, local drainage districts and the Army Corps of

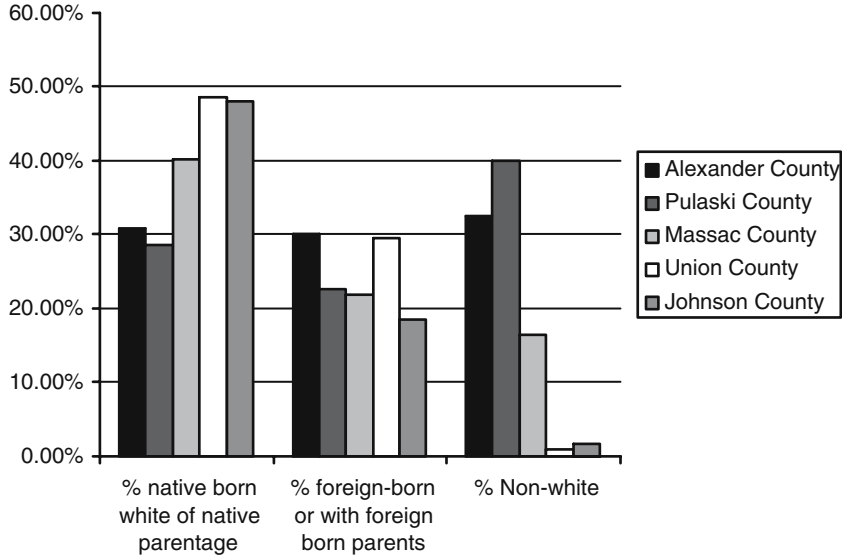


Chart 1. Proportion of Native Born, Foreign Born or with Foreign Born Parents, and Non-White, by County, 1900.

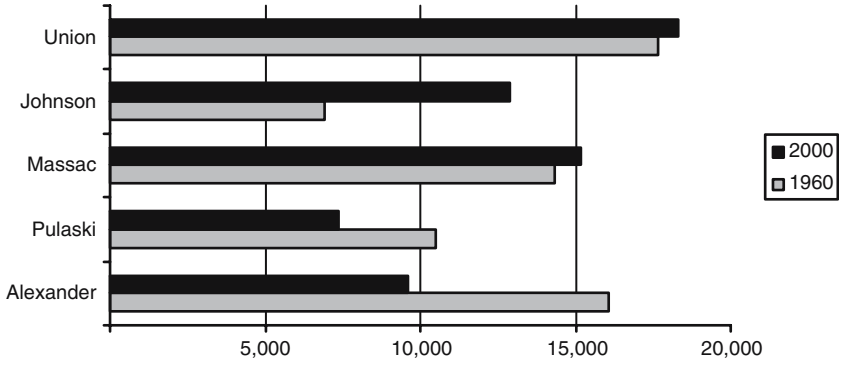


Chart 2. Population in Counties in Cache River Watershed, 1960 and 2000 Source: U.S. Census of the Population, 1960, 2000. Source: U.S. Census of the Population, 1960, 2000.

Engineers continued to drain the swamps (*St. Louis Post Dispatch* Oct. 9, 1989; Hutchison, 1984). The cotton and grain farms in Alexander and Pulaski counties expanded into these newly drained lands, shifting to large-scale soybean and corn production. Like other regions of the Mississippi Delta, the large tenant population, both black and white, was thrown out of work by farm mechanization. At the same time, the demand for wood products declined as cardboard replaced wood for boxes and crates and plastics and pressed boards replaced wood for furniture construction (University of Illinois, 1949; Adams, 1994). The dual impact of declining markets for timber, and farm and home mechanization led to an expansion of crop land in the level bottomlands, and abandonment of croplands in the hills. The Census of Agriculture indicates that the proportion of woodland on farms in Alexander and Pulaski Counties dropped most precipitously in the 1964–1974 decade, while it increased in the upland counties. The only remaining large-scale timber company, the Main Brothers, also declined, affected both by the decreasing timber stock and by declining markets. In 1973, Main Brothers sold most of their remaining holdings to a Kentucky timber company, Westvaco.

As in most agricultural regions in the US, populations dropped sharply, falling every decade between 1940 and 1970 in all five counties. In 1980, the entire region gained slightly, but in subsequent decades Alexander and Pulaski Counties once again declined, while the other three counties re-gained population, fueled to a considerable extent by new prisons and other state employment, retirees, and ex-urbanites from more economically dynamic areas outside the watershed (http://profiles.iastate.edu).

In 1967, a group of expanding farmers revitalized and expanded an existing drainage district, Big Creek Drainage District No. 2. According to

many recollections and land records in the County Clerks' offices, farmers from the southeast Missouri bootheel led this movement. With state support, they began to aggressively drain the lower Cache (see *Mounds-Pulaski Enterprise* 9/6/1972, 10/4/1972). Some of these farmers purchased land from Main Brothers Corporation or from heirs to the Main estate (Puslaski County Clerk, Alexander County Clerk, Deed Records).[1]

Around this same time, a series of local and statewide networks among people concerned about the loss of wild habitat congealed. They recognized the unique qualities of the region and in 1970 the Illinois Department of Conservation (IDOC) (now called the Illinois Department of Natural Resources – IDNR) purchased two fragile and endangered tracts, Heron Pond and Wildcat Bluff Natural Area. Through these same networks, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) acquired a considerable land in the area, including a 1975 purchase of 1018 ha in Little Black Slough. Through these purchases, and an energetic TNC staff member, TNC became deeply interested in the reclamation of the swamp.

3. CONFLICT OVER LAND USE

The drainage by the Big Creek Drainage District No. 2 was uncontroversial for many years. However, in 1978, landowners who made their living from fishing and/or seasonal use of their lands and local hunters, alarmed by the approach of drainage of their lands and hunting areas, organized the Citizens Committee to Save the Cache (CCSC) and began to contest this drainage. They enlisted the support of other citizens and citizen organizations, from both the immediate area and from the larger region. These organizations included the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, both based in the university town some 50 miles to the north, and the Illinois Environmental Council. The CCSC mounted a successful legal challenge to the method by which the Drainage District Board was appointed, and subsequently were able to elect board members who did not promote drainage as aggressively (interviews with participant).

Some members of the CCSC were part of the network linked to the Illinois Department of Conservation and TNC; these agencies were also enlisted to support CCSC programs (interviews, *Southern Illinoisan*, 6-3-1981: 5).[2] In 1982, the CCSC established a lowhead dam on one of their member's property, aiming to retard further siltation of the lower Cache. Farmers in the area bitterly contested the construction of the weir, fearing it

[1] Farmers from Missouri also expanded into the Arkansas Delta around this same time.

[2] The Nature Conservancy is a private not-for-profit (501c3) organization. However, it is a non-activist, professional, staff-run organization, and in that regard it is comparable to government agencies. We therefore include it in the category of "agencies."

would flood their lands and retard run-off. Eventually the CCSC and the US Department of Fish and Wildlife brought in the Army Corps of Engineers, which established a legal level for water retention (*Southern Illinoisan*, 5/7/1984, 9/30/1986, 8/20/1987). TNC provided crucial political resources, among other things helping obtain the swamp's designation as a wetland of international importance (Ramsar) in 1994, joining the Okefenokee and Everglades as UN-recognized wetlands.[3] TNC was also active in the establishment of the Cypress Creek Wildlife Refuge by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 1990, sited astride the most threatened portions of the bottomland reaches of the swamp.

These developments brought strong opposition from the large landowners in the Cache River bottomlands of Pulaski, Alexander, and Massac Counties. Interviews with local members of the CCSC revealed that they perceived the conflict to be one rooted in long-standing class divisions. Notably, our interviews with agency personnel and with large farmers did not reveal similar perception. Our analysis of the social orders in the watershed, and particularly in the disputed region in the Cache lowlands, indicates that class was a central, although publicly unacknowledged, aspect of the conflict and of the subsequent planning process.

3.1. *The "Ruling Elite"*

We were first alerted to the importance of class in the local area by the comments of one of the smallholders who was a member of the Resource Planning Committee (RPC) who told us,

> I would characterize the people along the Lower Cache, below Buttonland Swamp – there's fewer families who have the political control and there's fewer families who have the land control. On the Upper Cache – Union, Johnson County –, I think you have smaller landholders who – there's more of them and they're more diverse in their backgrounds. Where in the Lower Cache you may only have four or five different families that actually control most of that farmland. (Twist[4] 1390–1399)

When asked about the basis of these families' power and whether other counties in the watershed were the same, Twist (3859–3863) said,

> They're ag based. They may have businesses. They have jobs in the courthouse. Their wives have jobs in the courthouse. Their cousins have jobs in the school. They're on the school board. They're the names that if you looked at who's making what kind of money, those few families are going to keep popping up. That name.

[3] The Cache is Ramsar site no. 711. It is profiled on the Ramsar website: http://www.ramsar.org/profiles_usa.htm

[4] All names of interviewees are pseudonyms. Transcripts have been "cleaned up" with pauses, interjections by interviewers, repeated words and phrases, and so forth removed. Line numbers refer to lines in WinMax coding software.

Twist's perceptions were supported by other participants in the conflict. "Bay," one of the people involved in the legal battle with the Drainage District, recounted their difficulty retaining a lawyer to take their suit. He told us that the attorneys would say, "I don't wanna get involved with no drainage district. They got too much power." According to Bay, one said, "I buy a little land here and there and the first question I have when I go to buy a piece of land, is it in the drainage district? If it is I forget it. Because you can't handle the drainage district, got too much authority" (Bay 488–495). Lantz (1972: 161–162, passim), in his study of community failure in Cairo, argues that the existence of a narrow elite contributed to a culture of dependency in the city.

A rhetoric of class also pervaded interpersonal relationships. Smallholders reported being called "swamp rats" by their farmer opponents. Within the region, working class whites display a strong class consciousness. A local country and bluegras band calls themselves "The Sharecroppers," and defiantly proud songs claiming working class white religion and culture are widely popular.

4. THE STRUCTURE OF AGRICULTURE

Two sources, in particular, along with numerous anecdotes of wielding effective power, support the judgment that deep power differentials existed, particularly in Alexander and Pulaski Counties: farm subsidy data made available through the Environmental Working Group website, and land tenure data from the Agricultural Census. The farmer-members of the RPC were, in general, among the largest recipients of federal subsidies in their area, indicating the relative size of their operations (Environmental Working Group, search by zip code). Three of the strongest opponents of the efforts to preserve and restore the swamps were among the largest recipients of federal agricultural subsidies in the region, receiving payments near or above $1 million between 1996 and 2001(Environmental Working Group, search by county). One of these farmers was sufficiently influential to have his land excluded from the boundaries of the Cypress Creek Wildlife Refuge. This landowner has relatives in many county jobs and public offices, has held significant public office himself, and is active in the Farm Bureau. Another active member of the RCP, a "Missouri farmer" with large holdings in Alexander and Pulaski counties, and among the largest recipients of government subsidies, is a key member of the Alexander-Pulaski County Farm Bureau.

On the other side, the pro-swampland restoration Pulaski County smallholders we interviewed received no farm subsidies, although a few conservation-oriented retirees did receive government payments. Alexander and Pulaski Counties are among the poorest in the state and even the nation, Alexander County ranking in the lowest 3% and Pulaski in the lowest 5% nationally, with 26 and 25% poverty rates respectively.[5] The class differential between the relatively affluent lifestyle of the large farmers and the acute poverty of many African Americans and whites is visible in a visit to any of the small towns in Pulaski and Alexander Counties.

EWG data for the other three counties in the watershed indicate the differences with Alexander and Pulaski Counties. In the upland counties, substantially more farmers received subsidies, and the size of the subsidies are substantially lower and more evenly distributed. This is congruent with Adams's (1994) findings in Union County.

The class divisions in Pulaski and Alexander Counties congealed as the region's economy declined, and were rooted in the earlier social order. In 1950, on the cusp of the transformation to industrial agriculture, and the elimination of large-scale timbering, these two counties appear significantly different from the others in the watershed. They had the largest proportion of farms operated by tenants, as well as the largest proportion of land in those tenant-operated farms and the largest proportion of "non-white" (African American) farmers. Thirty-one percent of Pulaski County farmers were black, as were 18% of Alexander County and 6% of Massac County farmers. Many of these African American farmers were landowners. Alexander and Pulaski counties continued to show a higher proportion of tenants, a lower proportion of full-owners, and a higher proportion of part-owners (indicating relatively large-scale commercial farmers) than the other counties in the watershed (Geospatial & Statistical Data Center).

The transformations of the national economy following World War II sucked the vitality out of most rural regions. The Cache watershed was particularly hard-hit as timbering played out, manufacturing based on local resources declined, and small-town commerce lost out to regional centers. Working class people whose livelihood lay in timbering, manufacturing, and commerce lost not only economically but also politically, their links to local power attenuated. The only people left with economic and political power were the commercial farmers, their extended families, and those who found positions within the expanded state and federal bureaucracies. The commercial farmers, themselves embattled, allied themselves with anybody

[5] In 2000, Alexander County ranked 3043 out of 3141 US counties (lowest 3%), with a poverty rate of 26.1%. Pulaski County ranked 2999 (lowest 5%), with a poverty rate of 24.6%. The other three counties had considerably lower poverty rates: Union, 16.5% (lowest 27%), Massac – 13.5% (lowest 45%), and Johnson – 11.3% (lowest 61%) (US Bureau of the Census, 2000).

who came in with an idea about how to revitalize agriculture. This included the large planters from Missouri and, in the 1980s, a Chicago entrepreneur who sought to establish a large vegetable farm.

Farmers in these five counties had a history of organizing to protect their interests, going back to the formation of Farmers Clubs and Granges in the 1870s (Perrin, 1883; Adams, 1994). By the post-World War II period, the Farm Bureau had become the dominant organization. Even farmers who disagreed with its policies relied on the services it provided, but for many farmers it expressed their political commitments and interests. As the conflict between the Drainage District and the Citizens Committee developed, the Farm Bureau became a key locus of farmers' activities.

4.1. *New Regional Actors*

As Twist indicates, in the upland counties the situation was considerably different. In Union County, in particular, the bases for large estates eroded after World War II when markets for Midwestern fruits and vegetables were replaced by those grown in the US Southwest. In both Johnson and Union Counties, the US Forest Service, two (now three) state prisons, the state university, and other government entities brought in a large number of professionals from outside the area and provided employment for many local residents. It also shifted the bases of power, as Twist observed,

> I'll tell you what changed [Johnson County] was the prisons. And the Forest Service. When the prisons came in people transferred in here from other areas. But they had positions of power because they could hire people. So they had clout. Also, the Forest Service in Vienna [the Johnson County seat] – a lot of families have transferred in that had good educations. They became community leaders (Twist, 3859–3927).

The agency people had clout because they could hire people and because, as part of the educated class, they became community leaders. As LiPuma and Meltzoff (1997) indicate in their study of the Florida Keys, the combination of education and professional status gives many such people a sense of entitlement characteristic of elite governing classes. They also had real power, in terms of their capacity to hire and fire and to bring resources to the area. Agency professionals also came with little awareness of nor sensitivity to the older arrangements of power. This freed them to act without the encumbrance of concern for larger networks of relatives and associates. This sometimes provoked unanticipated conflicts, but it also often allowed them to act effectively for reforms.

Furthermore, another group began to move into the region who disrupted existing class relations. These were people who had left the area for work, often leaving family in the area. They returned with a different view of what was possible and desirable and some, now with independent retirement

incomes and often with professional social status, knowledge, and skills, became community leaders.[6] These and other retirees often settled in the Shawnee Hills because of its amenities. They, and people associated with the university in Carbondale, just to the north of the watershed, often had strong environmental concerns. Their power derived from their privileged access to information and to larger state and national networks.

The conflicts that erupted in the late 1970s between the farmers operating through the Big Creek Drainage District Number 2 and local landholders with their sportsmen allies, therefore, emerged in a changing social ecology: Old agricultural, timbering, manufacturing, and marketing systems of production and the social – particularly class – relationships they entailed had been replaced by new arrangements based on industrialized, highly rationalized agriculture. New actors – state functionaries and retirees – were emerging as powerful agents.

The stage was now set for a shift in the nature of conflicts around preservation and reclamation of the swamplands. In this new configuration, ''insider'' and ''outsider'' became terms deployed by each side in an effort to claim the right to represent the region to long-standing residents as well as to the new actors.

Each side accused the other of aligning with or being agents of putatively illegitimate ''outsiders.'' The local opponents of the drainage district accused the Drainage District of being the agent of newcomers from the Mississippi bottoms in Missouri and elsewhere. The drainage district's partisans characterized their opponents as agents of ''foreign'' environmentalists. Throughout, class remained a subtext as each side rhetorically situated the other as lacking legitimacy (''swamp rat'' vs. ''big'' or ''corporate farmer''). Both sides created alliances: the members of the Drainage District developed strong relationships with some professionals and other large farmers and agricultural investors who were able to operate within the larger political arena. The CCSC allied with local people employed by the Forest Service and Illinois Department of Natural Resources and sportsmen, hikers, and others who used wild areas. The specific groups included Ducks Unlimited, the Carbondale-based Sierra Club and Audubon Society, as well as members of The Nature Conservancy (TNC).[7]

[6] For an account of a comparable phenomenon in southern communities, see Stack, 1996.

[7] When the conflict began, TNC operated mainly as an organization to hold endangered lands for preservation and reclamation. According to interview subjects, during the 1980s, as the conflicts in the Cache escalated, they widened their view to including the surrounding ecosystem, and became increasingly proactive in trying to develop non-confrontational ways to shift land use in areas in which they had significant concern. They were key players in US Department of Interior's decision to establish a new wildlife refuge along the lower Cache.

Few "outsiders" had any knowledge of, or concern for, the historic roots of the conflict. Although some of the environmental activists, including TNC staff, differentiated among farmers by size, they appear to have had little solid grasp of the larger social economy that inflected the actions of their allies and opponents. The pro-drainage farmers were largely successful in defining the issue for the professionals as one between "landowners" (sometimes "local landowners") and "environmentalists" (generally "outside environmentalists"). This became the frame that defined both the nature of the conflict and who were legitimate participants in resolving or ameliorating the conflict.

As increased local, regional, and national attention came to bear on the region, the environmental organizations increasingly promoted and valued the Cache River as a unique and endangered wetlands. The Nature Conservancy, in particular, was instrumental in making the case for its uniqueness, but many SIU-based natural scientists and other environmental organizations contributed to a scientific literature that was understandable to environmentally sensitive members of important national and international policy making circles. They also provided economic analyses that documented the relatively small contribution made by agriculture to the region's economy (Beck et al., 1990).

In the early 1990s, The Nature Conservancy and the Soil Conservation Service (Now Natural Resource Conservation Service, NRCS) applied to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for support for a watershed-based resource planning process. Seeking to maintain legitimacy with the farmers whose land use directly affected the river, TNC agreed to adhere to NRCS procedures. In addition to following their detailed planning process, this entailed limiting participants to landowners in the watershed. Most of the members selected for the Resource Planning Committee were, therefore, nominated through their local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) boards (RPC, 1995: 1 and 6). TNC was also able to recruit part-time and non-farming landowners who shared TNC's environmental concerns. TNC and NRCS agreed to include some of the farmers who were the most vocal opponents of environmental interests and to exclude the most visible members of CCSC. The stated aim was "for agricultural and conservation interests to better understand each other and work together to solve environmental problems at the watershed level" (RPC, 1995: 6). According to interviews with those who initiated the planning process, they conceived of it as a means to create a degree of mutual recognition and respect between people who felt their interests were opposed and who had a history of conflict (farmers and conservationists), as well as among people (largely farmers) from different parts of the watershed. Sportsmen, recrea-

tional users, and other residents were not included in the process; nor were local elected officials.[8]

Despite the restricted membership, the plan was "intended to be a guide for resource agencies in the watershed to help procure the needed funds and deploy the necessary resources to achieve the measures" identified by the Planning Committee (RPC, 1995: 10). With its rhetoric of grassroots participation, its adherence to the NRCS 9-step resource planning process, and its operational ground rules of mutual respect and listening, it had many of the formal aspects of democratic decision-making. None of the participants viewed the limitation of its membership to landowners as problematic, although some RPC members thought elected representatives should have participated and one person noted the absence of African American landowners. At least one of the initiators was acutely aware that other sectors of the society had not been included, but believed that the NRCS-led process was crucial to developing a plan that would be recognized as legitimate by the farmers who would potentially be called upon to modify their land use patterns.

5. DISCUSSION

This sketch of the history of the social order and inter-group – largely inter-class – conflict in one small watershed raises a number of significant questions for those concerned with watershed planning. Around the time that the planning process began, theories of deliberative or participatory democracy became prominent in planning circles (Healey, 1998; Salamon et al., 1998; Dryzek, 2000; Weber, 2000; Swanson, 2001). These theories viewed the electoral process as too frequently captured by "special interests;" democratic in its procedures, it lacked democracy in its substance. These theories reflected a convergence of social theory and activism, including prominently Habermas's contrast between communicative and strategic rationalities and action. These theories were married to earlier, particularly New Deal, experiments in grassroots democracy that were influenced by Dewey (Gilbert, 2003), and communitarian political theories. The resulting, somewhat inchoate theory of participatory democracy advocated locally-based deliberative processes, such as that implemented by the NRCS and TNC, viewing such procedures as more capable of substantive democracy. The RPC was formed, in part, using these notions of grassroots, consensus-based, deliberation. The proximate concern was to create a plan for land use

[8] This committee appears significantly more narrow in its composition than one formed around the same time in central Illinois, that included town residents and farmers. See Salamon et al., 1998. To some extent, the theory behind the creation of the RPC, at least as promoted by TNC, was part of what Weber (2000) terms GREMs—rural, place-based, grass-roots ecosystem management efforts.

in the watershed that would harmonize the various interests and concerns in the region and decrease the degradation of water quality and soil erosion, which affects all downstream regions. It was also created as a way to defuse deep hostility on the part of most farmers in the lower Cache to the 1990 creation of the Cypress Creek Wildlife Refuge (USFWS) and to other attempts to preserve the remaining swamps. In a larger sense, watershed planning necessarily aims to affect behaviors of residents of the watershed, and to be widely accepted as legitimate in the eyes of watershed residents.

The fact that farmers make their livelihoods from extensive use of land, and that this use of land has consequences for everyone downstream from their farms, creates a true laboratory for understanding both the nature of class, and the possibilities for democratic governance. The issues are neither simple nor transparent: Many farmers, while landowners, are neither "elite" nor particularly privileged (see the extensive literature documenting the struggle of most farmers to stay afloat, and the continual crises that afflict modern industrial agriculture). Until the publication of the Environmental Working Group list of farmers' receipts from government subsidies and other payments (http://www.ewg.org), farmers themselves did not know – at least in a vocabulary that was meaningful in the way that dollar figures are – the vast disparities in wealth among farmers.[9] These differences were apparent in our interviews, both in the practical differences among farmers, some of whom relied increasingly on non-farm income to persist, and in their attitudes about farming. However, they were almost unanimously united in their belief that they should have virtually autarkic control over the use of their land. Any relinquishment of this autonomy should be based on monetary exchange (e.g., lenders have the right to earmark how their funds are spent; the government can legitimately pay people to remove land from production). *All* of the local residents we interviewed expressed adherence to the inviolability of private property.

Property owners (read "farmers"), then, viewed as a "class," must be seen as a vexed class: some clearly combine Marx's and Weber's notions of class as disproportionately powerful and privileged, with control over significant amounts of wage labor. Most farmers in the region, however, rely almost entirely on family labor, and many earn most of their income off the farm, through either husband's or wife's wages or salaries, or auxiliary enterprise (Mooney, 1988; Adams, 1994). In a region in which salaried professionals often earn considerably more than many farmers, and have greater access to

[9] The farmers in the Cache River Watershed, even those few who also operate land in Missouri, were not extremely large recipients of subsidies compared with cotton and rice producers, nor with farms in the prairie region to the north. The top 50 recipients of agricultural subsidies in Illinois received more than all five southernmost counties combined. http://www.ewg.org, calculations by author.

regional and national political and economic resources, control of farmland is a fragile claim to power. Virtually all the farmers, whether large or small, expressed a sense of being embattled and defensive, and our judgment is that, whatever critiques one might have of the accuracy of some individual claims, almost all are, in fact, embattled and threatened by forces in the larger world.

Swanson (2001) observes that the farm bloc, and its farmer constituents, was able to successfully identify farm interests as the same as rural interests and as identical with the interests of all landowners. The political practice this bloc promoted divided farmers only according to what they produced and the geographic region in which they lived, welding a view of farmers as fundamentally unified in their interests (Adams, 1992). Meanwhile, the five counties in the Cache River watershed, especially those in the lower Cache, Alexander and Pulaski counties where the conflict over the use of the Cache was strongest, are among the poorest in the nation. The small strata of largely white property owners live alongside of a majority of very poor families, many of whom are black. Over the years, the poverty has become more entrenched as the number of jobs declined. Although all of the members of the RPC (though few of the members of the Technical Committee, which was made up of professional scientists and agency personnel) were aware of the larger social economy of the region, these issues were not introduced into the planning process. In 1992, a survey undertaken as part of the overall planning process, drawn from a random sample of residents in the watershed (Kraft and Penberthy, 2000). It showed that farmers and non-farmers diverged widely in their judgments concerning the types of environmental problems in the watershed and the relative responsibilities of land users, with non-farmers placing far greater responsibility on land users than did farmers. A survey conducted in 2001 as part of the research reported here, which asked many of the same questions, showed similar results.

CONCLUSIONS

We believe the restricted membership on the RPC raises a number of issues concerning the nature of democratic governance in the context of a specific class that controls key resources:

- Working farmers control most of the land abutting the streams in the watershed, in both the lower and upper Cache regions, and in most other watersheds. Their individual decisions concerning land use, however, affect a far broader population: Non-point pollution (soil and agricultural chemicals) may be causing hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico (Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force, 2001; USGS, 2001). In many areas, communities within

specific watersheds are negatively affected by non-point pollution, most (but not all) of which comes from farm fields. However, unlike in the Sugar Creek watershed in Ohio, which organized farmers in the context of enforcement of EPA-mandated TMDLs (total maximum daily loads of agricultural run-off) (Moore, 2002), this planning process addressed overall watershed management.

- Many farmers and other local residents articulated a political philosophy that privileged property owners as the primary legitimate group to make decisions regarding the disposition of their property and, in a few cases, to govern. Even when such a political philosophy is not explicitly enunciated, virtually all farmers we interviewed perceived themselves as the social, economic, and cultural foundation of the community, and objected strongly to any analysis that portrayed them as relatively unimportant or marginal.
- The majoritarian system of government established in the US Constitution directly contradicts such heartfelt claims. It establishes the wider citizenry as the only legitimate basis for governing. Similarly, theories of participatory or deliberative democracy explicitly require access by those with little social power (Phillips, 1995; Dryzek, 1996, 2000).
- However, a deep respect for private property is widely shared by most of the citizenry, leading people – both (local) environmentalists and farmers – to accord greater weight to the individual interests of property-owners than to others. Virtually all members of the Planning Committee whom we interviewed gave greater honor and legitimacy to property-owners than to government agencies that manage lands; non-property-owning citizens were mentioned only insofar as they represent the acute poverty of the area.
- Most of those interviewed expressed a ''common sense'' commitment to instrumental rationalities as fundamental to legitimate claims (see also Bellah et al., 1996). Whatever the ontological or ideal status of Habermasian communicative rationalities, they were not viewed by the citizens or technical experts as a foundation for legitimate collective action.

5.1. *Consequences*

The plan, our survey and focus groups revealed, was not widely known, except by farmers. Even local elected officials, who would be expected to be concerned with and knowledgeable about planning efforts in their counties, show little knowledge of the plan. The plan is also, undoubtedly, incomplete, since so few voices were at the table. It had good geographical representation (and that is a key node of difference everyone acknowledges), but no townspeople, no African Americans, no non-farming professionals, nor other members of the larger community participated.

At the same time, the planning process had no institutional forms through which to implement any programs.[10] It was simply a consultative body that, over a period of 3 years, hammered out a series of priority concerns. The implementing bodies were, in fact, the various governmental agencies that operate in the area, particularly NRCS (with the Cropland Reserve Program and Wetland Reserve Program that pay farmers to retire land from production), the IDNR, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. TNC, as a member of a formal Partnership with IDNR and USFWS, is also a significant actor. Only the NRCS has a mission that makes it accountable to its constituency, who are defined as property owners. Because of its role in promoting soil conservation through providing cost-shares, grants, and payments for cropland retirement, and its historic lack of regulatory powers, it was the only institution with legitimacy in the eyes of both farmers and environmentalists (Kraft et al. 2005).

Therefore, the planning process, while represented as ''democratic,'' was in fact something significantly other that truly democratic. It was consultative, and effective insofar as it improved communication between contending actors. Participants' assessment of the process indicated that they believed the agency people had learned from the discussions, and that those landowners and agency people (members of the ''Technical Committee'') involved had gained a deeper understanding of the complexity of the region and the hydrological issues in the lower Cache. However, its lack of representation from the local non-farm-owning population perpetuated the belief, among both agency people and farmers, that landowners as a class had the legitimate right to be the primary advisors to government agencies.

State and federal government agencies have become the dominant social group in the region. They can be viewed – as Twist observed – as filling the social role once occupied by timbering and manufacturing elites. In part through the work of the planning process, the local agricultural elite who led the opposition to the ''outside environmentalists,'' including the establishment of the Wildlife Refuge and other efforts to restore wetlands, have made an accommodation with the governmental agencies that have become a permanent fixture in the area.[11] Neither the local elites, particularly in Alexander and Pulaski Counties, nor the government agencies, effectively address the acute poverty and lack of opportunity in the area. The government agencies that manage large amounts of land in the region have little

[10] The research team (Ruhl et al. 2004) has developed a ''Model Watershed Act'' that would provide electoral means to manage watersheds through democratic forms of governance.

[11] One outcome of the plan was to obtain substantial funds to enroll farms in the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), and to continue the CRP. Rose Farms, whose horticultural operation had been largely unsuccessful, enrolled most of its holdings in the WRP and then sold the residual to TNC. This land was purchased by IDNR from TNC in 2001.

direct responsibility to the area. Their institutional power is lodged elsewhere, in regions distant from the specific locales in which they operate.

Viewed from a historical perspective, the conflict between the farmers and the government agencies supplanted the relationship between farming and timbering elites who controlled the political process in Alexander and Pulaski Counties. Our current research indicates that timbering and farming interests were mutually supportive, but there were undoubtedly significant strains as well. Laborers and others not of these owning classes lived largely outside of the sphere of governance, articulating with governmental entities, as in much of the lower Mississippi Delta, through bonds of patronage with employers. The government agencies operate, then, as a new class organization, with its own managerial apparatus that is largely accountable to its internal governing hierarchy, lodged in the state or national capital. This brings new problems of governance. Not least is the relative transience of their staffs and their deep ignorance of the existing social relations.

If this analysis is accurate, it does not bode well for the economic well-being of the people in the lower Cache. The acute poverty in the Cache River lowlands is shared with the rest of the Mississippi Delta and appears structural. While some of the large farmers showed little concern for the region, others, including members of the "elite" families identified by Twist, expressed acute concern for the social, cultural, and economic conditions of those they governed. It was a concern, however, that does not seem to translate into viable investments nor political strategies. This conclusion veers away from the specific topic of watershed, or natural resource, planning. But it ran like a thread throughout all the interviews we had with members of the Planning Committee, no matter their views on preservation of the Cache River swamps. In contrast, the Agency personnel viewed the area solely through the lens of natural resource management. In this sense, Habermas's concept of "lifeworld," and his linkage of communicative rationalities to that domain, points to the flaw inside of a putatively deliberative, consensus-based planning process. As Fraser (1992) observed, those who create the capacity to frame issues can transform deliberation into a mechanism for domination. It remains to be seen whether democratic participation fares any better under the hegemony of the agencies than it did under the hegemony of the agricultural and timbering elites.

As this analysis shows, the planning process in the Cache River Watershed operated on two dimensions: It re-legitimated the theory that landownership confers the right to govern and it simultaneously provided an instrument – the planning document – for the state and federal government agencies to enhance their power and to bring resources to the region. In doing this, they extended the agencies' project of reclaiming wetlands, in direct contradiction to the aims of most of the farmers who initially opposed

such projects. At the same time, they consolidated a political order in which the interests of national bureaucracies predominate, and in which pressing social and economic problems may have less opportunity to be addressed. The project of wetlands restoration and water quality enhancement was furthered; the project of democracy was not.

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