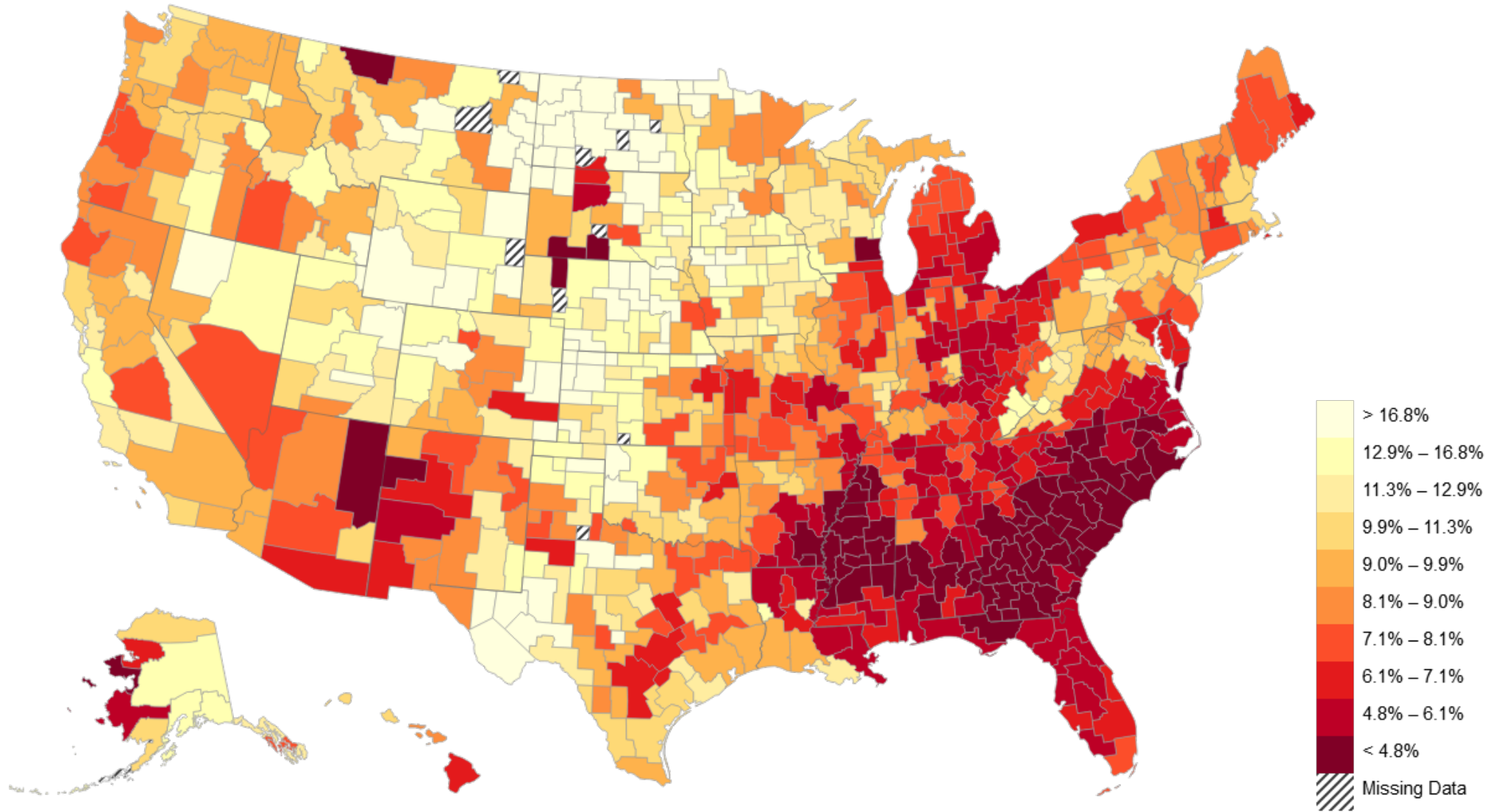


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February 3, 2021

▶ Moving Out to Move Up:
Higher Education as a
Mobility Pathway in the Rural
South



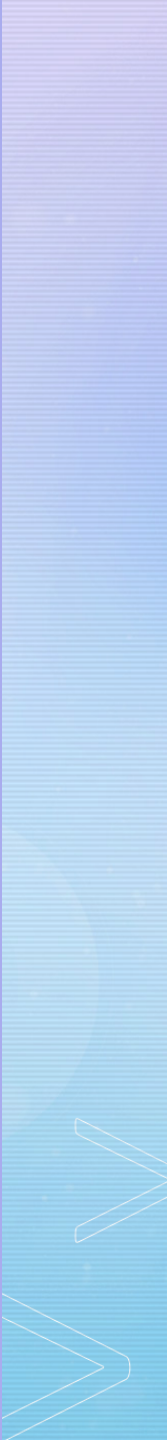
Argument

For rural youth, especially rural youth of color, enrolling in college and finding employment that uses that education requires a permanent transition from one opportunity structure to another, a transition which is not often expected of students from more privileged backgrounds.

- By opportunity structure, I refer to the linkages between educational opportunities and occupational hierarchies that are in turn embedded in a given spatial context.
- Growing up in NYC versus the Mississippi Delta



Central Delta

- Ethnographic and interview data on high school students in Central Delta County
 - Population: 25,000 (down from peak of 70,000)
 - 33% poverty rate, 16% deep poverty rate
 - No manufacturing employment + rapid decline of agricultural employment
- 

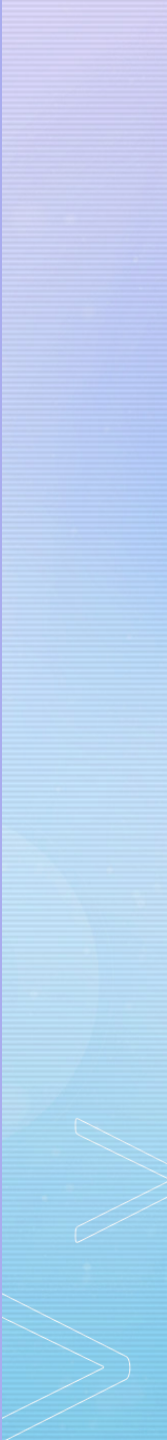


Imagining Mobility

- Students frequently expressed uncertainty about what going to college might mean for their lives
 - Often, the only college educated people they interact with are teachers
- A problem that compounds over generations; student aspirations are largely predicted by parent expectations (Byun et al 2012)

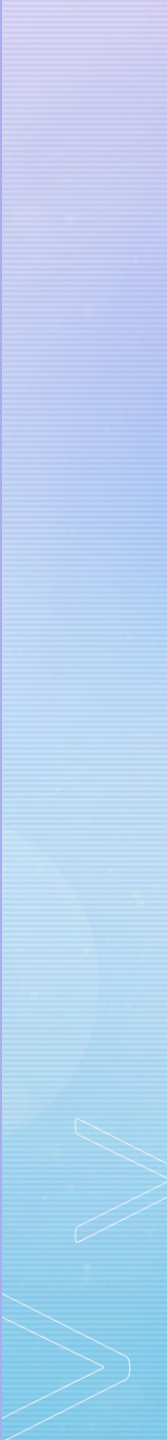


The Costs of Mobility

- Going to college means leaving someone behind
 - An ethical concern; students have to balance the decision to transition out of Central Delta versus wanting to be close to friends and family (Morton 2019)
 - A practical concern; students are leaving behind support networks – and people they supported (Stack1974)
- 



Race and Elite Spaces

- Students who attended elite summer programs as part of their preparation frequently report experiences of exclusion and overt racism – often for the first time
 - White students in spaces like this project their assumptions of class onto others (Warnock 2019)
 - Non-White students in these spaces have to learn to navigate two different worlds (Lee & Kramer 2013; Cornelissen 2016)
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Conclusions and Implications

- Social mobility is increasingly linked to geographic mobility.
 - A challenge linked to mechanization/automation
- How to support students who may have the potential for mobility and strong labor market outcomes but who are also embedded in social networks and opportunity structures that make that process more fraught?
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