

# Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20068]

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## **Proposed title of the session**

Diversity in the Development of the U.S. South

## **Abstract**

Specialists in the field of economic development, the youthful sub-discipline of economics, have learned many hard lessons in the seventy years since the field's birth after World War II, lessons that for good reason have occasioned a good deal of humility among practitioners. Although one of the lessons learned is that generalization is tricky business, most development economists would agree that the development process is fraught with difficulties, that there is no single "path" to growth," and that, with the possible exception of good institutions, there are no sine qua nons. Most would probably also agree that history matters and matters a lot. Hence, the relevance of the "Diversity in Development" theme for the 2015 World Economic History Congress.

History has mattered a lot in the development experience of the U.S. South as well, the geographical focus of the six papers included in our session. In world historical terms, the U.S. South is known—to the extent that it is known—as the region of the U.S. where slavery and plantation agriculture were most important and most deeply embedded, and where in the 1860s a ferocious and ferociously destructive civil war was mainly fought, which war ended slavery. As a result of this war, the slave-based economy was destroyed, and only slowly rebuilt. For a variety of reasons, when the economy was reconstituted, it was done so in a largely retrograde way which held back the region's development for generations. Indeed, it was not until the late 1930s and World War II that the South, for a variety of complicated reasons, began to right its economic path and to converge upon U.S. norms. Since that time, the region, despite continuing economic problems, has gradually become less isolated economically, less anomalous socially and culturally, and so-called southern exceptionalism has waned considerably. This is the standard story in any case.

The economic dimensions of this narrative are not so much wrong as incomplete, and the varied papers in our session do much to call attention to important aspects of the southern developmental experience that are glossed over or overlooked altogether. Four of the papers treat developmental issues associated with the southern agricultural sector, which seems fitting given the sector's overarching role in the region's history. Tomoko Yagyu analyzes the differential developmental effects of the transatlantic slave trade on labor markets in Virginia and South Carolina, while Barbara Hahn and Peter Coclanis focus on the differential development experiences of various tobacco-growing and rice-growing sub-regions in the South. Complementing these papers, Louis Ferleger examines the impact of science, particularly soil science, on southern agriculture in different parts of the South during the "long" nineteenth century. The two remaining papers examine aspects of the region's industrialization experience , with David L. Carlton focusing on southern textiles in global perspective and Lacy K. Ford tracing the path-dependent nature of South Carolina's developmental trajectory. The six papers, taken together, add much-needed texture and nuance to our still rather "underdeveloped" understanding of economic development in the U.S. South.

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## **I. Corresponding Session Organiser**

Prof. Peter Angelo Coclanis (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill [United States of America])

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## **II. Co-Organiser(s)**

1. Corresponding Organiser.

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## **III. Expected Participant(s)**

1. same as correspondent.
2. Lacy K. Ford (University of South Carolina [United States of America])
3. Louis A. Ferleger (Boston University [United States of America])
4. Tomoko Yagyu (Keio University [Japan])
5. David L. Carlton (Vanderbilt University [United States of America])
6. Barbara Hahn (Texas Tech University (and University of Leeds) [United States of America])