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Title: Cooperative Economics and the Failure of Black Capitalism in Hancock County, Georgia, 1966-1976

Abstract: This paper looks at the period of the Civil Rights Movement in Hancock County, Georgia. Led by the itinerant political organizer, John McCown, the African American community in Hancock won control of the county commission, desegregated the county school system, and set to work building an array of cooperative economic ventures that included what was then considered the largest catfish farm and processing plant in the world. The dominant historical narrative contends that McCown, the “outside agitator,” came into the county and destabilized a peaceful community and that his efforts at economic development were criminal and incompetent. In fact McCown was building on a long history of political agitation and resistance as well as a tradition of mutual aid and cooperative economics in Hancock County that stretched back into the 19th century. This paper also offers a preliminary discussion of why these experiments in “black capitalism” failed.

Bio: Mark Huddle is an Associate Professor of History at Georgia College and the Director of the College’s Center for Georgia Studies. He is currently working on a manuscript about the rise and fall of Black Power and Black Capitalism in rural Georgia.