

## PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY



## Jobs for the Future

**C**oncerned about the level of poverty in eastern North Carolina, sociologist Leslie Hosstfeld decided to do something about it. Working with her undergraduate students and teaming up with a community organization called the Center for Community Action, Hosstfeld designed a project, called Jobs for the Future, to help create jobs in this region of high unemployment. First, Hosstfeld and her associates gathered data on the impact of the loss of manufacturing jobs in Robeson County, the county in North Carolina where the project was centered.

Robeson County has a very multi-racial population. Thirty-eight percent of the population is Native American, mostly Lumbee Indians. Twenty-five percent of the population is African American; 5 percent are Latino; and the rest, White. There is a 24 percent poverty rate—much higher than national and state rates of poverty. In just four years, between 1997 and 2003, Robeson County lost 41 percent of its manufacturing jobs—jobs traditionally found in the textiles, apparel, and furniture-making industries. In the wake of this huge job loss, unemployment among African Americans rose



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to 16 percent; 12.4 percent among Latinos; and 9 percent among Native Americans. The results were high rates of personal bankruptcy, human suffering, and a huge loss in business revenue and county taxes.

Having collected such data, Hosstfeld and her team organized a national conference on the impact of job loss, produced a web page for the project to inform the public about what

was happening, and held a briefing on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, testifying about the impact of job loss in eastern North Carolina. Although the initial research for this project is complete, the work is ongoing through the efforts of the Center for Community Action.

This project provides a model for what people can do, using their sociological knowledge, to work on public issues involving inequality in their communities. For more information on this and related projects, see [www.asanet.org/footnotes/apr04/indextwo.html](http://www.asanet.org/footnotes/apr04/indextwo.html) and [www.povertyeast.org](http://www.povertyeast.org)

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. What is the poverty rate in your county? (You can learn this at American FactFinder, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).) What impact does this have for people in your region?
2. Were you to organize such a project in your community, what existing organizations might you collaborate with? How would your knowledge of sociology inform your public work?

Source: Hosstfeld, Leslie, Mac Legerton, and Gerald Keuster. 2004. "The Economic and Social Impact of Job Loss in Robeson County, North Carolina, 1993-2003." *Sociology Today* 2 (Fall). [www.ncsociology.org/socialactiontoday/v22/hosstfeld.htm](http://www.ncsociology.org/socialactiontoday/v22/hosstfeld.htm)

