

ENERGY DEVELOPMENT ON THE NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS:  
MERCER COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School  
Western Illinois University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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January 1980

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ABSTRACT

As a region, the great plains has generally been experiencing population decline since the 1930's. However, some areas are experiencing anomalous growth, Mercer County, North Dakota is such a place.

Legislative action and policy decisions at the federal level have provided the impetus for expanding the development of low sulphur coal reserves in Mercer County. The county will experience extremely rapid growth as thousands of workers move into the county to build three large power plants and a coal gasification plant. By 1985, the population will nearly double its 1970 level.

This development of resources due to exterior economic pressure is not new to Mercer County. Twice in the past, the area has been exploited by market forces outside of the region, first in the fur trade and then by wheat milling, banking interests.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First it describes geographically the settlement history of Mercer County and the changes it will experience during the rapid growth associated with energy development. Secondly, the thesis discusses the geographical expression of the federal governmental interest in energy development in the county and the implications of that interest for other areas like Mercer County in the northern great plains.