

INTRODUCTION

The Nine-State Area. The so-called Sun Belt region of the United States has experienced rapid growth in the past two decades. This region which stretches from Virginia southward and westward to California has been characterized by population expansion along with economic and industrial development.

The nine Southern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas) included in this study have been growing with the trends of the region. Total population in the nine states was approximately 43.5 million in 1970 and has grown to over 53.6 million by 1980. The annual rate of growth of the area based on the 1970 population was 2.34 per cent. While all the states gained population, the two largest states of the group, Texas and Florida, experienced not only the greatest absolute growth but actually grew at the fastest percentage rate. Table 1 shows the population changes in the area during the past decade.

It is generally thought that the population gains of the Southern states will continue in the coming decade. The rate of growth the area can look forward to during the 1980s is open to question and will likely be influenced by several variables. Among others these may include government policies at federal, state, and local levels; the pace of economic development of the various regions of the nation; and perhaps the severity of northern winters.

Table 1. Population and Population Change.
Nine Southern U.S. States, 1970-1980

	1970 Census (April 1)	1980 Census (Prel.)	Total Change	Average Year- to-Year Change (Per Cent of 1970)
Alabama	3,444,165	3,890,061	445,896	1.29
Florida	6,789,443	9,739,992	2,950,549	4.34
Georgia	4,589,575	5,464,265	874,690	1.90
Louisiana	3,641,306	4,203,972	562,666	1.54
Mississippi	2,216,912	2,520,638	303,726	1.37
North Carolina	5,082,059	5,874,429	792,370	1.56
South Carolina	2,590,516	3,119,208	528,692	2.04
Tennessee	3,923,687	4,590,750	667,063	1.70
Texas	11,196,730	14,228,383	3,031,653	2.71
Nine-State Total	43,474,393	53,631,698	10,157,305	2.34