Dear friends:

This paper is part of a larger project about the history of the Research Triangle and the emergence of the idea of the postindustrial or information economy since the 1950s. It comprises parts of several chapters I have been working on, and it has been stitched together with the aim of coming up with some kind of manageable journal article. In the piece I have not really theorized the concept of “cultural capital” and have been wondering how much I should engage with the literature on this subject, or if this is even a particularly useful category or term to use with regard to this research. Any thoughts or suggestions you have would be most appreciated—thanks for reading!

- ASC

P.S. The original document featured several pictures, but it became too large to transmit. I’ve uploaded several of them to this page in case you would like to see some of the visual culture associated with the Triangle:

Inventing the “Creative City”: Cultural Capital and the Making of North Carolina’s Research Triangle, 1953-1965

Alex Sayf Cummings
Georgia State University

“Progress goes where there’s brains and water.”

- Durham banker John S. Stewart, 1967

“It’s a creative community. With plenty of educated men and women.”

- State-sponsored ad for the Research Triangle, 1965

In 2011, Forbes magazine declared Raleigh, North Carolina and its affluent bedroom suburb of Cary to be the United States’ second biggest “brain magnet.” Nearby Durham, home of Duke University, was the nation’s “second brainiest” city the year before, according to The Daily Beast. And Bloomberg Businessweek gave Raleigh the unlikely honor of America’s “best city” in 2011, passing over seemingly more compelling candidates like New York or San Francisco.

Brains, of course, weren’t the only thing attracted to North Carolina in recent years. Indeed, the state saw robust economic growth and an influx of population in the last fifty years, reversing a trend of out-migration that worried policymakers in the mid-twentieth century. Since the 1950s Americans from the Northeast, Midwest, and West Coast flocked to the emerging banking center of Charlotte and the high-tech Research Triangle of Raleigh,

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2 “A Lot of Yesterday’s Science Fiction Isn’t Fiction Anymore,” 24 November 1965, 12.
Durham, and Chapel Hill, while immigrants transformed the complexion of a state once thoroughly defined by a black-white racial binary.⁴

The story is a familiar one—North Carolina boosters successfully concocted a narrative about the state as moderate or even progressive, at least compared to its Southern neighbors, as politicos in the 1950s and 1960s dragged their feet on integration but studiously avoided the “fire-breathing” of George Wallace or Orval Faubus. Subsequent efforts by Governor Jim Hunt and other state leaders to enhance education and recruit advanced industries such as biotechnology in the 1980s and 1990s lent credibility to the state’s claims of relative progressiveness. Meanwhile, national and international media have been happy to echo this message with glowing portrayals of bustling, prosperous cities, prestigious universities, and an excellent quality of life. At the same time, North Carolina became the nation’s most manufacturing-intensive state, as persistently low wages and a more or less bipartisan policy of anti-unionism made rural and small-town NC an attractive target for footloose capital.⁵

However, even as manufacturing grew in the state during the 1970s and 1980s, a sexier story captured the attention of national media and local economic development boosters throughout the United States and, indeed, the world: the rise of high-tech industry in and around Research Triangle Park (RTP), a project modeled on California’s Stanford Industrial Park in the late 1950s that, to the surprise of many, soon became a center of research and development to rival Boston and Silicon Valley. Indeed, RTP is the largest

⁵ Edward J. Feser, Harvey A. Goldstein, Michael I. Luger, and Andrius Nemickas, At the Crossroads: North Carolina’s Place in the Knowledge Economy of the 21st Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Department of City and Regional Planning), 1. See also Bryant Simon’s forthcoming Hamlet, USA: The Cost of Cheap and the Rewriting of the Social Contract in the United States.
research park in the country, home to facilities operated by multinational giants like IBM and GlaxoSmithKline, as well as nonprofit institutions such as the National Humanities Center. How a state once mired in rural poverty and stubbornly wedded to low-wage, labor-intensive industries such as textiles and furniture managed to attract so many jobs in capital-intensive, white-collar industries is a question that scholars have not yet adequately addressed.

RTP brought better-paying jobs to the Triangle, but its greatest significance lay in promoting a vision of urban development geared toward the interests of an upper-middle-class technical elite. Between the Triangle’s “livable” cities and tony suburbs, its bohemian food trucks and its laboratories shielded behind pine trees and generous setbacks, the area has become a model of a postindustrial city. It is a haven for the group of highly educated, generally affluent professionals that sociologist Richard Florida famously called the “creative class.”

For decades, social scientists and theorists have grappled with how to analyze or even define an emergent group of white-collar workers. In the 1970s Daniel Bell and Herman Kahn labeled them “knowledge workers” and a “new class” (respectively), while economist Robert Reich coined the term “symbolic analysts” in the early 1990s. This group has been loosely defined not only by its command of technology or “theoretical knowledge” (in Bell’s formulation), but also its increasing prominence within an economy where manufacturing played a diminishing role—the “post-industrial society” of Bell or the “information age” of Manuel Castells. In Florida’s influential formulation, this ever-

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broadening class is defined by its “creativity”—a flattering, if elastic, descriptor that can encompass everyone from the starving artist to the corporate CEO.  

As early as the 1950s, though, the founders of Research Triangle Park developed a powerful rhetoric about class and culture that strikingly resembles Florida’s prescription for cultivating a “creative” urban milieu. As Florida stressed in his influential 2002 study *The Rise of the Creative Class*, workers with high degrees of education and privilege do not necessarily follow jobs, but, rather, companies seek locations that will appeal to the workers they hope to employ. Aiming to recruit high-income workers such as scientists and engineers, an alliance of academics, businesspeople, and state development officials in North Carolina began in the 1950s to appeal explicitly to the Triangle’s cultural “climate” and “atmosphere” to persuade corporations such as IBM to open facilities in RTP. The Triangle’s promoters emphasized the benefits of living in a community with numerous colleges and universities, as well as museums, symphonies, and other cultural institutions. Pamphlets, advertisements, and private correspondence with decisionmakers in big business repeatedly emphasized that the Triangle possessed a “stimulating” environment that would appeal to scientists and their families, who would be willing to relocate to the South thanks to the prospect of living among other highly educated individuals, such as university professors.

In short, North Carolina leaders in business, education, and government imagined the Triangle as a postindustrial playground for an elite of white-collar workers—what geographers David Havlick and Scott Kirsch have called “a production utopia.” (In France, scholars have dubbed high-tech enclaves “technopoles,” while others have coined terms

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such as “technoburbs” and “cities of knowledge.”)\(^9\) Planners realized that scientists and engineers were in high demand and short supply at the height of the Cold War, and could thus exercise a significant degree of discretion about where they chose to live. North Carolinians had to persuade companies they hoped to recruit to RTP that the workers they planned to hire would be willing to relocate to the Triangle.

In the process, RTP’s promoters developed an economic development strategy that economist Ann Markusen described as “creative placemaking” fifty years later—deliberately developing a regional identity (“the Triangle”) that catered to the interests of educated professionals and focused heavily on the importance of cultural amenities for quality of life.\(^{10}\) RTP is part, thus, not only of the story of the postwar Sunbelt’s economic growth or the rise of high-tech industry, but of a reconfiguring of urban identity and economic development around the use of cultural capital to spur growth—strategies that scholar-consultants like Florida and Markusen articulated much later as a means to revive the fortunes of ailing cities throughout the United States in the early twenty-first century.

**Economic Origins of the Triangle**

To understand how historic a shift RTP represents for North Carolina, it is necessary to view it in the broad sweep of Southern industrialization. Historians such as James Cobb and David Carlton have provided superlative accounts of the chronic weaknesses of the former Confederacy in terms of developing industry, raising wages, and lifting Southerners out of rural poverty. Like other Southern states, North Carolina sought to spur development

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by virtually any inducement to recruit industry, offering tax incentives, providing worker
training, suppressing unions and even building facilities for outside firms. Boosters promised
outside industrialists and investors that the local people were hard-working, docile, and
(tellingly) “native-born”—not the sort of agitators infected by foreign ideologies who came
off the boat at Ellis Island.11 And as the sociologist and legislator Paul Leubke has pointed
out, North Carolinian elites were determined to maintain a labor market that would appeal
to labor-intensive industry, going so far as to deter industries that would pay higher wages
from locating in the state. Meanwhile, as David Carlton has shown, the state’s own
remoteness from Northern markets, lack of local purchasing power, and shortage of
entrepreneurial or scientific expertise largely prevented it from developing its own innovative
industries at home, with a few notable exceptions, such as Washington Duke’s success in
developing cigarettes as a distinctive and popular product line. Until the 1950s,
industrialization in North Carolina centered primarily on industries that were highly routine
and labor-intensive, leaving little possibility for higher wages or local innovation.12

The development of Research Triangle Park, thus, represented a departure from the
state’s past economic trajectory in the sense that North Carolina elites actively sought
higher-wage industry and aimed to “hatch” new industries at the local level. (RTP in many
ways succeeded in the first goal, though progress on the second score remains less clear.)
Some histories credit the legendary UNC sociologist Howard Odum with originating the
idea of the Research Triangle; prior to his death in 1953, Odum had envisioned developing a
research center between Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill that would work in conjunction

12 James Cobb, The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990 (University
of Illinois Press, 1993); Liston Pope, Millhands and Preachers; Paul Leubke, Tar Heel Politics 2000; David
Carlton, “The Revolution from Above: The National Market and the Beginnings of Industrialization in
with area universities. However, little to no evidence suggests that Odum’s ideas directly influenced the political decisionmakers who founded RTP in the late 1950s, although his disciple George Simpson, a fellow UNC sociologist, was heavily involved in promoting RTP in its early years.\textsuperscript{13}

Rather, the chief impetus came from Romeo Guest, a Greensboro contractor whose role in the project has been curiously deemphasized by some scholars. Guest coined the term “Research Triangle,” the visual gestalt that defined the project from the beginning and that has become so central to the identity of the greater Raleigh-Durham metropolitan area, around 1953.\textsuperscript{14} His company, Romeo Guest and Sons, focused primarily on building facilities for industrial firms relocating to the South. “The competition for new industrial plants is becoming so keen and so competitive that it is increasingly more difficult to relocate a new plant in our State,” Guest told his secretary, Phyllis Branch, in 1954. He also noticed that Congress was throwing federal money at military projects and scientific research, thanks to the Cold War, and North Carolina mostly missed out on this bonanza. “I have heard that MIT has research grants from the government through industry amounting to approximately $5 million per year and that California institutions are similarly loaded,” Guest said.\textsuperscript{15}

At this stage, Guest’s “triangle” could easily have evolved in directions that departed sharply from the tree-lined research park surrounded by sprawling, low-density suburbs that

\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, disagreement over who originated the concept persisted for years; Mary Virginia Jones, a graduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill, interviewed Simpson in the late 1970s and found that he attributed it entirely to Guest. In Jones’s words, Simpson believed that the Triangle’s early chroniclers, such as Louis Round Wilson, were “guided by extreme loyalty to the University [UNC]” and he regretted “that they give credit for the idea to Odum.” Mary Virginia Jones to Romeo Guest, 14 March 1978, in RGP, Box 10, Correspondence 1954-1955, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{14} Guest had used the phrase in discussions with influential Tar Heels at least as early as December 1953, judging from his correspondence with Edwin Gill of the State Treasury. Edwin Gill to Romeo Guest, 6 January 1954, in Romeo Guest Papers (RGP), Box 10, Letters (Copies) 1953-1954, Duke University Durham, NC, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{15} Memo to Phyllis Branch, 5 November 1954, in Romeo Guest Papers (RGP), Box 10, Advertising and Related Correspondence 1954, Duke University, Durham, NC, p. 1.
we know today. In August 1954 Guest received a proposal from Stanley Reed, an engineer and inventor who later went to found Mergers & Acquisitions magazine and dabbled in pursuits ranging from politics to opera. Reed envisioned a truly self-contained scientific city: a 4000-acre, for-profit complex in Virginia organized around his own Reed Research Inc., encompassing both “research organizations… [and] residences in the $20,000 to $40,000 class for many of the personnel,” as well as some manufacturing. “The whole thing would probably be fenced in and have a watchman,” Reed’s agent told Guest.16

Guest rebuffed Reed’s proposal. He conceded that the “idea coincided… closely with what we have in mind,” but as far as he was concerned, the project had to be in North Carolina. So began his mission to evangelize the idea of a “research area” between Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill. It required enlisting the support of bankers, journalists, politicians, textile magnates, and university presidents and professors, who helped persuade corporations and government to place scientific facilities in the state. The program demonstrated a degree of cooperation among powerful North Carolinians—from Governor Luther Hodges, a tenant farmer’s son (and former textile executive) who was ardently pro-business, to deep-pocketed bankers like George Watts Hill and academics like George Simpson—that was remarkable even in the context of the “commercial civic elite” that long dominated local government in the South. The Triangle received the (nearly) unflagging support not just of the local Chamber of Commerce or city council in Raleigh or Durham, but of influential people at multiple levels of government and in divergent fields of endeavor throughout the state. At least a few professors and administrators wondered whether their universities’ involvement in the Triangle campaign—which essentially promised access to

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their expertise and libraries to prospective businesses—would really benefit the schools or the faculty, but the project otherwise received broad-based support throughout the state.\(^\text{17}\)

North Carolinians in the early 1950s were well aware of experiments with new kinds of scientific organizations in Alabama, Massachusetts, Texas, and other states, and consciously used these as models.\(^\text{18}\) Guest had studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a young man; seeing the hub of scholarly activity in Cambridge inspired him to see in Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill the potential for a Charles River of the South.\(^\text{19}\) Interestingly, Guest chose not to focus on Greensboro area, despite it being home to his company as well as numerous colleges located in Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem—what later became known as “the Triad,” the Triangle’s junior cousin. Instead, he won the support of Gov. Hodges, private businessmen, and key leaders at UNC, Duke, and State College for the idea of recruiting business to the Triangle. Guest contacted Hodges’s office in December 1954, and by the following Summer the Research Triangle Committee met to discuss what exactly the Triangle would be.\(^\text{20}\)

Hodges had just taken office in November, following the past Governor’s untimely death, and he took up Guest’s cause almost immediately, looking perhaps for some stamp to put on the economic development efforts of his administration. Hodges later recalled in his 1962 memoir that the Triangle was “an idea that has produced a reality”—but in its early


\(^{20}\) Luther H. Hodges to Gordon Gray, 2 June 1955, in Research Triangle Foundation Papers (RTF), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1; “Research Triangle Plan Adopted,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 8 November 1955, in RGP, Box 10, Research Triangle Correspondence 1955.
phases the idea itself was far from clear.\textsuperscript{21} In March 1955 Hodges told the \textit{Raleigh News and Observer} that the Triangle could compete with the international stature of MIT, which was “ringed” by labs. “Many industries, he reported, have located centers in the vicinity of the school in order to take advantage of M.I.T. staff and facilities,” the paper reported. “The same thing could happen in North Carolina,” according to Hodges. “It would bring in more Ph.D’s than we’ve ever heard of here.”\textsuperscript{22}

To hear Hodges speak, one would think he only intended to import more people with advanced degrees. As historian James C. Cobb has noted, “Research scientists were more than five times more numerous in the nation as a whole than in the South, and patents were issued to southerners at a rate less than one-third of the national average” by the end of World War II.\textsuperscript{23} And, indeed, Triangle planners would continue to speak frankly about their aim to “import” scientists who would, presumably, elevate the tax base and workforce in the state. Political and business leaders also worried about the steady flow of scientists and engineers who trained at North Carolina universities but left to work for industries outside the state.\textsuperscript{24}

The Research Triangle Committee spent the next several years attempting to convince outside corporations to place facilities in the general area between Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill. The group decided to compile an inventory of local resources, such as the schools’ many laboratories, NC State’s atomic reactor, and equipment for medical research. But before listing scientific and technological assets, the report extensively documented the

\textsuperscript{21} Luther H. Hodges, \textit{Businessman in the Statehouse: Six Years as Governor of North Carolina} (Chapel Hill, 1962), 203.
\textsuperscript{24} Romeo Guest to Edward R. Lutz, 13 Dec. 1954, in RGP, Box 10, Correspondence 1954-1955, p. 1.
“cultural opportunities” offered by the Triangle cities, such as art galleries, lecture series, museums, symphonies, and theater.  

The following year the group appointed UNC sociologist George Simpson as its director—essentially, a point-person and pitchman who would travel the country to speak with scientists, executives, and policymakers. In 1956 the professor met with the “appropriate research people” at “the Air Force, the Navy, the Army, the National Science Foundation, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Bureau of the Census.” Meanwhile, chemist William F. Little of UNC met with representatives from Buckeye Cellulose, Chemstrand, Ortho Pharma, and Scott Paper at Chapel Hill in early 1957. “All of these people showed real enthusiasm for the idea and without exception, have promised to turn over the brochure I gave them to research directors, etc.,” Little told Simpson. In fact, the men from Dow in Texas showed special interest. “It was an absolutely glowing letter of praise for our area,” Little said. “Coming from Texans this is something.”

Meanwhile, Hodges sought the support of Karl Robbins, a New York-based magnate who, before retiring, had extensive holdings in the North Carolina textile industry, to fund land purchases for a research park near Morrisville, NC. In 1957 Robbins pledged a million dollars for the project, organized as the Pinelands company; the firm planned to sell off or lease parcels of land to high-tech companies and ultimately turn a profit. However, as

30 Little to Simpson, 20 February 1957, p. 2.
few companies showed interest in relocating to the area and Robbins’s own health flagged, the Research Triangle Committee realized that the project was likelier to succeed as a nonprofit venture. With the energetic support of banker Archie Davis, the Committee was able to raise enough donations from wealthy North Carolinians by 1959 to buy out Robbins’s shares and reorganize itself as the Research Triangle Foundation, a nonprofit that would be jointly controlled by the three universities and the state. Thus did the fledgling Research Triangle Park change from a private, commercial effort to a joint public-private partnership—albeit one without many interested tenants lined up.31

The Trouble with the Triangle

Indeed, Guest and his allies had been receiving kind words about their project for several years, without realizing tangible results. The Triangle had the active support of a network of high-placed individuals in academia, industry, and state government, and it appeared to have leads for potential tenants. However, the research park struggled to generate the kind of interest—and land sales—that seemed so plausible in the Spring and Summer of 1957. A business downturn that year left many companies reluctant to take a chance on the Triangle’s as-yet unproven potential as an ideal location for industrial laboratories. Three clients who had planned to move to the park failed to follow through.32

Clearly, businesses were not champing at the bit to relocate to the Triangle. Boosters could claim that Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill was an ideal area for scientific research, but skeptics remained skeptical until corporations actually began to set up shop there. A.H. Kinzel, a chemist at Union Carbide, was not sanguine about the Triangle’s prospects. Meeting with Simpson in 1956, Kinzel said simply that the existence of nearby research

32 Wilson, Research Triangle, 14.
facilities was not a major factor when his company was deciding where to put a laboratory. Carbide would not consider the chemistry labs at Duke or UNC a compelling reason for locating a facility in the area, as academic research was often too slow-moving and remote from practical application to make much of a difference for the company:

Usually, he said, the laboratory will follow the plant, and in the case of his company the plants have in recent years been located generally with reference to water supply. He pointed out the deficiencies of our area and of the South in general in the services that are necessary to support research activities, such as engineering, skilled workers for machine making and the like, the proximity of supplies, and a large skilled laboring force from which to choose. This was not the first time that this point had been made to me.\footnote{Simpson to Hodges, 6 November 1956, in RGP, Box 11, Governor Hodges’ Archival Papers 1955-1957, p. 1.}

Kinzel did not mince words. The chemist, Simpson recalled, “took occasion, also, to point out that in the national setting our three institutions, while quite good, did not loom especially large to such a person as he.”\footnote{Simpson to Hodges, 6 November 1956, p. 1.}

The sociologist was not offended but, in fact, took the candid words for what they were: a frank assessment of the challenges involved in persuading outsiders that a patch of piney woods between two modestly sized cities and a small college town in the South was a technology hub waiting to happen. How could you build an “M.I.T. of North Carolina” without an MIT or Boston to go with it? If the Triangle’s seeming \textit{raison d’être}—its
concentration of scholars and scientific resources—had only marginal utility for big business, what could be its chief selling point?

Boosters claimed that geography favored the Triangle in other ways, since it was situated between New York, Atlanta, and Washington, DC, at a nexus of transportation routes, including the new interstate highway system, then in its early stages of construction. Scientists and executives could get from Chapel Hill to the Raleigh-Durham airport in twenty minutes, from which they could reach Washington in an hour and Atlanta in an hour and a half by plane. “The industrial scientist thus may live in an environment peculiarly suited to him and yet remain in close touch with executive offices and perhaps even production facilities located elsewhere,” explained Simpson, in a 1957 promotional piece in the New York Times.

When IBM announced plans to build a research center in New York’s Westchester suburbs in 1956, the company appealed to the same mix of geographical and social qualities that would soon define the Triangle’s message. IBM officials cited Westchester’s proximity to its other laboratories and offices as a top concern, just as Kinzel suggested. “The Westchester County site on which we hope to build is located midway between [IBM facilities in] Poughkeepsie and New York City,” president Thomas Watson said. However, a convenient location between its labs along the Hudson River was not the only consideration. “It was selected not only with an eye to accessibility but to the considerable cultural and educational opportunities in the area,” Watson told the New York Telegram-Sun. “These are of

35 “Conditioned for Research…” pamphlet, in RGP, Duke University, Advertising and Related Correspondence 1954, Box 10, p. 3.
great importance to scientists, whose interests individually and as a group are extremely varied.”37

Indeed, Union Carbide executive G.H. Law offered a contrary view from his colleague Kinzel, arguing that these less tangible factors, such as culture, could be important when businesses choose a site for a laboratory. Law told Simpson that “living conditions and cultural opportunities” were “at least as as important as any other considerations” for corporations and the scientists they hoped to employ. “There just aren’t enough good men to go around and competition is intense,” Law said. “With equal opportunities and salaries at different locations the decision to accept a position is usually made on the basis of living conditions. Many of the young men we hire now are married before they leave school and their wives frequently cast the deciding vote on location.”39

Crucial to the success of the Triangle, then, was an emphasis on the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area as a place where scientists could be happy and creative. In this sense, both the Triangle’s champions and the corporations who moved there needed to present the urban landscape as rich in culture and social status. The production and sale of this new kind of space predated the discourse of “innovative milieu” and “creative cities” that came into vogue since the 1980s.40 North Carolinians spoke of the value of the Triangle’s educational institutions and privileged workforce in terms of “climate,” “atmosphere,” and the ubiquitous language of “stimulation.” Such rhetoric resembles the more recent trend toward emphasizing “diversity” and other qualities of neighborhoods and

cities that accompanied gentrification amid the renaissance of cities like New York and Boston in the 1990s, even though the Triangle was, at least at first, cultivated as a landscape solely for white, affluent workers and families.41

Indeed, the promotional literature for the Triangle unfailingly presented its quarry as white men with horn-rimmed glasses and white lab coats. Boosters assumed that scientists coming to the area would be white, male, and middle-class—unsurprising, perhaps, in the 1950s and early 1960s—even though the growth of employment in RTP in subsequent decades resulted in significant in-migration of racial and ethnic minorities and increased employment of women in scientific fields. Promoters were anxious to skirt the issue of Jim Crow as much as possible; one promotional piece boasted that Chapel Hill had two elementary schools and two high schools, without mentioning why such a small town would need dual institutions, while noting in passing that Raleigh had a hospital for Negros. Generally, leaders like Luther Hodges and Terry Sanford were keen to fall back on North Carolina’s reputation as the most moderate Southern state in racial matters—however well-deserved that image might have been—and outsiders appear to have taken their pitch at face value. Carbide’s J. Fellig visited in 1958 and counted only sweltering summer heat and “the racial strife in connections with the desegregation of schools” as potential drawbacks of the area. “It is my feeling however,” Fellig told his supervisors, “that the latter problem will not have as disruptive an influence in the Triangle as in other parts of the South, because the colored schools in the three urban districts are above average in quality and also because the population of the Research Triangle can probably be called quite progressive in what is generally considered to be the most progressive of the southern states.”42

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By presenting the image of a landscape uniquely suited to a white, professional elite, North Carolinians imagined a space that was both urban and anti-urban, dispersed and concentrated. Research parks like RTP aimed to exploit the advantages of agglomeration—pooling labs, libraries, and schools in close proximity to each other—yet aspired, as historians Margaret Pugh O’Mara and John Findlay have shown, to a bucolic ideal of a rolling, green landscape, akin to the classic college campus and the curvilinear suburb. Hodges assured Charlotte business leaders in 1958 that “research organizations tend to cluster together… since much is to be gained by constant intellectual interchange among scientists and research workers.” “There is a concentrating tendency,” George Simpson told faculty at UNC, “about research activities.” Planners frequently discussed the park in terms of laying out a new “city” of tens of thousands of people, yet boosters repeatedly stressed that the Triangle was not urban at all—rather, it offered professional men (always men, and, always, their wives) access to cultural opportunities that were “unique outside a metropolitan area… offering an ideal environment away from crowded cities.” Such developments played on an anti-urban bias characteristic of the postwar era, when middle-class (and many working-class) Americans fled a dense and menacing city for the better controlled comforts of suburbia. This impulse led to the simultaneous construction of mythic landscapes like Disneyland, with its spirit of “techno-nostalgia,” privately planned cities like the Sun City

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retirement community, and the pastoral working environments of parks—office parks, industrial parks, and research parks.  

The Research Triangle differed from its postwar, Sunbelt peers chiefly in its scale and its singularity of purpose. Like Sun City, Arizona or Celebration, Florida, the Triangle began as a single, highly controlled space, but the project came to redefine multiple cities and counties as part of one sprawling metropolitan landscape. (As Hodges rhapsodized, “Actually, you and I cannot hem in or establish boundaries for the Research Triangle… for while its heart pulses in the counties of Orange, Durham and Wake it is providing new life for all segments of North Carolina and the Southeast.”) And while cities such as Atlanta and Los Angeles swelled with newcomers seeking a wide range of opportunities in the booming Sunbelt, RTP’s boosters attracted residents and investment in a much more focused and intentional fashion, crafting a new urban identity—“the Triangle”—almost entirely out of whole cloth, and repackaging the cities of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill as a place specifically oriented to workers with high degrees of status and education.

Long before the “rise of the creative class,” scientists had to be cajoled to take a job, even with a company as powerful as IBM, and the qualities of a work and living environment were central to such appeals. With the federally-subsidized push into chemistry, computer science, and weapons and space technology during the 1950s and 1960s, employers competed to recruit a scarce number of scientists and engineers with advanced degrees. “With the intense competition existing today for scientific talent, industry is finding that it must offer more than just good pay to attract the kind of people it seeks,” the New York Times reported.

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Times reported in 1962. “When evaluating locations for new research operations, industrial concerns also look for proximity to entertainment and cultural centers.” Executives at Union Carbide took such opportunities into consideration when choosing where to place a laboratory, as “research people are quite interested in the theatre, music and other arts. Many like to participate in little theatre groups or local orchestras.”

In fact, Triangle supporters had been trumpeting such quality-of-life considerations for years. The Chamber of Commerce’s Carl Madde boasted that the Research Triangle was one of the places that attract “these brilliant, creative people,” like “Route 128 in Massachusetts, with the facilities of Harvard and MIT,” and Stanford in California. “The Research Triangle is also an outstanding area in which the industrial scientist’s family may live,” an ad by North Carolina’s Board of Conservation and Development (BCD) announced in 1957. The ad reassured readers in the Northeast that central North Carolina offered abundant cultural opportunities: “Each year many concert artists and groups appear here, along with many touring companies of Broadway shows, and scarcely a week passes during the fall and winter months when a speaker of national reputation does not appear somewhere in the Triangle.” Such luminaries included speakers such as Ralph Bunche and Robert Frost, and performers ranging from the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Quartetto Italiano—entertainments that catered to highbrow tastes. One could leave New York, in other words, without leaving Lincoln Center.

Boosters attributed these cultural amenities to the presence of scholars, students, and schools in the greater Triangle. “In Durham the flavor of fine universities blends with the tempo of diversified manufacturing...” a 1957 ad promised. “The result is a stimulating

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47 “Research Staffs Being Beset By Problem of Where to Live,” NYT, 16 June 1962, 47.
atmosphere where a productive day’s work—whether it be in the factory, laboratory, office, or class room—is the accepted standard.” The Research Triangle Institute, an organization founded in 1958 to carry out projects for business and government on a contract basis, sought to woo potential employees in 1962, stating, “A stimulating environment for professional and cultural development is provided by close association with the Triangle universities: Duke, North Carolina, and North Carolina State.”

The Triangle’s boosters at first experienced only modest success convincing major corporations that North Carolina would satisfy the desires of potential employees for good schools, entertainment, and recreation. Simpson, Little and company courted the likes of American Cyanamid and Union Carbide, which sent three representatives to tour the area in July 1958. The physics consulting firm ASTRA relocated from Milford, Connecticut to Raleigh in 1958, with plans to move into RTP. The first major tenant, though, was Chemstrand, a chemical firm that opted to move its facilities from Decatur, Alabama in 1959. Ironically, in their quest to imitate the Charles River and draw business from the North, the Triangle’s organizers poached a business that was thirty minutes away from Huntsville, one of the South’s other scientific centers. Chemstrand hired the Wigton-Abbott company of Plainfield, NJ to build its $7.5 million site in 1959, which was dedicated three years later.

When businesses decided to open facilities in or near RTP, they adopted nearly identical rhetoric. Chemstrand stressed that “a principal factor in [its] decision was the stimulating research climate already established in the Triangle, with its proximity to 900

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53 Wilson, Research Triangle, 16.
scientists at State College, Duke University, and the University of North Carolina, and to the
research staff of the new Research Triangle Institute.”\(^{55}\) The company promised prospective
mechanical engineers that the Triangle “offers excellent facilities for cultural and recreational
activity.” The Triangle “was chosen after a six-month study of 21 locations because: You and
your family will enjoy living in this area where educational, cultural, recreational and residential
facilities are top-notch. You will find intellectual stimulation in the university atmosphere
which will surround Chemstrand’s expanding research program.”\(^{56}\) Meanwhile, the Missile
Battery Division of the Electric Storage Battery Company tried to lure engineers to the
Triangle’s “unusual intellectual climate” in 1960, and Chemstrand’s executive director
extolled its “unique location and productive climate” the following year.\(^{57}\)

Soon after the arrival of Chemstrand, boosters tried to persuade the American
Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists to leave its base in Lowell, Massachusetts for
RTP, arguing that proximity to the state’s textile mills would benefit the group.\(^{58}\) In fact, the
AATCC was prepared to move. Its long-running relationship with the Lowell Textile School
had diminished as the school morphed into the Lowell Technological Institute in the mid-
1950s, shedding its explicit ties to the declining New England textile industry.\(^{59}\) New
president George Paine was determined to move the group to New York, even though the
cramped conditions of the city were not well suited to developing an in-house lab for
AATCC’s use. Paine was a “confirmed northerner,” according to the group’s official history.

\(^{56}\) “Mechanical Research” (ad), NYT, 23 September 1962, 176; “Live a Full Life with Chemstrand
\(^{57}\) “Senior Project Engineers,” NYT, 21 February 1960, F15; “Pittsburgh Plate and Glass wanted
Community Cooperation,” IFJYJ, 5 April 1961, 10;
\(^{58}\) James B. Shea, Jr. to Members of the Council, 2 Feb. 1961, in RTF, Folder 289, General, 1961:
\(^{59}\) 130.
As far as he was concerned, if one “crossed the Hudson River and headed South [one came] into the land of the aborigine.”

Persuading the likes of Paine that the organization’s scientists would be happy relocating to North Carolina was a significant challenge, and one that Triangle supporters nearly did not achieve. The Triangle’s hopes were dashed in 1961 when the AATCC’s Executive Committee voted to move to New York City. RTP came in a close second among the choices, which included Philadelphia, NC State, Clemson College in South Carolina, and Washington, DC as potential sites for the new headquarters. A second vote in 1962, however, selected RTP as the organization’s new home, because the Triangle promised lower costs for rent, more space for laboratories, and a “good quality of life.”

RTP as a Model for Development

After years of lobbying and courtship, North Carolina won two major projects in 1965 that ultimately set RTP on a sound course: the federal government chose the park for a major environmental health research center, and IBM selected RTP for a large facility. The former was the result of a long process of political horse-trading. Terry Sanford, who was running for Governor in 1960, made a politically risky endorsement of Sen. John F. Kennedy for President, and his predecessor, Luther Hodges, accepted an appointment as Secretary of Commerce in the new Kennedy administration in 1961. A few weeks before his death in 1963, President John F. Kennedy gave a national nod to the Triangle idea. “The North Carolina site is a good one, as there is a triangle there of colleges and hospitals and

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61 Clark, Dyeing for a Living, 140.
62 Clark, Dyeing for a Living, 139.
medical facilities,” Kennedy said. “I have indicated that would be satisfactory, if that was the judgment of Congress.”

Intense jockeying for the project had been going on for months in Washington, as Health Secretary Anthony Celebrezze argued for a site near other government agencies like the Food and Drug Administration in Maryland, and Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) lobbied for his own state to receive the project. Hodges and then-Governor Sanford worked behind the scenes to land the $25 million research center, and the existence of hospitals and universities in the Triangle was a major plank in their argument. Sanford had guaranteed the state would provide the federal government with several hundred acres in RTP for the lab free of charge. “While the land is not a very important part of the cost,” Sanford told reporters in January 1965, “for some reason that is very appealing to these agencies, and it helped a great deal to sell them on the location. Now I’m sure they wouldn’t go to the wrong place in order to get free land, but it does help and we used this simply, you might say, to get their attention.” In a typical instance of Johnsonian deal-making, both West Virginia and Celebrezze’s home state of Ohio ultimately received smaller facilities, but the National Environmental Health Science Center ended up squarely in RTP. Though the result of pork barrel politics, the decision also reflected the fact that policymakers during the Cold War preferred to “disperse” government facilities throughout the country, in order to reduce

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64 “Carolina Shows How To Do It,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 8 January 1965, 6A.
the impact of a potential nuclear strike.67 Congress had mandated that the center be no less than 50 miles from Washington, DC.68

The other major victory came in the form of IBM, which announced its decision to place a major research facility in RTP in 1965—the biggest name the Triangle had landed thus far, and a deal that RTF staff had been negotiating for seven years. The Associated Press noted that IBM chose RTP for the $15 million dollar project after “six months of secret inspections of scores of communities.” Indeed, “IBM advance agents even checked on whether it was pleasant to shop in Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill, the three points of the research triangle.” Of the IBM news, a Sarasota paper observed: “Bagging a big new industry for your town can be quite a coup. And it takes a lot more than luck. Figuring in it are such things are Boy Scouts, schools, beaches, hospital beds, universities and race and labor peace…”69 As a state ad promised readers of the Wall Street Journal the same year, the Triangle was “a creative community… with plenty of educated men and women.”70

Boosters had been citing the value of universities and an educated community for nearly a decade, and other communities took notice even before RTP began drawing major projects. Several local newspapers in Oregon suggested imitating the North Carolina example. In 1962 the Bend Bulletin noted that a rival paper had proposed a “research triangle” in Oregon. “It’s an appealing idea, the linking of the two universities in Eugene and Corvallis and the Bureau of Mines laboratory in Albany. It does, indeed, provide a triangle not greatly different from the great research complexes in North Carolina, Massachusetts

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67 O’Mara, Cities of Knowledge, 36-45.
69 J.W. Davis, “Getting New Industry For A City Can Be A Real Coup,” Herald-Tribune (Sarasota), 11 July 1965, 10A.
70 “A Lot of Yesterday’s Science Fiction Isn’t Fiction Anymore,” 24 November 1965, 12.
and California.” Papers on both sides of the political aisle rallied behind the idea, and Don Wilson, a Republican running for the state House, promised to work to develop a “local climate of support” in 1964. “Here in Oregon we are fortunate in having the triangle already in place and already gaining steadily in its national reputation,” Eugene Register-Guard declared. “What we must do now is to advertise this triangle as a triangle.”

The Oregonians seem to have intuited the key to the Research Triangle’s success as an economic development venture: public relations. Oregon already had a triangle; it just needed to advertise it as such. “The ‘triangle’ which includes Eugene-Springfield, Corvallis, and Albany has many attractions to offer to businesses,” candidate Wilson said, “but our assets often need to be explained to those who have not had the privilege of living here.” The Register-Guard concurred, pointing to the importance of reputation and promotion in making the region a magnet for jobs. “Among the really important factors in attracting desirable industry are the presence of good schools, the reputation of a community as a pleasant place to live, and the presence in the community of people who can stimulate and communicate with the newcomers,” the paper said in 1962. “We have it here in the upper Willamette Valley. Let’s promote it.”

Of course, a “triangle” is just a shape. Any three points could be connected on a map by an ambitious politician or local planner. The St. Petersburg Times in 1965 proposed that “the Suncoast will have its own ‘research triangle.’ That includes Mound Park Hospital, with

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72 “Triangle,” Eugene Register-Guard, 23 October 1962, 12A.
73 “‘Research Triangle’ Important,” The Bend Bulletin, 25 August 1962, 4. “Research Triangle” (letter to the editor), Eugene Register-Guard, 18 April 1964, 4A
74 “Research Triangle” (letter to the editor), Eugene Register-Guard, 18 April 1964, 4A.
75 “Triangle,” Eugene Register-Guard, 23 October 1962, 12A.
its outstanding medical staff; Bay Pines Veterans’ Hospital, in a beautiful location with plenty of space for expansion; and the University of South Florida, where a medical school and veterans’ hospital are in preliminary planning stages.” The paper proposed that southwestern Florida capitalize on these institutions to specialize in health, particularly gerontology, and compete vigorously to receive “one of the 32 regional medical centers President Johnson has asked Congress to authorize for combating heart disease, cancer and strokes.”

What is most striking is the way others borrowed the exact language of the Research Triangle. “It’s interesting, how these names catch on,” University of North Carolina president Gordon Gray commented in 1968. “I remember here a couple of years ago the Governor of Maryland, in a speech, a message to the legislature, said, ‘We need a research triangle in Maryland.’ Well, he didn’t even know the origin. I mean, ‘research triangle’ has come to have a meaning because this place has developed it somewhat successfully.”

Talk of triangles, and research parks more broadly, was on the policy agenda for local media, politicians, and developers throughout the United States in the 1960s. From Oregon and Florida to New York’s Hudson Valley, local boosters kept score of which localities were pulling ahead in the competition to burnish their images as desirable places to live and work. “Research parks, created near, or about, a university or research center, are the newest real estate developments,” the Miami News surveyed the national and regional landscape in 1964. This model of development became part of a national discourse about the direction of the economy itself, as communities wooed high-tech industries by packaging

76 “Suncoast Research Triangle,” St. Petersburg Times, 10 January 1965, 76
77 “Suncoast Research Triangle,” St. Petersburg Times, 10 January 1965, 77
78 Interview with Gordon Gray, Eisenhower Administration Project (1968), 175.
the appeal of local cultural institutions, such as universities, museums, and theatre, as a resource to be consumed by employers and employees alike.

Educated people were a sort of resource to be mined or consumed. Surgeon General Luther Terry described the Triangle as “reservoir of experienced consultants in nearby distinguished academic institutions” in 1965. An envious Florida columnist noted the same year that North Carolina “has taken this reservoir of academic talent, created a $2 million foundation to promote and develop it, and established a Research Triangle park to attract industrial research institutions. Thus it is far ahead of states like Florida in readiness to capitalize on the most attractive adjunct to the 20th Century’s technology revolution—research.”

The key, though, was that this “reservoir” was thought to appeal not just to management, but to employees themselves. “Scientists like to live where other scientists live and where they will have the facilities they will need to carry on their work,” an Oregon newspaper noted. A 1962 study of Boeing employees found that the existence of the University of Washington was a factor that made jobs in Seattle more appealing. “The proximity of the university helps the company attract and keep employes [sic] and often improves their usefulness on the job,” the Eugene Register-Guard reported. “Ninety per cent of Boeing supervisors and 80 per cents of its engineers, scientists and office workers said the nearness of the university contributes to their job satisfaction.”

Miami’s Ralph McGill believed that the moral of the story was simple. “There is no ‘which-came-first-the-chicken-or-the-egg?’ argument in this story,” he opined in 1964. “The educational institutions were

82 “Carolina Shows How To Do It,” St. Petersburg Times, 8 January 1965, 6A.
83 “[Suncoast Research Triangle],” St. Petersburg Times, 10 January 1965.
85 “Triangle,” Eugene Register-Guard, 23 October 1962, 12A.
http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=zckUAAAAIBAJ&sjid=4uIDAAAAIBAJ&pg=2936,4432362&dq=research-triangle&hl=en
there. Industry and science came to them. The difference between a community making itself educationally eligible to attract modern industry and one that struggles to get a pants factory primarily is one of education.\(^\text{86}\)

The argument for the Triangle, then, hinged on the universities and the people they employed and taught. Business leaders in New York’s Hudson Valley commissioned a report by consultants at Arthur D. Little in 1967, which noted that the upstate region lacked the kind of educational programs that would attract both business and workers. “An increasing number [of women] are taking advantage of extension programs,” the report said. Women who had foregone careers or advanced education to raise families increasingly looked to take advantage of nearby universities, which were more accessible in the Research Triangle than in the Hudson Valley, where few schools offered master’s degrees programs. “The availability of facilities to meet the educational desires of wives is often an important consideration in the choice of jobs by scientists,” the Little researchers concluded.\(^\text{87}\)

It would be too much to say that the Research Triangle succeeded entirely due to its self-promotion as an enclave for the privileged and well-educated—a sort of stimulating, albeit homogeneous, community. Colleges such as UNC and Duke provided a supply of young, educated labor that high-tech companies could employ, and the lower costs of land and labor were as attractive to firms that came to the Triangle as they were in other burgeoning Sunbelt metropolises of the period, such as Charlotte or Phoenix. However, the idea that scientific workers would like to cluster together was as important as the notion that laboratories and industrial facilities would benefit from agglomeration economies by gathering in one area. “Luring companies with pirouettes and a symphony” was how the \textit{Christian Science Monitor} described the Triangle’s sales-pitch in the early 1980s, when Sara


\(^{87}\text{“University Complex,” }71.\)
Hodgkins was North Carolina’s secretary of cultural resources—occupying perhaps the only such post in the nation at the time. “You can’t draw good people from New York or Boston without good cultural resources,” local officials said. Universities were key to such strategies; as the geographer Blake Gumprecht has observed, college towns are unique in “their youthful and comparatively diverse populations, their highly educated workforces, their relative absence of heavy industry, and the presence in them of cultural opportunities more typical of large cities.”

North Carolinians helped pioneer the sale of such traits for the purpose of regional economic development, seeking to draw both private and public investment to the “academic archipelago” that existed throughout the twenty-five mile radius around RTP. The market value of these ambient qualities, the by-products of status and educational attainment, can be determined by looking at the material benefits the region accrued in terms of new employment and infrastructure. North Carolina may have remained “the land of the aborigine” in the eyes of Northerners like the AATCC’s George Paine, but the Triangle succeeded in winning both corporate and federal investment in advanced industries by crafting an image as a desirable place for educated professionals to live—a middle-class landscape that combined the cultural amenities of a Northern metropolis with the easy living of the suburban Sunbelt.

That image was undoubtedly more myth than reality in 1960, but the cluster of colleges and universities in Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill provided an attractive asset for relocating firms—if not entirely for the direct, economic utility of nearby research facilities so much as the promise of a cultural life that purportedly came along with higher education and the highly educated. In this way, the founders and sellers of the Triangle not only

anticipated the cottage industry of urban “branding” that Florida, Markusen, and others have theorized in the last twenty years, but also the “big sort” that writer Bill Bishop identified in his 2008 book on the ways Americans were increasingly “clustering” with others who shared their worldview, interests, and class status. The Triangle’s pitch was based on the idea that smart, creative—or at least privileged—people wanted to live near each other. As the Christian Science Monitor said in an adoring 1982 profile of the Triangle, “Chemists and engineers know other chemists and engineers down the block.”

To many observers, the RTP strategy was a successful one. By 1970 the New York Times noted approvingly that RTP “now has 7,000 employees, almost all white, whose annual payroll is about $70-million,” and incomes in the three counties had increased by 28%, or $1000, during the 1960s. Even more telling is another statistic cited by the Times: “In Raleigh and Wake [county], unlike metropolitan areas in other parts of the country, white immigration has surpassed the growth of the black population.” The successful importation of chemists from Michigan and Connecticut had managed to offset the number of African Americans in the area—apparently a positive achievement.

In subsequent decades, major corporations like pharmaceutical giants Burroughs Wellcome (1972) and Glaxo (1982) followed, and 170 companies call the park home today, not counting the many other tech-oriented firms in greater Raleigh-Durham. The number of white-collar, professional jobs in counties such as Durham and Wake (Raleigh) increased five- and six-fold, respectively, from 1950 and 1990, dramatically outpacing the growth of

manufacturing or retail jobs, and similar changes could be noted across the eight-county
Raleigh-Durham combined statistical area (CSA) during the same period. Income growth
was greatest, though, in the core Triangle counties of Durham, Wake, and Orange (Chapel
Hill), and was especially concentrated in affluent Wake towns such as Cary (dismissed as a
“Containment Area for Relocated Yankees” by some locals).

Since the birth of RTP in the 1950s, educated professionals have “sorted”
themselves into metropolitan communities of the greater Triangle, even as the rest of North
Carolina continues to experience low wages, low upward mobility, and an incidence of infant
mortality surpassed only by Louisiana, Alabama, Guam, Mississippi, and the District of
Columbia. The benefits of postindustrial prosperity, it seems, have not spread far beyond
the high-tech centers of Raleigh-Durham or the finance capital of Charlotte. Richard Florida
himself has worried that “creative class” cities tend to exhibit widening inequality, which he
attributes to the ability of high-income professionals to pay others to perform personal tasks
and chores for them, spawning a growing low-wage service sector. Planning scholars Mary
Donegan and Nichola Lowe have tested Florida’s hypothesis and found a modest correlation
between inequality and how “creative” a city is, although they assign a significant portion of
the blame for growing inequality to declining unionization and real minimum wages.

In any case, whether RTP has spilled over into greater prosperity or opportunity for all remains
unclear—but in affluent cities such as Raleigh and Cary, at least, its aim to “bring in more
Ph.D’s than we’ve ever heard of here” has achieved unmistakable success.

93 “Cities with the Most College-Educated Residents,” NYT, 30 May 2012,
http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/05/31/us/education-in-metro-areas.html?_r=0; Catherine
Rampell, “Memo to Would-be Members of the 1%: Move to the Northeast or Mid-Atlantic,” New York
Times, 10 May 2012, http://www.cnbc.com/id/47366872; “Infant Mortality Rate (Deaths per 1,000 Live
death-rate/.

94 Mary Donegan and Nichola Lowe, “Inequality in the Creative City: Is There Still a Place for ‘Old-