



KEN KOLB, PHD

Senior Social Scientist

Ken Kolb is a Senior Social Scientist at The Water Institute. An expert on community development and pragmatic solutions to persistent social problems, he brings 20 years of experience conducting community-based research. His work focuses on analyzing social problems to propose practical solutions that leverage readily available resources.

ORGANIZATION ROLE

Senior Social Scientist

PROJECT ROLE / FOCUS AREAS

Community-based
vulnerability research

Social policy planning

Qualitative research &
integration

Urban data analysis

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Sociology,
University of North
Carolina at Chapel Hill,
2008

MA, Sociology,
University of North
Carolina at Chapel Hill,
2000

BA, Sociology, Bates
College, 1998

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

American Sociological
Association

Scholars Strategy
Network

Southern Sociological
Society

A distinguished author, Ken has written two award-winning books and numerous peer-reviewed articles that translate complex data into clear, actionable insights for stakeholders and the broader public. His most recent book, *Retail Inequality: Reframing the Food Desert Debate*, was a finalist for a James Beard Award in the Food Issues and Advocacy category.

Born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, Ken's research interests are deeply shaped by place. He has recently published several articles on occupations supporting the shipping industry along the Lower Mississippi River. His evolving focus on integrating evidence-based research into practice to improve outcomes for residents along the Gulf Coast and beyond led him to join The Water Institute after leaving his tenured position as a professor and chair of the sociology department at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2026-Present: Senior Social Scientist, The Water Institute

2020-2025: Chair, Sociology Department, Furman University

2021-2025: Professor, Sociology Department, Furman University

2014-2021: Associate Professor, Sociology Department, Furman University

2008-2014: Assistant Professor, Sociology Department, Furman University



SELECTED PROJECTS

Displacement Risk and Community Asset Analysis *Northside Development Group. (Ongoing).* Co-Principal Investigator. Analyzed the demographic and economic challenges facing housing affordability in historically Black neighborhood. Conducted parcel-level analysis of community-owned versus corporate-owned units to measure neighborhoods' cultural resiliency.

Placing Furman: Racially Restrictive Covenants in Greenville, South Carolina. *Furman University Academic Affairs. (2024–2025).* Organized and executed an institutional history analysis project after personally discovering over 1000 exclusionary housing deeds executed by the former chair of the board of trustees. Informed and collaborated with the President, Provost, and Dean to release information in a thoughtful and strategic manner.

Gentrification Heat Map and Demographic Analysis. *Greenville County Habitat for Humanity, Urban League of the Upstate, S. Economic Development Administration. (2025).* Co-Principal Investigator. Managed an interdisciplinary team with expertise in GIS and data visualizations to conduct a parcel-level analysis of neighborhood property value increases relative to the county over time. Produced a gentrification “heat map” with a methodology deployed for first time in South Carolina.

Mapping Anticipated Market Pressure in Farming Areas. *Sub-awardee of USDA grant. (2023–2025).* Co-Principal Investigator. Identified and secured a grant in collaboration with a larger regional research organization to map rural gentrification trends across South Carolina. Identified appropriate statistical methodology for the project and recruited an outside technical expert to train team members to use it.

Gentrification and Displacement in the City of Greenville, South Carolina. *In collaboration with Gannett News, Greenville News. (2024–2025).* Co-Principal Investigator. Led a team of Geographic Information Systems specialists to gather, analyze, and visualize economic and demographic data for a project documenting racial displacement and gentrification:

CommunityGVL.org. Coordinated national award-winning media coverage of the report, extensively referenced in a six-part investigative series, an 8-minute public radio feature, and a 3-minute local television segment.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

1. Kolb, K. H. (2025). Tugs and Lines: Working from Home, on the River. *64 Parishes*. 7(4), 44-52.
2. Kolb, K. H. (2023). Against the Current: River Pilots in an Age of Automation. *64 Parishes*, 5(4), 42-50.
3. Kolb, K.H. (2023). Professions as Closed-Networks: Mississippi River Pilots and Mead's Conceptualization of Mind. In Chen, S.L.S. (ed.) *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, 57, 117-128.
4. Kolb, K. H. (2023) [Review of *How the Other Half Eats: The Untold Story of Food and Inequality in America*, by Priya Fielding-Singh]. *Contemporary Sociology*, 52(2), 141-143.
5. Kolb, K. H. (2022). *Retail Inequality: Reframing the Food Desert Debate*. University of California Press.
6. Kolb, K. H. (2022). [Review of *The Problem with Feeding Cities: The Social Transformation of Infrastructure, Abundance, and Inequality in America*, by Andrew Deener]. *American Journal of Sociology* 128(1), 289-291.
7. Kolb, K. H. (2020). Feeding the Cultural Omnivores. [Review of *Masters of Craft: Old Jobs in the New Urban Economy*, by Richard E. Ocejo]. *Contexts* 19(1):62-63.
8. Kolb, Kenneth H. (2017). “Eviction and the Reproduction of Inequality” Review of *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, by Mathew Desmond. *Symbolic Interaction* 40(1), 122-124
9. Kolb, K. H., Kyle, C. L., & Alexa J. S. (2015). Choosing Not to Cheat: A Framework to Assess Students' Rationales for Abiding by Academic Integrity Policies. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 9(1), 9.
10. Kolb, K. H. (2014). *Moral Wages: The Emotional Dilemmas of Victim Advocacy and Counseling*. University of California Press.
11. Kolb, K. H. (2014). “Emotional Subcultures.” *Sociology Compass*, 8(11): 1229-1441.
12. Victim-advocates' Perceptions of Legal-work. *Violence Against Women*, 17(12), 1559-1575.
13. Kolb, K. H. (2011). Sympathy Work: Identity and Emotion Management among Victim-advocates and Counselors. *Qualitative Sociology*, 34(1), 101-119.
14. Kolb, K. (2014). Status shield. In G. Ritzer (Ed.). *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology Online*.