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# ◆ Regional Outlook ◆

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FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

FIRST QUARTER 2000

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## FDIC ATLANTA REGION



## DIVISION OF INSURANCE

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## In Focus This Quarter

◆ *Recent Trends Raise Concerns about the Future of Business Credit Quality*—Commercial and industrial (C&I) lending is one of the largest and fastest-growing lending lines at insured institutions. Recent growth in C&I lending can be attributed to a strong U.S. economy, increased industrial merger activity, and a willingness of lenders to extend credit. While C&I credit quality remains relatively strong, signs of deterioration have recently begun appearing in C&I portfolios and in corporate bond defaults. These signs of weakness in commercial credit quality raise concerns because they are appearing during a period of economic strength. Business credit quality could deteriorate further in the event of an economic slowdown, higher interest rates, or a loosening of underwriting practices. *See page 3.*

*By Arlinda Sothoron, Alan Deaton*

◆ *Local Industries in the Global Economy*—The contribution of international trade to overall U.S. economic activity has been increasing for a number of years. Although the United States trades with many nations, most activity is concentrated in a few markets—Canada, Japan, and Mexico. Across a collection of industries, there is, however, considerable variation in both the level of exposure to export markets and the intensity of import competition. A number of industries are highly exposed to international markets, suggesting that economic conditions abroad are particularly important in any assessment of future revenue growth or profitability. *See page 11.*

*By Paul C. Bishop*

## Regional Perspectives

◆ *The Atlanta Region's Economy Remains Strong as the Nation's Expansion Approaches Record Length*—However, development of new industries can result in new challenges for local economies. These challenges exist side by side with perennial threats to areas dependent on more traditional types of industry, such as coal mining and apparel manufacturing. *See page 18.*

◆ *Several Factors, Such as Supply and Demand Forces, May Have Coalesced to Foster a Suitable Environment for De Novo Banking Activity*—Population increases may boost market demand for financial services, and supply-side forces, such as displaced management and available capital, work together to encourage the chartering of new banks. *See page 21.*

◆ *De Novo Banks Traditionally Experience Higher Levels of Risk and Are More Susceptible to Economic Downturns than Established Banks*—The number of de novo banks in the Atlanta Region has risen substantially since 1993. It is likely that the crucial period in the life cycle of a de novo bank, as it matures into an established bank, extends beyond the first three years of operation. Recognizing this vulnerability, management of new banks should be aware of the greater risks that are innate in the early life cycle of a de novo bank and how changes in the economy could affect these institutions. *See page 23.*

*By the Atlanta Region Staff*

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## *Recent Trends Raise Concerns about the Future of Business Credit Quality*

- **C&I loan portfolios have been growing rapidly during this economic expansion.**
- **Indicators of weakening corporate credit quality have begun to appear, including higher C&I loan losses and rising corporate bond defaults.**
- **The future of business credit quality will depend on the economy and on underwriting practices.**

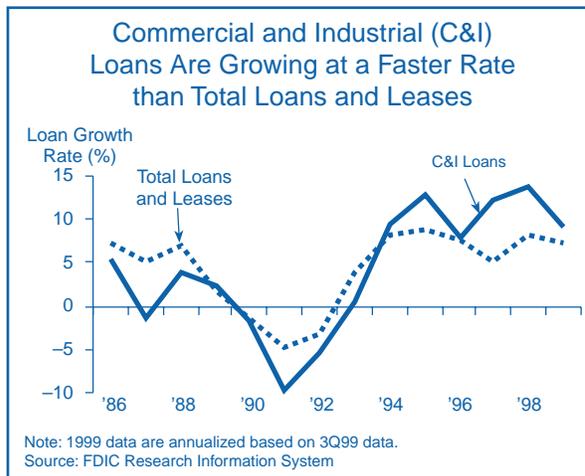
Commercial and industrial (C&I) lending is one of the largest and fastest-growing segments of lending at insured institutions. As of the third quarter of 1999, C&I loans comprised 24 percent of total loans and leases held by FDIC-insured institutions, up from 21 percent at the end of 1995. C&I loan portfolios have grown primarily because of strong loan demand driven by a long economic expansion during which the indebtedness on corporate balance sheets has expanded rapidly. Even as the economic expansion continues, C&I loan charge-offs have begun to trend upward, albeit from historically low levels. By some measures, banks and the financial markets appear to be assuming increased levels of risk that could lead to greater C&I loan losses when the economy eventually weakens.

High rates of growth in commercial lending and weakening indicators of C&I credit quality raise concerns about the future of credit quality at insured institutions. This article examines the factors that have contributed to high C&I loan growth rates and discusses the drivers that will determine the direction of C&I credit quality in the future. While loan performance at insured institutions is relatively good at the present time, signs of deterioration and stress have begun to appear despite the continued strength of the domestic economy. The future of C&I credit quality will ultimately be determined by trends in underwriting and corporate debt levels, along with the performance of the U.S. economy.

### ***C&I Loan Growth Has Accelerated***

C&I loans held by FDIC-insured banks and thrifts grew by almost 9 percent during the 12 months ending in September 1999, down somewhat from a 13.4 percent rate of growth in 1998 (see Chart 1). By contrast, total

**CHART 1**



loans and leases at insured institutions grew by only 7 percent in the 12 months ending in September 1999. C&I loans accounted for approximately 29 percent of all net new loans booked during the 12 months ending in September 1999, while unfunded C&I loan commitments grew by approximately 17 percent to \$1.6 trillion. Syndicated lending played a major role in C&I loan growth during the 1990s. As intense competition and a narrowing of financial institutions' net interest margins have encouraged lenders to seek additional sources of revenue, larger institutions have become increasingly active as loan syndicators and as purchasers of syndicated credits. Syndicated loan volume reached its peak in 1997, when originations totaled some \$1.1 trillion (see Chart 2, next page).<sup>1</sup> After falling off in 1998, originations of syndicated loans rose by 17 percent in 1999 to just over \$1.0 trillion. Leveraged loans, in which the borrower's debt-to-equity ratio is significantly higher than the industry average, served as a catalyst for syndicated lending growth in 1999, accounting for 32 percent of total syndicated loan originations. Leveraged lending is very attractive to lending institutions because of the generous fee income associated with leveraged originations. Leveraged loan originations grew to \$320 billion in 1999, partly because of the continued rapid pace of corporate mergers in 1999.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *LPC Gold Sheets*, Vol. XIV, No. 1. Loan Pricing Corporation. January 10, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> According to Houlihan Lokey's *Mergerstat*, total M&A activity set a new record of \$1.4 trillion in merger deal value in 1999.

Most of the C&I loan growth among insured institutions since 1997 has been concentrated in loans to domestic borrowers. C&I loans held in foreign offices declined following the Asian economic crisis and the Russian government bond default in 1997 and 1998, respectively, while domestic C&I lending was growing at double-digit rates. During the 12 months ending in September 1999, C&I loans held in domestic offices grew 12.2 percent while C&I loans held in foreign offices declined by almost 6 percent.

### ***Is This Rapid Loan Growth a Cause for Concern?***

The effect of rapid loan growth on subsequent credit quality has been the subject of a number of articles. A recent study by the *Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City* found that high rates of loan growth in the early 1980s and early 1990s appeared to be positively correlated with future higher loss rates.<sup>3</sup> The study also noted, however, that relatively high loan growth rates in the late 1980s did not result in sharply higher loss rates. Another study by the *Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation* found that banks that failed during the banking crisis of the 1980s were generally more likely to have grown their loan portfolios aggressively than banks that did not fail.<sup>4</sup> But it remains to be seen whether the high C&I loan growth rates of today will necessarily contribute to higher losses for insured institutions in the future. The future course of industry loan losses depends on many factors, including the condition of the economy, the interest rate environment, and underwriting standards used in originating C&I credits.

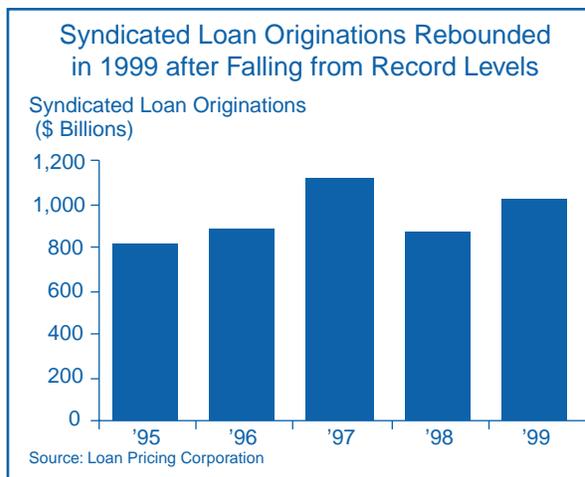
### ***The Condition of the Economy Is an Important Driver of C&I Loan Growth***

Recent economic conditions have been particularly conducive to rapid growth in domestic C&I lending. Business investment has expanded at double-digit annual rates as firms have invested in new technologies to raise productivity and keep costs down. These productivity gains have been instrumental in allowing the

<sup>3</sup> William R. Keeton. "Does Faster Loan Growth Lead to Higher Loan Losses?" *Economic Review*. Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. Second quarter 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Division of Research and Statistics. *History of the Eighties: Lessons for the Future*. Vol. 1, *An Examination of the Banking Crises of the 1980s and Early 1990s*. 1997. <http://www.fdic.gov/bank/historical/history/contents.html>.

CHART 2



economy to grow at a relatively rapid pace with low inflation. Strong growth in real wages has helped boost the consumer confidence index to an all-time high of 144 in January 2000. Robust consumer demand for goods and services has kept business profits growing, further spurring business borrowing to finance inventories, new construction, and fixed assets such as computer networks. Amid all of these favorable trends, C&I loan charge-off rates have remained at record lows of less than 0.5 percent since 1994. Recently, however, despite a continuation of generally favorable conditions in the economy and the financial markets, signs of credit quality deterioration have begun to appear in C&I loan portfolios.

### ***Evidence from Financial Institutions Points to a Weakening in Business Credit Quality***

Despite strong business conditions and generally good asset quality, signs of deterioration in C&I credit quality have begun to appear in bank portfolios. While problem C&I loan levels remain low by historical standards, net C&I loan charge-offs during the 12 months ending in September 1999 were 63 percent higher than during the previous 12-month period. The net C&I loan charge-off rate rose in the 12 months ending in September 1999 to 0.5 percent, up from 0.3 percent one year earlier. Similarly, noncurrent C&I loans as of September 1999 rose to \$11.2 billion, or 1.2 percent of total C&I loans.<sup>5</sup> In dollar terms, this level of noncurrent loans is 30 percent higher than one year earlier.

<sup>5</sup> Noncurrent C&I loans include C&I loans past-due over 90 days and all C&I loans in nonaccrual status.

Despite these increases in C&I charge-offs and noncurrent C&I loans, the current industry ratios for these measures remain well below the 1.9 percent and 4.5 percent ratios reported during the recession in 1991 for net C&I charge-offs and noncurrent C&I loans, respectively.

### **Interagency Loan Review Reveals Increases in Problem Credits from Previously Low Levels**

The results of the **1999 Shared National Credit (SNC)** review provide another indication of slipping credit quality at large commercial banks.<sup>6</sup> According to the **Federal Reserve Board of Governors**, adversely classified syndicated loans rose to \$37.4 billion in the 1999 review, a level approximately 70 percent higher than that reported in 1998. This figure represents 2 percent of the \$1.8 trillion in drawn and undrawn loan commitments reviewed in 1999. By contrast, adversely classified assets identified in the 1998 SNC review totaled only \$22 billion, or 1.3 percent of loans reviewed in 1998.<sup>7</sup>

While the level of adversely classified syndicated loans remains low, 14 percent of the loans adversely classified during the 1999 review were loans made to new borrowers since the 1998 SNC review. In reference to this finding, **Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC)** First Senior Deputy Comptroller and Chief Counsel Julie Williams has noted that “Banks are booking new loans that are weak at their inception.”<sup>8</sup> The high rate of adversely classified new loans could be attributable to the continued effects of loan originations made toward the end of a period of loosened underwriting standards in 1997 and early 1998. Alternatively, it could indicate a higher-risk credit mix in current C&I loan portfolios.

Signs of corporate stress that may weaken credit quality at insured institutions are also reflected in recent **Banc of America Securities** analysis of publicly available bank loan amendments.<sup>9</sup> This study shows a significant increase in the number of loan amendments

<sup>6</sup> The annual interagency process reviews commercial loans over \$20 million that are shared by three or more participants.

<sup>7</sup> Federal Reserve Board Press Release. November 10, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> “OCC’s Williams Warns of Credit Risk in the Banking System; Calls for Bankers to Scrutinize Loan Portfolios More Closely.” OCC Press Release. October 5, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> “Leveraged Loans: The Plot Thickens.” Banc of America Securities Syndicated Finance Research. November 15, 1999. This loan amendment analysis was completed using only publicly available information from Loan Pricing Corporation and Banc of America Securities LLC.

generated because of covenant relief requests, from 22 percent of all loan amendments during the last six months of 1998 to 45 percent during the first ten months of 1999.

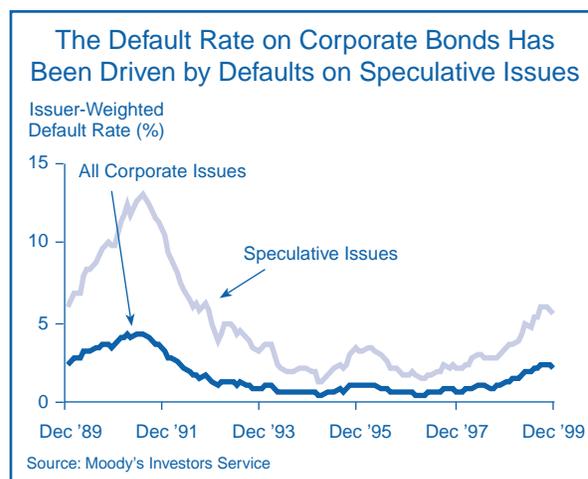
### **Corporate Bond Defaults Soared in 1999**

Trends in corporate bond defaults also indicate increasing levels of stress in the corporate sector. During 1999, 147 issuers defaulted on \$44.6 billion in long-term debt. Default rates as a percentage of volumes outstanding (or dollar default rates) have trended upward each year since 1996, reaching 2.2 percent for all corporate issues at year-end 1999. Much of the increase can be attributed to a rising dollar default rate for speculative-grade issues, which peaked in November 1999 at 8.2 percent. Measured as a percentage of all issuers, the default rate for speculative-grade issues rose to a post-1991 high of 6 percent in September 1999 (see Chart 3). According to **Moody’s**, year-end 1999 default rates improved marginally but are expected to remain high through mid-2000.<sup>10</sup> In addition, domestic speculative-grade issuers reported twice as many issuer downgrades as upgrades during the fourth quarter of 1999, although the dollar volume of upgrades exceeded the dollar volume of downgrades by 55 percent.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> “Corporate Bond Default Rates Highest Since 1991.” Moody’s Investors Service. October 13, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> “Moody’s Default Rate Pendulum.” Moody’s October 1999 Commentary. Moody’s Investors Service. October 18, 1999.

**CHART 3**



### Why Are C&I Loan Losses Increasing Amid Strong Economic Growth?

Several factors have contributed to the current signs of deterioration of C&I credit quality in an environment of favorable business conditions. These factors include global competition and deflationary pressures, an increase in corporate debt levels, loosened underwriting standards, and a greater appetite for risk.

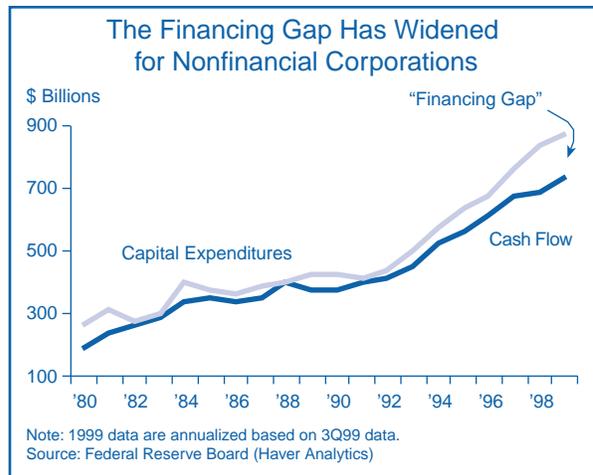
**Global competition and deflationary pressures have squeezed revenues.** An era of low inflation and intense global price competition has contributed to low or negative revenue growth in a number of domestic industry sectors, particularly commodities and manufacturing.<sup>12</sup> The result has been an increase in loan losses and corporate bond defaults in these sectors. *Moody's* noted that the industrial sector, weakened by low commodity prices, accounted for 64 percent of all defaults in 1999, with the oil and gas, steel, and shipping industries being especially hard-hit.<sup>13</sup> For example, *Standard & Poor's (S&P)* reports that third-quarter 1999 earnings for the iron and steel sector declined 80 percent from one year earlier after five consecutive quarters of negative year-over-year earnings growth. Initially, commodity price declines and the international economic turmoil in 1997 and 1998 resulted in slowed foreign C&I lending and increased net losses of C&I loans held in foreign offices. These losses accounted for the majority of net C&I loan losses in 1997 and 1998. However, this adverse trend reversed itself in 1999, when C&I loans held in domestic offices accounted for the majority of losses.

**Corporations are increasingly reliant on debt markets.** Increasing levels of debt on corporate balance sheets have helped to foster C&I loan growth. The growth in corporate debt is partially a result of actions taken by firms to improve operating efficiency, including increasing merger and acquisition (M&A) activity and rising spending on fixed investments. Capital expenditures on fixed investments by businesses have increased at a steady rate since the 1990–91 recession, as evidenced by Chart 4. Cash flow has also been increasing, but at a slower rate, resulting in a growing “financing gap” that reached an annualized level of

<sup>12</sup> See also Richard A. Brown and Alan Deaton. “Falling Prices in Commodities and Manufacturing Pose Continuing Risks to Credit Quality.” *Regional Outlook*, third quarter 1999. <http://www.fdic.gov/bank/analytical/regional/ro19993q/na/t3q1999.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> “Historical Default Rates of Corporate Bond Issuers, 1920–1999.” *Moody's Investors Service*, January 2000.

CHART 4



\$142 billion in the third quarter of 1999. Where cash flow has not been available to finance investment, firms have turned primarily to debt financing as opposed to equity financing. Net new corporate equity issues by nonfarm nonfinancial corporations have been negative in each year since 1993, while net new corporate bond issuance has increased from \$75 billion in 1993 to \$219 billion in 1998.

**Loosened underwriting standards in 1997 and early 1998 are contributing to current losses.** Signs of stress in C&I loan portfolios can be partially attributed to loosened underwriting standards in 1997 and early 1998. During 1997 and early 1998, loan underwriting standards loosened, accompanied by reduced spreads and pricing. In May 1998, the *Federal Reserve Board Senior Loan Officer Opinion Survey on Bank Lending Practices* reported that domestic banks were “generally eager to make loans to businesses” and that during early 1998 “a large percentage cut their spreads on such loans.” *Moody's* describes the second half of the 1990s as a “mini credit cycle.” The cycle began in 1995, when the strong economy, accompanied by falling interest rates and low loan losses and default rates, encouraged investor demand for high-yield bonds and loans.<sup>14</sup>

A record number of first-time speculative-grade deals were also brought to market during 1997 and early 1998. The increase in the volume of issuance was itself enough to push the default rate lower, which in turn may have fueled investor demand for additional high-risk bonds. However, the Asian crisis during 1997 and the Russian debt default during the second half of 1998

<sup>14</sup> “Default Rate Pendulum.” October 18, 1999.

caused new issuance of speculative-grade bonds to slow significantly while defaults rose sharply, to a rate of 6 percent by issuer in September 1999. While speculative-grade bond issuance declined, banks stepped in to fill the void by raising originations of highly leveraged loans between second-quarter 1998 and fourth-quarter 1999.<sup>15</sup>

**Financial markets have evidenced greater risk appetite.** While the ratio of speculative-grade bond issues to total corporate bond issues has remained fairly stable at approximately 40 percent during the past decade, the composition of borrowings has shifted substantially. *Moody's* reports a shift in the distribution of bond issue ratings within the speculative-grade category toward the lower end of the ratings scale (see Chart 5).<sup>16</sup> Evidence of this shift is demonstrated by the fact that bonds rated B3 or lower currently comprise approximately 35 percent of all speculative-grade issues, a record high and up from 24 percent in 1995.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, almost 50 percent of the issuers that defaulted during the year ending September 1999 were rated for three years or less.<sup>18</sup> This change in the composition of ratings has contributed to the current increase in speculative-grade defaults and could affect the future volatility and liquidity of the market. The current high volume of corporate bond defaults reflects the looser standards in 1997 and 1998 for corporate debt issued by low-rated first-time issuers, who accounted for 40 percent of rated

bond defaults in 1999.<sup>19</sup> This relationship is analogous to the current increase in net C&I charge-offs partially attributable to weakened underwriting standards in 1997 and early 1998.

***The Increase in Leveraged Lending Could Result in a Riskier Mix in C&I Loan Portfolios***

Leveraged lending comprises an important part of the syndicated lending market and generates considerable fee income for financial institutions. Leveraged loans have grown from 12 percent of total syndicated loan originations in 1995 to 32 percent in 1999 (see Chart 6, next page). Leveraged syndicated loan originations grew 19 percent to \$320 billion in 1999, as investors were seeking higher risk-adjusted returns and lenders were seeking higher fees. *Paine Webber* analysts estimate that leveraged lending accounts for over 80 percent of syndicated loan fees and profits earned by loan underwriters.<sup>20</sup> Highly leveraged lending increased to a new record of \$190 billion in 1999.<sup>21</sup> This growth in loan originations reflects the current high corporate demand for loans, and by definition these loans are being made to borrowers with higher-than-normal levels of financial leverage and risk. In return for their higher risk profile, leveraged borrowers must compensate financial institutions through higher pricing and higher fees.

<sup>15</sup> *LPC Gold Sheets*. January 10, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> *Moody's January 2000 Commentary*. January 18, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> "Refunding Risk for Speculative Grade Borrowers." *Moody's Special Comment*. *Moody's Investors Service*. December 15, 1999.

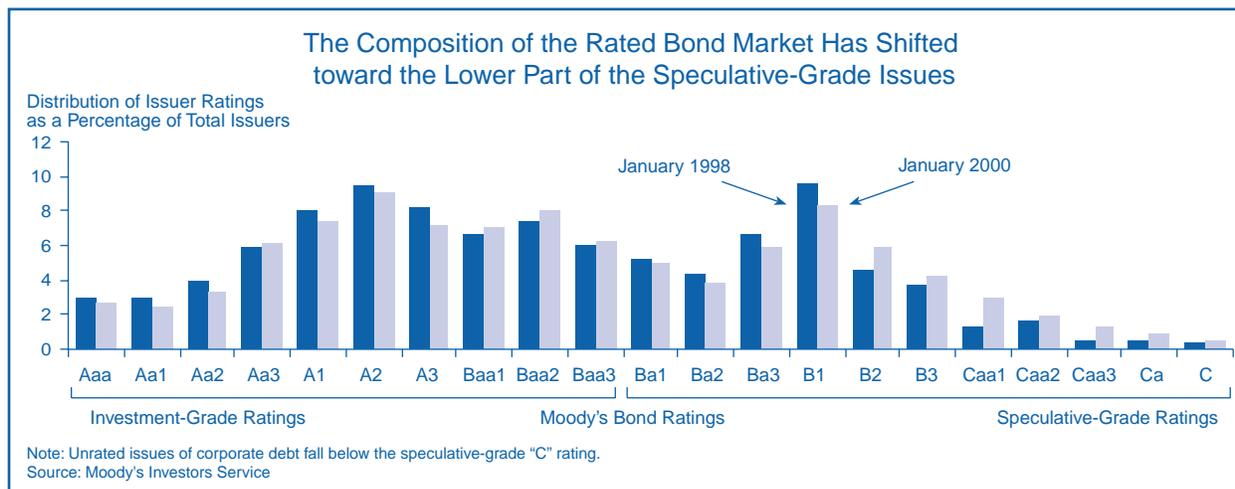
<sup>18</sup> "Default Rate Pendulum." October 18, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> *Moody's January 2000 Commentary*. January 18, 2000.

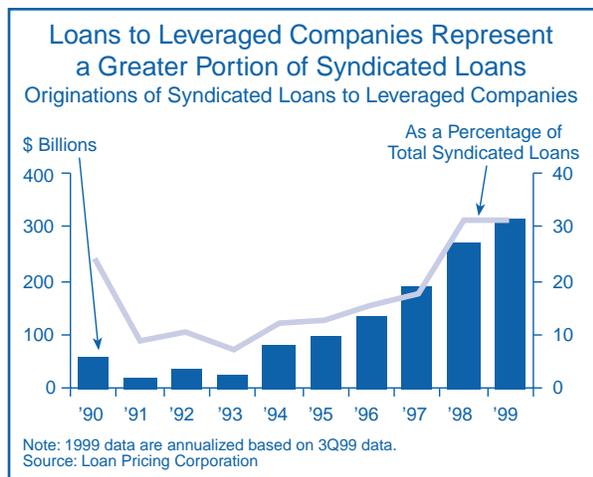
<sup>20</sup> "The Biggest Secret of Wall Street." *Paine Webber Equity Research*. May 14, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> *Loan Pricing Corporation* defines highly leveraged loans as those for which pricing exceeds 250 basis points over LIBOR and generally involves sub-investment-grade credits.

**CHART 5**



**CHART 6**



Leveraged lending volumes have recently been partially driven by M&A lending, which comprised over 30 percent of the total syndicated loan market in 1999. M&A activity approached \$1.4 trillion in total volume during 1999, increasing the demand for capital and driving corporations to the loan market.<sup>22</sup> Approximately 22 percent of leveraged loans originated in 1998 were to the media and telecommunications industries, which have experienced significant levels of M&A activity.<sup>23</sup> Leveraged buyout activity contributed an additional 15 percent to leveraged lending volumes, surpassing 1998 levels in quantity.

**Where Is Business Credit Quality Heading?**

The future direction of business credit quality will be influenced by several factors, including the condition of the economy, growth in the indebtedness of corporate borrowers, exposure to vulnerable industry sectors, the interest rate environment, the development of emerging markets, and underwriting standards.

**Economic growth will remain an important determinant of credit quality.** Should economic growth slow and corporate profits decline, the demand for C&I loans is likely to fall, and problem asset levels are likely to rise. A recent S&P survey of global credit conditions noted that excessive credit, attributable to unsustainable corporate indebtedness and falling asset values, has weakened the financial systems of 20 nations. As for credit expansion in the United States, the survey noted

that the ratio of private sector loans outstanding to gross domestic product rose from 101 percent in 1995 to 142 percent in 1999. S&P also noted evidence that banks' C&I loan portfolios may be relying too heavily on loan repayments based on projections that are realizable only if the current economic expansion continues. S&P estimates that 5 to 15 percent of bank loans could default should the United States experience a significant downturn in the stock market leading to a hard landing for the domestic economy.<sup>24</sup>

**Continued growth in corporate indebtedness could contribute to increased losses and defaults.** The growth rate of corporate debt has surpassed the growth rate of the economy in each year since 1994. A widening financing gap and increasing debt levels could pose problems if there are adverse changes in the interest rate environment or if corporate revenue growth slows. Rising rates will increase the costs of servicing debt, while a slowdown in revenue growth would reduce the cash flow available to service outstanding debt. Under such a scenario, business bankruptcies and failures are likely to rise, causing increased loan losses and bond defaults.

**Lending to some industries involves high-risk exposures.** Despite the strength of the U.S. economy, some domestic industries are continuing to experience stress. Exposures to weakened industry sectors, such as health care and oil and gas, could negatively affect C&I credit quality at insured institutions. One way to evaluate the relative riskiness of firms operating in a given industry is through *KMV Corporation's*® Expected Default Frequency™ (EDF™) analysis. *KMV Corporation*® has developed a proprietary method of measuring the degree of credit risk inherent in corporate borrowers by calculating an EDF™ score to estimate the probability that a firm will default on its obligations within one year.<sup>25</sup> Chart 7 diagrams syndicated loan exposures along with December 1999 EDF™ scores and the direction of change since December 1998. This chart illustrates one measure of the risk associated with the 10 industry sectors having the highest expected default

<sup>22</sup> Houlihan Lokey's *Mergerstat*. [www.mergerstat.com](http://www.mergerstat.com).

<sup>23</sup> "The Biggest Secret of Wall Street." May 14, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> "Global Financial System Stress: The Weak, the Vulnerable, and Those Limping Toward Recovery." Standard & Poor's. December 17, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> *KMV's*® proprietary calculation for EDF™ is based on (1) the current market value of the firm, (2) the structure of the firm's current obligations, and (3) the vulnerability of the firm to large changes in market value. Multiplying industry originations by median industry EDF™ scores provides an estimate of expected default volumes. This figure provides a more meaningful measure of aggregate lending risk exposure than pure origination volumes alone and can be used to rank industry exposures.

volume based on the volume of 1999 syndicated loan originations. In 1999, loans originated to mortgage lenders (including subprime lenders), communications firms, oil and gas firms, health care firms, and retail trade organizations generated the five highest expected default volumes among 50 broad industry sector classifications.

### The interest rate environment and refunding risk affect the demand for and availability of credit.

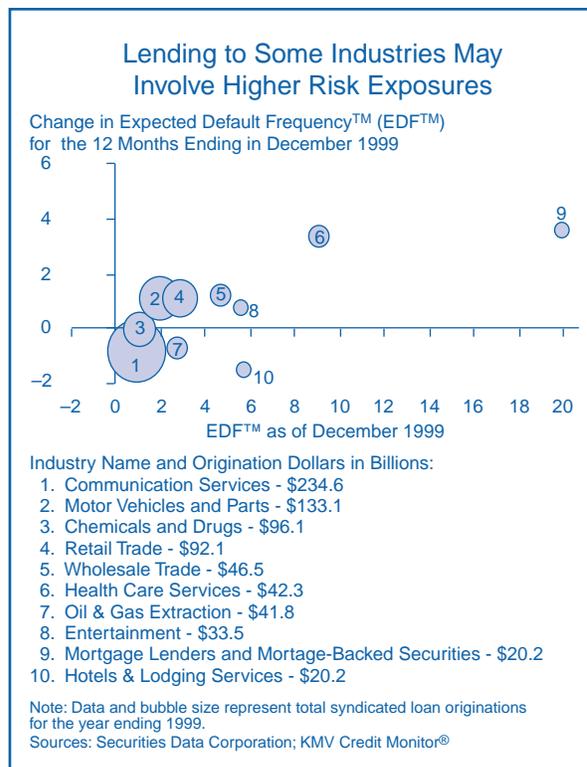
Declining interest yield spreads from 1996 to 1998 benefited borrowers. As spreads declined, the rate of syndicated loan growth increased and refinancing activity was high. Increases in spreads since 1998, along with higher interest rates, have caused refinancing activity to slow significantly. However, rising rates have not significantly affected origination volumes, as new debt continues to come into the market. Rising interest rates and refunding risk particularly affect speculative-grade borrowers. Higher interest rates would raise businesses' cost of borrowing, potentially decreasing the demand for business credit and impairing borrowers' ability to repay their debts. Once a corporation's debt service ability is compromised, access to new capital markets can become limited. A sharp rise in interest rates would particularly impair the ability of highly leveraged firms to repay floating-rate debt obligations.

Refunding risk continues to be a concern for speculative-grade borrowers as they face potential problems refinancing the maturing portions of long-term debt. The current tightening of terms in the C&I market and increasing default rates heighten refunding risk to borrowers. Rising interest rates or limited access to secondary markets could also increase refunding risk. This situation could continue to be problematic, since a rising volume of speculative-grade borrowings, consisting largely of unsecured bank debt, matures in 2001 and 2002. Specifically, \$64 billion in speculative-grade debt matures in 2001 and 2002, and approximately 63 percent of the debt is unsecured.<sup>26</sup>

**Potential growth in new markets presents both opportunities and challenges.** The Internet and European syndicated loan markets represent both future potential growth areas and possible sources of credit risk for C&I lenders. The Internet has introduced large new markets to the loan and bond markets and has

<sup>26</sup> "Refunding Risk for Speculative Grade Borrowers." December 15, 1999.

CHART 7



increased market efficiency. The "Internet economy" grew 68 percent from the first quarter of 1998 to the first quarter of 1999, with annual revenue expected to exceed \$500 billion in 1999.<sup>27</sup> Internet technology has improved the efficiency of the syndicated loan markets, with recent changes including the development of public price reporting, credit ratings, and Internet sites for online trading.<sup>28</sup> Increased levels of credit risk could result from the volatility of Internet stock prices and the competitive disadvantage faced by firms that do not have an Internet presence but must compete against firms that do.

While the majority of syndicated loan financing currently occurs in the United States, analysts predict that syndicated lending activity in Europe will accelerate significantly because of increased cross-border competition generated by the introduction of the euro and new financing needs. In addition, the European high-yield bond market is still developing but produced \$6.8 billion of volume in the third quarter of 1999, or 61 per-

<sup>27</sup> "Internet Indicators." The Center for Research in Electronic Commerce at the University of Texas Graduate School of Business. October 27, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> "Syndicated Loan Market Soars as Efficiency Increases." *The Wall Street Journal*. December 6, 1999.

cent of the total market.<sup>29</sup> Domestic lenders have begun to compete for this market but face credit risks because the European markets also pose sovereign and foreign exchange risk.

### ***Underwriting Remains the Key to Assessing C&I Credit Quality***

The August 1999 *OCC Survey of Credit Underwriting Practices* reported some tightening of commercial loan underwriting standards. However, loan officers also reported increased embedded risks in commercial loan portfolios for the fifth consecutive year. Survey respondents attributed the increased risks to weakened underwriting standards in previous years. The November 1999 *Federal Reserve Board Senior Loan Officer Opinion Survey on Bank Lending Practices* found that 30 percent of domestic banks reported increasing risk premiums, credit line costs, and loan spreads during the preceding three months. Loan officers cited an uncertain or unfavorable economic outlook, an expected worsening of industry-specific problems, and a reduced tolerance for risk as reasons for tightening C&I lending standards.



Despite signs of tightening underwriting standards, the mix of credits appears to be riskier than in recent times. The OCC issued an advisory to banks in May 1999 warning of potential problems with leveraged lending. The OCC stated that highly leveraged corporations could be particularly vulnerable to economic weakness and may not be able to compete effectively in a rising

interest rate environment. The OCC also addressed reliance on enterprise value loans, which are often used to support leveraged lending. Enterprise values are calculations based on projections of the future income of a firm. If such estimates are overly optimistic, or if the company fails to meet the assumptions underlying these estimates, the lender may be subject to considerable credit risk. The last interagency SNC review also noted instances of inadequate documentation and support for enterprise loans.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Summary***

C&I lending is one of the largest and fastest growing lending lines at insured institutions. Recent growth in C&I lending can be attributed to a number of factors, including a favorable economy, merger and acquisition activity, and other sources of high loan demand, strong asset quality, aggressive pricing, and attractive fee income. While indicators of C&I loan performance remain generally strong, signs of deterioration in commercial credit quality have begun to surface. These signs are cause for some concern because they are surfacing during a period of remarkable economic strength. Increasing corporate indebtedness, signs of corporate stress, and adverse trends in corporate bond defaults suggest that an economic downturn could result in a much more challenging environment for business credit quality.

*By Arlinda Sothoron, Senior Financial Analyst  
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<sup>29</sup> *LPC Gold Sheets*, Vol. XII, No. 44. Loan Pricing Corporation. November 15, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Remarks by OCC First Senior Deputy Comptroller and Chief Counsel Julie L. Williams before the Robert Morris Associates Conference on Lending and Credit Risk Management, October 5, 1999.

## *Local Industries in the Global Economy*

- **The contribution of international trade to U.S. economic activity has risen rapidly during the past decade. The U.S. economy has been increasingly influenced by conditions abroad, such as the recent financial market turmoil in several emerging markets.**
- **Canada, Japan, and Mexico are the largest U.S. trading partners, accounting for approximately 40 percent of U.S. trade. Western Europe and Asia (excluding Japan) also account for a large share of U.S. trade.**
- **The importance of trade at the industry level varies widely. The industries most dependent on trade, including machinery and transportation equipment, also account for a large share of U.S. trade.**

The value of goods and services traded on international markets has more than doubled during the past decade. More goods and services than ever are being shipped abroad and imported from all parts of the globe. Consequently, U.S. economic activity is increasingly influenced by the flow of goods, services, and capital across national borders.

The increasing importance of international trade is reflected in different types and levels of exposure to international markets. First, total exports and imports compared with overall economic activity confirm the increasing contribution of trade to the economy as a whole. Second, the amount of U.S. trade with foreign markets, although widely varied, is concentrated in a small number of countries, namely Canada, Japan, and Mexico. Consequently, economic conditions in these countries are particularly important in assessing the influence of global economic conditions on U.S. trade. Third, the level of exposure to international trade across industry sectors varies considerably. Some industries are not influenced greatly by activity in international markets, while for other, more trade-dependent industries, conditions in the world economy are an important factor in determining the level of sales and profit. The exposure to international markets, either through reliance on trade with particular countries or via industries with a significant exposure to international markets, is an important consideration for lenders seeking to determine a firm's future profitability and financial condition.

### *International Trade Is of Growing Importance*

Over the past 30 years, international trade has grown more quickly than the economy as a whole. Exports, which include both merchandise and services, have risen from less than 5 percent of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) in 1970 to approximately 12 percent today. The merchandise component accounts for about 73 percent of exports and includes manufactured goods, agricultural products, and raw materials such as metals and oil. The services component of exports, accounting for about 28 percent of total exports, includes travel services, passenger fares, royalties, freight and port services, and a number of smaller sectors such as financial and educational services.

Imports also account for a growing share of U.S. consumption of goods and services, exceeding 15 percent of U.S. GDP in 1999, up from 6 percent in 1970. Merchandise is the largest component of imports, accounting for 83 percent, while services account for 17 percent (see Table 1, next page).

Although trade in services has grown quickly for many years, merchandise still accounts for the majority of all trade. The dominance of merchandise is attributable, in part, to the difficulty of trading many types of services. With few exceptions, services are generally produced and consumed within a local market because they cannot be transported easily and are subject to language and cultural barriers. Hospitals, dry cleaners, and movie theaters, for example, serve well-defined local markets and produce products that cannot be traded competitively on international markets. Although trade in services such as travel continues to grow, the remainder of this article focuses primarily on the dominant merchandise component.

### *U.S. Trade Activity Has Reflected Recent Global Economic Turmoil*

Over time, conditions in the international economy have become an increasingly important influence on U.S. growth, since a rising share of all domestically produced goods and services is sold abroad. Similarly, an increasing volume of imported goods and services implies a higher level of competition for domestic producers that compete directly with imports.

TABLE 1

MERCHANDISE IS THE LARGEST COMPONENT OF TRADE			
	DOLLAR VALUE* (1998, \$ MILLIONS)	PERCENT OF TOTAL	1999 GROWTH**
<b>EXPORTS</b>	<b>\$ 933,910</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>
MERCHANDISE	682,138	73.0%	0.8%
AGRICULTURE AND RELATED COMMODITIES	26,603	2.8%	-1.8%
MINERAL COMMODITIES	6,644	0.7%	-17.4%
MANUFACTURED GOODS	593,297	63.5%	-0.1%
OTHER MERCHANDISE	55,593	6.0%	39.5%
SERVICES	263,662	28.2%	4.3%
TRAVEL	71,250	7.6%	3.0%
PASSENGER FARES	19,996	2.1%	2.7%
ROYALTIES AND LICENSE FEES	36,807	3.9%	4.1%
FREIGHT AND PORT SERVICES	25,520	2.7%	6.4%
OTHER SERVICES	110,089	11.8%	5.0%
ADJUSTMENTS***	(11,890)		
<b>IMPORTS</b>	<b>\$ 1,098,193</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>10.3%</b>
MERCHANDISE	907,647	82.6%	10.4%
AGRICULTURE AND RELATED COMMODITIES	22,859	2.1%	-2.2%
MINERAL COMMODITIES	38,619	3.5%	5.6%
MANUFACTURED GOODS	803,384	73.2%	11.6%
OTHER MERCHANDISE	42,786	3.9%	-0.6%
SERVICES	181,015	16.5%	9.6%
TRAVEL	56,105	5.1%	7.2%
PASSENGER FARES	19,797	1.8%	8.3%
ROYALTIES AND LICENSE FEES	11,293	1.0%	11.0%
FREIGHT AND PORT SERVICES	30,460	2.8%	11.4%
OTHER SERVICES	63,360	5.8%	10.9%
ADJUSTMENTS***	9,531		

\* SUM OF COMPONENTS MAY NOT EQUAL TOTAL DUE TO ROUNDING.  
 \*\* FIRST THREE QUARTERS OF 1999 VERSUS FIRST THREE QUARTERS OF 1998.  
 \*\*\* BECAUSE OF DIFFERENT METHODS OF ESTIMATING THE MERCHANDISE AND SERVICES COMPONENTS OF TRADE, AN ADJUSTMENT TERM IS NECESSARY. CONSEQUENTLY, PERCENTAGES MAY NOT SUM TO 100.  
 SOURCES: BUREAU OF ECONOMIC ANALYSIS; BUREAU OF CENSUS

During the past two and a half years, for example, the international economy has been buffeted by a series of crises that resulted in steep exchange rate depreciations for a number of countries and a marked slowdown in economic growth in many emerging markets. Although the U.S. economy remained surprisingly strong during the worst of the emerging markets crises, the fallout was evident in the diverging performance of U.S. exports and imports over the period.

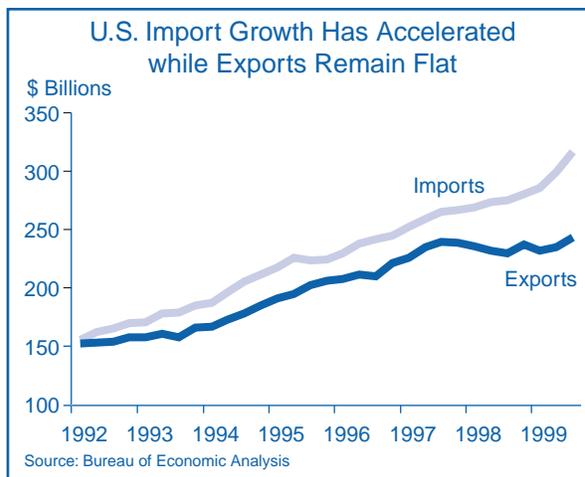
From mid-1997 through mid-1999, U.S. exports were generally flat, reflecting the sluggish pace of growth in several important U.S. export markets. Export prices fell by 4 percent over the period in response to weak demand for U.S. exports. In particular, exporters of agricultural products, basic manufactured goods, and commodities faced rapidly deteriorating conditions in several important overseas markets. For example, the value of merchandise exports to the Pacific Rim fell by 15 percent during the first six months of 1999 compared with the same period in 1997 because of the recent financial market turmoil in the region.

U.S. imports continued to grow during the period, however, reflecting both strong demand for imported goods and falling prices. In fact, average import prices fell by 5 percent between 1997 and 1999. At the same time, competition from imports limited the pricing power of domestic producers that compete with goods produced abroad. Although producers that compete with cheaper imports experienced adverse effects on profitability, consumers and firms that purchased goods from abroad generally benefited from falling import prices.<sup>1</sup>

The slowdown in U.S. export activity and the acceleration of import growth have resulted in an increasing trade imbalance (see Chart 1). The U.S. trade deficit, which reached a record \$26.5 billion in November, has raised concerns among analysts about the vulnerability of the dollar. Faster growth abroad or a slowdown in U.S. growth could convince foreign investors to increase purchases of assets outside the United States, resulting in a sell-off of the dollar. Depending on the severity and speed of a sell-off, heightened financial market volatility and rising U.S. import prices could result. Although potentially many forces are at work in

<sup>1</sup> Weak import prices are a factor cited by analysts to explain the benign performance of U.S. inflation during the past few years.

**CHART 1**



such a scenario, rising inflation or a falling dollar may ultimately result in higher interest rates and slower U.S. growth. The extent to which U.S. trade would be affected by such a scenario is difficult to assess, since changes in the prices of either imports or exports would result in both positive and negative effects on firms' costs, revenue, and profitability.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Most U.S. Trade Is Concentrated in a Few Foreign Markets***

Because the United States trades with most nations, economic conditions abroad are one of the critical factors that determine the growth of U.S. trade. Foreign demand for U.S. goods and services depends on the strength of the markets to which exporters ship their goods. Consequently, economic weakness abroad often results in slower U.S. export growth. Economic conditions abroad also influence the level of import competition that U.S. firms experience. Foreign firms facing slack demand in their own domestic markets, much like manufacturers in Southeast Asia during the recent market turmoil, may

<sup>2</sup> During the early 1980s, the dollar rose by roughly 50 percent, as measured against a trade-weighted basket of currencies. The increase in the value of the dollar made U.S. exports much more costly on world markets and contributed to financial stress among export-dependent manufacturers and agriculture producers. Beginning in mid-1985 the dollar fell sharply, back to its pre-appreciation level. The resulting improvement in U.S. competitiveness contributed to robust growth in U.S. exports that lasted during the rest of the 1980s.

reduce prices of their U.S.-bound goods to compete more effectively with U.S. producers.<sup>3</sup>

Although the U.S. trades with many nations, a large share of U.S. trade is concentrated among a small number of countries. Canada, Mexico, and Japan account for more than 40 percent of merchandise exports and imports. Asia (excluding Japan) and Western Europe each account for just over 20 percent of U.S. exports and a broadly similar share of imports. Central and South America, despite proximity to the United States, account for less than 10 percent of exports and only 5 percent of imports (see Chart 2).

The United States has routinely run a trade deficit with its largest trading partners. The trade deficit with Canada was \$22.8 billion through the first three quarters of 1999. The trade deficit with Mexico topped \$18.8 billion during the same period. The trade deficits with Japan and China, by far the two largest at \$53.4 billion and \$49.4 billion, respectively, accounted for approximately 40 percent of the total U.S. merchandise trade deficit through the first three quarters of 1999.

### *The Importance of Trade Varies among Industries*

The level of export activity or the intensity of import competition also varies across industries. Besides the overall dollar volume of exports, industries differ in the proportion of total production that is exported. Although some industries, such as leather products, account for a relatively small share of total U.S. exports, exports from this industry make up a large share of all U.S. leather goods production. In cases such as this, conditions in export markets are important for producers even if total export sales from a particular industry are small.

Industries also differ in the share of total spending devoted to imports. Imports account for a relatively

<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of a foreign exporter, increased sales of goods abroad, even at reduced prices, may be a preferred strategy to offset lower sales within its own weaker domestic market. A foreign steel mill facing weak sales in its home market may choose to sell its output below cost on the world market if it can still cover its fixed costs of operation. There also may be an incentive to maintain or even expand market share and recoup current losses in the future when prices rebound.

CHART 2



small portion of all domestic spending on farm products such as grains and livestock, for example, while imports account for a relatively large share of all U.S. oil consumption. These differences expose U.S. industries to varying levels of competition from abroad. In industries characterized by high levels of import competition, import prices may largely shape the domestic pricing environment and, by extension, the revenue and profit growth of domestic firms.

For the purposes of this article, industries can be assigned to one of three broad categories depending on their exposure to international markets either through exports or through the intensity of import competition. Firms in *Less Exposed Industries* are not directly influenced by conditions in the global markets. Export markets are not a particularly important source of revenue, and imports are a negligible share of all domestic consumption of goods produced by these industries. In contrast, some industries are highly exposed through their reliance on export markets, through competition from imports, or in some cases, through both. For firms in these *Highly Exposed Industries*, conditions in international markets are clearly one of the important factors influencing current and prospective financial performance. Industries not part of either group, or *Moderately Exposed Industries*, face some competition from abroad and may earn a relatively small amount of revenue from export markets.

To gauge these differences more fully, a measure of exposure to international markets was calculated for a set of 26 industries (20 manufacturing industries, 4 mining industries, and 2 agriculture sectors). Table 2

TABLE 2

		INDUSTRY EXPOSURE TO INTERNATIONAL TRADE		
		IMPORT SHARE OF U.S. CONSUMPTION		
		Low	Medium	High
EXPORT SHARE OF U.S. PRODUCTION	Low	PRINTING AND PUBLISHING FOOD PRODUCTS	LUMBER AND WOOD PRODUCTS PETROLEUM AND COAL PRODUCTS AGRICULTURAL SERVICES, FORESTRY, AND FISHING FURNITURE AND FIXTURES	OIL AND GAS EXTRACTION
	Medium	COAL MINING TOBACCO PRODUCTS NONMETALLIC MINERALS, EXCEPT FUELS FABRICATED METAL PRODUCTS	METAL MINING PAPER AND ALLIED PRODUCTS TEXTILE MILL PRODUCTS STONE, CLAY, AND GLASS PRODUCTS RUBBER AND PLASTIC PRODUCTS PRIMARY METAL INDUSTRIES	MISCELLANEOUS MANU- FACTURING INDUSTRIES APPAREL PRODUCTS
	High	FARM PRODUCTS	CHEMICALS AND ALLIED PRODUCTS INSTRUMENTS AND RELATED PRODUCTS	TRANSPORTATION EQUIPMENT INDUSTRIAL MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT LEATHER AND LEATHER PRODUCTS
		 HIGHLY EXPOSED INDUSTRIES	 MODERATELY EXPOSED INDUSTRIES	 LESS EXPOSED INDUSTRIES

summarizes the results of the assessment.<sup>4</sup> Each row shows industries that have high, medium, or low reliance on export markets, defined as the share of U.S. production in a particular industry that is exported. Each industry was ranked by this measure, with the 7 highest industries placed in the High category, the 7 lowest in the Low category, and the remaining 12 in the

Medium category.<sup>5</sup> Table 2 shows, for example, that a relatively low proportion of production in the printing and publishing, lumber and wood products, and oil and gas extraction industries is exported. In contrast, a relatively high percentage of production in the farm products sector, chemicals, and transportation equipment industries is exported.

<sup>4</sup> Export share of production (rows in Table 2) was calculated as the ratio of inflation-adjusted exports at the industry level divided by inflation-adjusted production in that industry (Gross Output by Industry from the Bureau of Economic Analysis was used as a measure of industry production). The import share of consumption (columns in Table 2) was calculated as the share of inflation-adjusted industry imports divided by inflation-adjusted domestic production less exports plus imports. All calculations were based on 1997 data, the latest industry-level production data available.

<sup>5</sup> This allocation, while completely arbitrary, roughly corresponds to a distribution where 50 percent of the industries are assigned to the Medium category, with the remaining 50 percent evenly allocated between the High and Low categories. Breakpoints for the distribution of industries by export share of production were as follows: Low: less than 7 percent; High: greater than 13 percent.

The industries in each column are categorized by the share of U.S. consumption expenditures in a particular industry that are satisfied by imports. Again, the Low and High categories each include 7 industries, and the Medium category includes the remaining 12 industries.<sup>6</sup> On the basis of this analysis, for example, a relatively low share of U.S. consumption of food, fabricated metals, and farm products is imported. In contrast, a large share of U.S. consumption of oil, apparel, and electronic equipment is imported.<sup>7</sup>

As shown in the lower right cell of the table, four industries are highly exposed to both export markets and import competition. These industries—transportation equipment, industrial machinery, electronic equipment, and leather products—account for slightly less than half of total U.S. exports and a similar percentage of total U.S. imports. Not only are these industries more closely tied to international markets than most other industries examined, but they also account for a large share of U.S. international trade.

Using the terminology introduced above, Highly Exposed Industries are defined as those assigned to either of the High categories; industries in this group either are very reliant on export markets or face high levels of import competition. Less Exposed Industries are defined as those that have little exposure to either export markets or import competition; they are shown in the upper left cell in the Low classification. The remaining industries are defined as Moderately Exposed Industries.

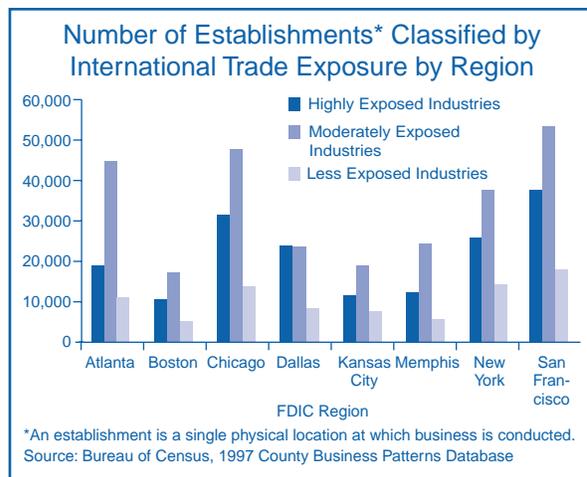
Chart 3 illustrates the distribution of establishments in each of the three categories by Region.<sup>8</sup> Among the

<sup>6</sup> Breakpoints for the distribution of industries by import share of consumption were as follows: Low: less than 9 percent; High: greater than 25 percent.

<sup>7</sup> Although not directly included in the analysis, most domestically produced services also have minimal reliance on export markets and face little import competition. Retail trade, construction, local transportation services, and government, for example, all operate in relatively sheltered markets and are dependent on the health of the local economy. Particular firms may engage in high levels of international activity in tradable services such as travel, but manufacturing, mining, and agriculture account for the majority of imports and exports.

<sup>8</sup> An establishment is defined as a single physical location at which business is conducted or services or industrial operations are performed. It is not necessarily identical with a company or enterprise, which may consist of one or more establishments. Data are from *County Business Patterns* (Bureau of Census, 1997).

**CHART 3**



group of industries analyzed, most are in the Moderately Exposed Industries category. Of the FDIC Regions, Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco have the greatest number of establishments in this category. The Chicago and San Francisco Regions lead in the number of establishments in the Highly Exposed Industries group, followed by the New York and Dallas Regions.<sup>9</sup> Less Exposed Industries account for a relatively small number of establishments. As suggested above, however, most service-sector, construction, and government enterprises, while not part of this analysis, could be classified as Less Exposed.<sup>10</sup>

Although this analysis highlights the varying level of direct exposure to international markets, industries also may be exposed through a less direct secondary channel. Several industries, although not highly exposed themselves, are suppliers to Highly Exposed Industries. For example, the rubber and plastics industry produces goods that are used in the manufacture and assembly of transportation equipment, a Highly Exposed Industry.

<sup>9</sup> An alternative way of analyzing the establishment data is to calculate the percentage of all establishments across the 25 industries that are in Highly Exposed Industries. On the basis of this calculation, the Dallas Region ranks highest at 42 percent because of the large number of establishments engaged in oil and gas extraction. For the remaining Regions, the percentages vary between 25 percent and 35 percent. Across all industries (including services and other sectors not part of this analysis), the percentage of Highly Exposed Industries in each Region ranges from 1.7 percent (Atlanta Region) to 3.4 percent (Boston Region) of total establishments.

<sup>10</sup> These data do not include a count of establishments in the farm products sector (Standard Industrial Code (SIC) 01 and SIC 02). Therefore, 25 industries are represented in the establishment data, and not 26 as in Table 2.

Consequently, conditions in export markets for transportation equipment are of particular interest for manufacturers of certain types of rubber and plastic products. These supplier industries are also vulnerable to import competition through this secondary exposure to international markets. A transportation equipment manufacturer, in response to heightened competition in international markets for its products, may switch from a domestic supplier of rubber products to a cheaper foreign supplier if a favorable price differential emerges. Therefore, assessing the exposure of industries to either exports or imports requires consideration of any secondary linkages between suppliers and purchasers of industry products.

### *Summary*

The contribution of international trade to overall U.S. economic activity has been increasing for a number of years. The growing significance of trade has been high-

lighted by the recent series of economic and financial crises across the globe. One result of recent global economic turmoil has been a slowdown in U.S. export growth resulting from both slumping international demand for U.S. goods and services and weak prices. Import growth has continued unabated, largely because of strong U.S. growth, leading to a rapidly widening trade deficit. The effects of import and export growth on particular industries vary because of differing levels of reliance on export markets and the extent of import competition. This analysis suggests that several industries are highly exposed to changing global economic conditions. Lenders should be aware that for firms in these industries, changes in global economic conditions, including demand for U.S. exports and prices of both imports and exports, largely determine pricing, revenue growth, and profitability.

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*Senior Financial Economist*

## *Regional Perspectives*

- Despite the near record length of the nation's current economic expansion, overbuilding, weather-related property losses, and continued challenges to established industries could jeopardize future strong growth in the Atlanta Region.
- Development of new industries is contributing to the Atlanta Region's strong growth but also may result in new risks to local economies as income and employment levels may be more closely linked to the national business cycle.
- Several factors, including supply and demand, may have coalesced to foster a suitable environment for de novo banking activity in the Atlanta Region. It is likely that the crucial period in the life cycle of a de novo bank, as it matures into an established bank, extends beyond the first three years of operation until it experiences its first recession.

### *Region's Economic and Banking Conditions*

#### *Economic Growth in the Atlanta Region Continues, but Risks Persist*

The Atlanta Region economy remains strong as the nation's expansion approaches record length; however, setbacks in new and traditional industries could jeopardize the Region's continued growth. Historically low interest rates and inflation, high levels of consumer confidence, and strong job and real-income growth



have combined to support consumer spending, which accounts for two-thirds of the nation's economy. In the Atlanta Region, even stronger economic growth has been fueled by continued corporate expansion and relocation and above-average levels of population growth. Rapid gains in the economy, however, pose unique challenges. Development of new industries can result in new risks to local economies. Construction activity in high-growth areas, if not controlled, could lead to overbuilding. Recent development in coastal areas could increase the risk of exposure to hurricanes. These risks exist side by side with the perennial threats to areas dependent on more traditional types of industry, such as coal mining and apparel manufacturing. Consequently, as the expansion enters its ninth year, the Atlanta Region is not without risk.

#### *Losses in Alabama's Textiles and Apparel Industries Continue, but Growth in Commercial Real Estate Poses Its Own Risk*

While losses in manufacturing, primarily in textiles and apparel, have weakened **Alabama's** economic performance throughout 1999, stronger growth in some urban areas in the state's northern half continues to support demand in the construction industry. **Birmingham** accounted for nearly half of all new commercial construction starts in Alabama during the first half of 1999, up from just over 25 percent during the same period one year earlier. Commercial construction reached record levels in **Huntsville** in 1998 while **Tuscaloosa** saw high levels of building earlier in the decade.

Local banks with less than \$1 billion in assets are actively involved in development activity in these metropolitan areas. Birmingham, after **Atlanta**, had the highest level of construction and development (C&D) lending in the Atlanta Region in third quarter 1999. Three financial institutions with C&D loans as a share of total assets greater than 10 percent account for nearly half of this type of lending. In Huntsville and Tuscaloosa as well, the share of C&D lending is considerably higher than the Region's average. Looking ahead, any retrenchment in real estate markets could more adversely affect those institutions with higher concentrations of construction lending.

### **Florida's Economic Growth: It's Not Just Tourism and Citrus**

Florida's economy continues to change, as reflected by the high-tech industry's growing importance to the economy, with telecommunications and biomedical manufacturing the predominant growth sectors. High-tech growth has been strongest in the **Orlando** area, where it is now the largest industry, after tourism, in terms of employees. **Lockheed Martin**, with 15,000 employees, is second to **Disney** as Orlando's largest private employer. Access to roadways, distribution channels, warehousing space, and a large international airport have attracted high-tech companies to the area. High tech also is a large and growing industry in the **Tampa** area, where 23 percent of the state's biomedical manufacturing is based.

While high tech has been a source of growth, it may introduce Florida to new types of risk. South Florida increasingly is becoming exposed to new risks as it continues to evolve into a major international telecommunications gateway between the United States and Latin America. Companies such as **AT&T** and **Siemens Information and Communication Networks, Inc.**, are making sizable investments in high-speed, high-volume services to major corporate clients in Latin America. Likewise, midsize and small companies are becoming involved in business opportunities with clients eager to rebuild economies weakened by the recent Latin American crisis. Many of these smaller companies, in particular, may be subject to the economic volatility that historically has existed in Latin American countries. As the state grows increasingly interconnected with international economies, exposure to global financial developments correspondingly rises. Banks providing funding for expansions in international ventures may want to exercise caution in this volatile sector.

### **Rapid Growth in Atlanta Continues to Fuel Demand in the Retail Real Estate Market**

Retail construction in Atlanta continues to expand rapidly as residents migrate to the metropolitan area. Concern about overbuilding, suburban sprawl, and lack of workers, however, may threaten the absorption of retail inventory. Most attention in Atlanta's retail real estate markets during 1999 has focused on the construction of two mega-malls—the 1.7-million-square-

foot Mall of Georgia, which opened in August 1999, and the 1.2-million-square-foot Arbor Place Mall, which opened just two months later in **Douglas County**. However, the increase represents just 30 percent of the total retail starts in Atlanta during 1998. Over 5 million square feet of starts got under way during the first half of 1999. Several million square feet remained in the planning stages as of September 1999, including construction for a third mall, with an additional 1.2 million square feet of space. Both the Mall of Georgia and Arbor Place Mall will likely serve as hubs for other surrounding retail construction. Slower economic growth or lack of labor may constrain absorption of new space in the future.

Slower-than-anticipated absorption of retail real estate space could have consequences for community banks in the Atlanta metropolitan area, whose C&D loan exposure, as a share of total assets, remains the highest in the Region at 12.9 percent. In third quarter 1999, community banks' total C&D loan portfolio stood at \$1.57 billion, which accounted for 21 percent of all C&D lending in the



Atlanta Region. Nineteen financial institutions headquartered in the metropolitan area have C&D loans that account for more than 20 percent of total assets. While most of the C&D lending is for residential construction purposes, a slowing in the area's real estate markets could pose risks to community banks with concentrations in this type of lending.

### **Hurricane Damage Expected to Have Significant Impact on the North Carolina Economy**

Hurricane activity could pose substantial risks to the increasingly developed areas along the coastal sections of Florida, **Georgia**, Alabama, the Carolinas, and **Virginia** (see *Atlanta Regional Outlook*, Fourth Quarter 1997). For example, eastern **North Carolina** will likely feel the lingering effects of damage caused by hurricanes Dennis, Floyd, and Irene for several years to come. Losses from these storms are expected to top \$5 billion, which would exceed the destruction caused by Hurricane Fran in 1996. According to **William M. Gray**

and other researchers at *Colorado State University* (CSU), a “moderate” hurricane season can be expected in 2000, with 11 named storms, seven hurricanes, and three intense hurricanes predicted. However, CSU researchers anticipate that the Atlantic Ocean/Caribbean Sea is entering an era of greater storm activity. Furthermore, the economic growth of the past several years increases the number of developed properties that potentially lie in the path of hurricanes. Rising deductibles and inadequate insurance coverage could result in increased exposure in many areas prone to hurricane damage.

### ***The Tug-of-War between New and Old Industries in South Carolina Continues***

**South Carolina’s** industrial mix continues to shift. Automotive-related manufacturing now has a presence in nearly three-quarters of the state’s counties and has created more than 30,000 new jobs over the past decade, making this industry the fourth largest in the state. Despite the rapid growth in automotive-related production, however, South Carolina’s economy continues to be dominated by the textile and apparel industries, which employed almost 100,000 in 1998. Increasing overseas competition, demographic shifts, and increased use of automation have accelerated job losses in textiles and apparel. Shifts in South Carolina’s industrial mix may affect how its economy interacts with the national business cycle and global economic shocks.

### ***High-Tech Development in Virginia Fuels Growth***

High-tech telecommunications development is helping to propel Virginia’s economy forward. In November 1999, analysis conducted by the *Wall Street Journal* cited Virginia, which has dubbed itself *Silicon Dominion*, as one of the hottest spots in the nation for high-tech development. Many other states are aggressively recruiting high-tech industries, which may limit the opening of new manufacturing plants or corporate

relocation to Virginia. Moreover, high-tech development may not always be the permanent economic panacea for which states hope—a fact to which Massachusetts could attest, given its experience during the 1980s. In Massachusetts, a high concentration of large employers in one segment of the industry was decimated by a rapid shift from minicomputers to network PCs in the business environment. Closer to home, *Motorola’s* on-again, off-again chip plant construction in **Goochland** was postponed in late November 1999 for at least another year. As a result, the rapid pace of growth in the area’s high-tech sector, funding for high-tech development, supporting industries, and surrounding real estate development may be particularly vulnerable if the industry suffers a downturn.



### ***West Virginia Coal Update—Recent Court Ruling***

A recent legal ruling could negatively affect the coal industry and economic growth in the state. In late October 1999, the Southern West Virginia U.S. District Court imposed a ban on valley in-fills, usually associated with mountaintop mining. Dana Waldo, president of the governor’s *West Virginia Roundtable*, recently warned that the ban would adversely affect mining beyond mountaintop operations since it affects valley in-fill from all types of mining (mountaintop, surface, and underground mining). Coal miners account for approximately \$2 billion, or 20 percent, of the state’s payroll, and are among the state’s highest-paid industrial workers. On average, mining wages are \$50,000 annually, compared with the average **West Virginia** nonmining wage of about \$25,000. Mines operate in 33 counties, but every county in the state is affected either directly or indirectly by the prosperity of the industry. Consequently, legal developments affecting the coal industry can have significant ramifications for local communities and their lenders, and deserve close monitoring.

*De Novo Banking in the Atlanta Region*

Although the 1990s often have been characterized as an era of bank consolidation, mergers, and acquisitions, new commercial banks continue to be chartered at a growing rate in the Atlanta Region. More banks were chartered during the first three quarters of 1999 than during any year since the previous cyclical peak in 1988 (see Chart 1). Moreover, the issue of de novo<sup>1</sup> banking is of particular importance to this Region, which is home to 25 percent of the nation's institutions chartered since 1992. Several factors, such as supply and demand, may have coalesced to foster a suitable environment for de novo banking activity. This analysis looks at economic factors that may have fostered the resurgence of de novo banking in the Region during the 1990s and scrutinizes the examination and failure performance of de novo banks that were chartered during the 1980s.

**The Demand-Side View:  
De Novo Banking and Economic Growth**

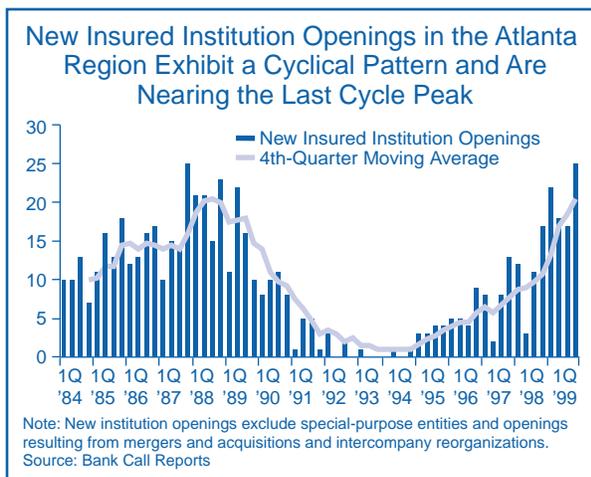
Banking is like other services provided by an economy: As the market expands, so does the demand for

<sup>1</sup> While the common usage of the term "de novo" refers to a bank during its first three years of operation, a de novo bank is defined for purposes of this discussion as a new commercial bank that has not experienced an economic recession, but excluding any new opening for special-purpose entities or those resulting from mergers and acquisitions or intercompany reorganizations.

financial services. One way to measure market expansion is through population increases. During the 1990s, the number of residents in the Atlanta Region has increased by over 5 million, raising the Region's share of the nation's population from 16.7 percent in 1990 to 17.3 percent in 1998. During the 1990s, there appears to be a strong relationship between aggregate population growth and the formation of de novo banks at the county level. This relationship can be seen in Map 1, which is an overlay of de novo bank openings and population changes. Since the recession of 1990/91, most economic growth has occurred in metropolitan areas in the Atlanta Region, a fact that correlates with de novo banking activity. Specifically, over this period, 193 new commercial banks have opened in the Atlanta Region, with 152 (79 percent) opening in metropolitan areas.

Urban areas that have experienced the largest *absolute* increase in population also have seen the greatest levels of de novo bank activity. This correlation makes sense intuitively because, even if a small urban area experiences a high population growth rate, the absolute increase in population might not create enough density or critical mass to support an expansion of local banking services. The most active urban markets for new openings are Atlanta, numerous urban areas in Florida, and urban centers along the I-85/40 corridor in South Carolina and North Carolina. Table 1 (next page) lists the most active metropolitan areas for de novo banking.

**CHART 1**



**MAP 1**

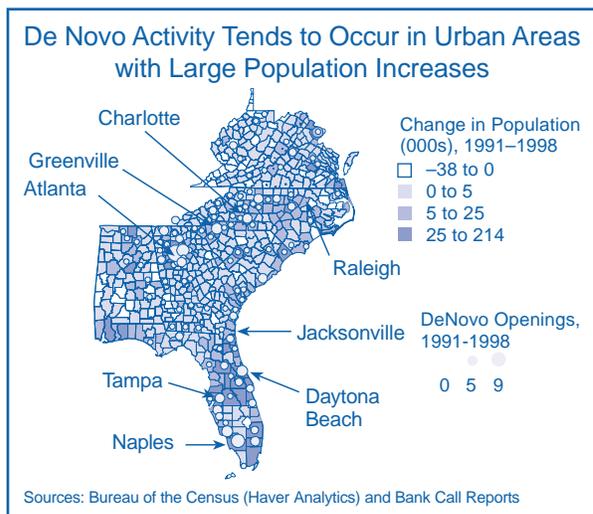


TABLE 1

MARKETS WHERE A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF DE NOVO BANKS <sup>1</sup> HAVE OPENED RELATIVE TO EXISTING BANKS SINCE 1994			
HEADQUARTERS LOCATION	DE NOVO COUNT	ESTABLISHED BANK COUNT	DE NOVO TO ESTABLISHED %
ATLANTA MSA	26	55	47.3
TAMPA-ST. PETERSBURG-CLEARWATER MSA	10	27	37.0
GREENVILLE-SPARTANBURG-ANDERSON MSA	7	13	53.8
NAPLES MSA	7	4	175.0
SARASOTA-BRADENTON MSA	7	10	70.0
GREENSBORO-WINSTON SALEM-HIGH POINT	6	8	75.0
FORT MYERS-CAPE CORAL MSA	5	2	250.0
DAYTONA BEACH MSA	5	4	125.0
JACKSONVILLE, FL, MSA	5	7	71.4
FORT LAUDERDALE PMSA	5	10	50.0
CHARLOTTE-GASTONIA-ROCK HILL MSA	5	14	35.7
ORLANDO MSA	5	16	31.3
ALL OTHER ATLANTA REGION MSAs	60	296	20.3
ALL ATLANTA REGION MSAs	153	466	32.8
ALL ATLANTA REGION NONURBAN BANKS	37	505	7.3
<b>ALL ATLANTA REGION BANKS</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>971</b>	<b>19.6</b>

MSA = METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREA  
<sup>1</sup> INCLUDES ONLY NEW COMMERCIAL BANK OPENINGS FROM 1994 THROUGH THIRD QUARTER 1999 AND EXCLUDES ANY NEW OPENINGS FOR SPECIAL-PURPOSE ENTITIES OR THOSE RESULTING FROM MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS OR INTERCOMPANY REORGANIZATIONS.  
 SOURCE: BANK CALL REPORTS

Metropolitan areas that experienced more modest increases in population also experienced lower levels of de novo banking. Given the apparent strong relationship between the increase in population and greater de novo banking activity, it appears that for new bank charters to occur, favorable market growth conditions (the demand-side argument) likewise may need to exist.

### *The Supply-Side View: De Novo Banking and Mergers and Acquisitions*

Demand-side factors, such as increases in a population or improvement in its financial well-being, may not be the only contributors to de novo banking activity—supply-side forces also may play a determining role. One such factor, often cited by industry analysts, is the effect of mergers and acquisitions (M&As) within the industry on the incidence of new bank chartering. When a local financial institution is absorbed, management and board members who do not transfer to the acquiring bank may see market opportunities for seeking a new

charter. Their resources include preexisting relationships with the acquired bank's clientele, intimate knowledge of local economic conditions, and, in many cases, a ready pool of capital that was received in the sale from the acquirer.

While the impact of M&A activity on the resurgence in de novo openings has received significant press coverage, it does not seem as strong as the effects of population and income. (See Map 2, which is an overlay of de novo openings and M&A activity at the county level.) While there is some equivalence between births and deaths of institutions in counties within urban areas, this relationship is less clear in rural counties. Hence, it appears that supply-side forces—displaced management and available capital pool—manifest to form a new bank when demand-side forces are favorable. Consistent with this view, a recent study by the FDIC's *Division of Research and Statistics*<sup>2</sup> concluded that the

<sup>2</sup> Seelig, Steven A., and Timothy Critchfield, "Determinants of De Novo Entry in Banking," FDIC Division of Research and Statistics, 1999.

relationship between out-of-market M&As and new bank formation in certain markets may not be as strong as previously thought.

## De Novo Banks in the 1980s and 1990s

The number of de novo banks in the Atlanta Region has risen substantially since 1993. Thus far in 1999, the number of de novo banks has reached the highest level since the previous peak of 80 in 1988. Moreover, the four-quarter moving average continues to increase, as seen in Chart 1 (page 21). Although the current cyclical upswing in de novo openings is similar to the trend experienced in the 1980s, there are differences between the two periods. First, the number of new financial institutions chartered during the current expansion falls far below the number chartered in the 1980s. Since the end of the 1990/91 recession, 198 de novo banks have opened in the Atlanta Region. From the 1982/83 recession to the beginning of the 1990/91 recession, 377 de novo banks opened. Second, the market location of de novo banks in the 1990s differs from that of the 1980s. While the Atlanta and the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metropolitan areas were the most active areas for new openings during both periods, the volume is lower during this cycle. Urban areas along the I-85/40 corridor in South Carolina and North Carolina and in other urban areas in Florida such as Naples, Daytona

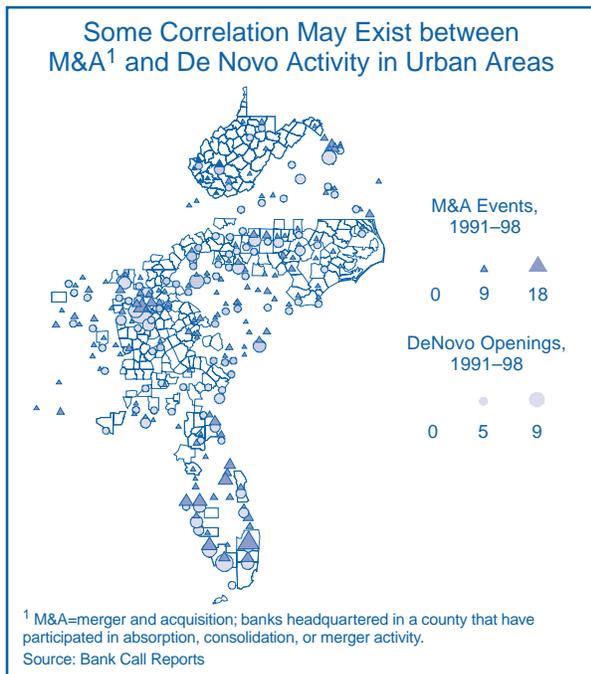
Beach, and Jacksonville, are experiencing increased activity in this cycle. The most active markets in the current period can be seen in Table 1.

## De Novo Banks of the 1980s Performed Poorly during the Last Recession

De novo banks that opened from 1984 through 1991 performed poorly relative to established commercial banks<sup>3</sup> during the recession of 1990/91. Banks formed after the 1982/83 recession were much more likely than established banks to receive a “poor” examination rating<sup>4</sup> or fail. As seen in Chart 2, the percentage of poorly rated de novo banks was generally much higher than the percentage of poorly rated established banks from 1985 through 1994. Moreover, at year-end 1991, about 36 percent of de novo banks received poor examination ratings compared with 22 percent of established banks.

The performance of de novo banks was markedly worse in urban areas than in rural areas. Nearly 40 percent of new banks in urban areas were poorly rated compared with 21 percent of new banks in rural areas. Greater competition contributed to the higher rate in urban areas. Although an established urban bank was more likely to receive a poor examination rating than an established

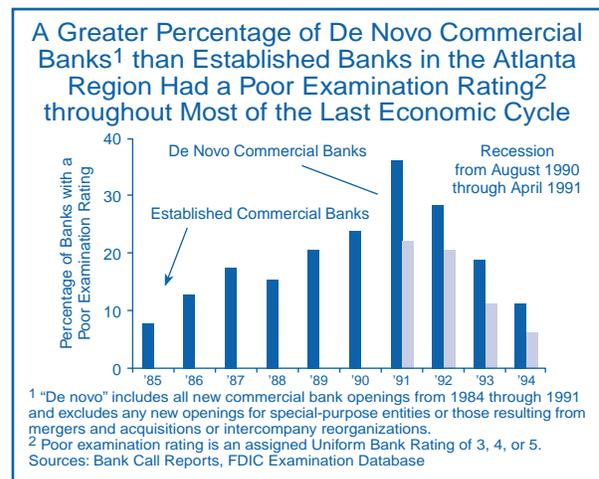
MAP 2



<sup>3</sup> For purposes of this analysis, established commercial banks are those eight years old and that opened before January 1, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> A “poor” examination rating is a Uniform Bank Rating of 3, 4, or 5. There is some survivorship bias in the figures as new banks or established banks that failed prior to year-end 1991 are not included, but they would likely have had a poor examination rating. However, the survivorship bias would have a greater effect on the new-bank group because of the smaller size and would increase the contrasting performance relative to established banks.

CHART 2



rural bank, the difference was not as pronounced as in the new bank group (see Table 2).

De novo banks of the 1980s failed at a significantly higher rate than did established banks. Over a ten-year period from 1984 through 1993, 56 commercial banks failed in the Atlanta Region. Of the total, 26 were de novo banks that ceased operation around the economic downturn of 1990/91. The failure rate among de novo banks at year-end 1991 was 7 percent compared with only 2.6 percent among established banks.

Additionally, de novo banks, chartered in the 1980s, that were open three years or longer were more likely to receive a poor examination rating after experiencing their first economic recession. This is illustrated in Chart 3, as a greater percentage of new banks open three years or longer had a poor examination rating at year-end 1991. Moreover, the likelihood of having a poor examination rating increased with the length of operations as a poor rating was received at 52 percent of new banks that were open between six and eight years. This significant difference in examination performance, depending on the age of the de novo bank, was consistent in all of the Region's major urban markets and rural areas. It is likely that this difference derives from the innate life cycle of a de novo bank.<sup>5</sup> Typically, new banks grow assets very rapidly and suffer operating losses during the early years of their life cycle. In response, regulatory authorities typically require a min-

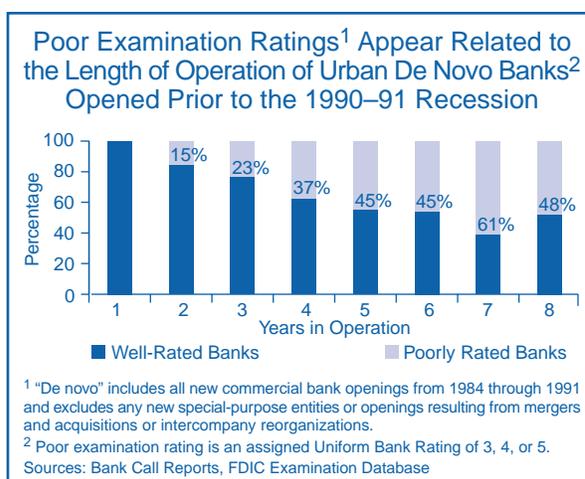
<sup>5</sup> For further discussion see DeYoung, Robert, "Birth, Growth, and Life or Death of Newly Chartered Banks," *Economic Perspectives*, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, Third Quarter 1999.

**TABLE 2**

COMPARISON OF POORLY RATED BANKS BETWEEN URBAN AND NONURBAN DE NOVOS <sup>1</sup> AND ESTABLISHED BANKS IN 1991 <sup>2</sup>				
HEADQUARTERS LOCATION	DE NOVOS		ESTABLISHED BANKS	
	COUNT	% WITH A POOR EXAMINATION RATING <sup>3</sup>	COUNT	% WITH A POOR EXAMINATION RATING <sup>3</sup>
ALL ATLANTA REGION MSAs	293	39.6	539	29.9
ALL ATLANTA REGION NONURBAN BANKS	70	21.4	633	15.5
ALL ATLANTA REGION BANKS	363	36.1	1,172	22.1

MSA = METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREA  
<sup>1</sup> INCLUDES ONLY NEW COMMERCIAL BANK OPENINGS FROM 1984 THROUGH 1991 AND EXCLUDES ANY NEW OPENINGS FOR SPECIAL-PURPOSE ENTITIES OR THOSE RESULTING FROM MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS OR INTERCOMPANY REORGANIZATIONS.  
<sup>2</sup> INCLUDES ONLY BANKS FOR WHICH AN EXAMINATION RATING EXISTS.  
<sup>3</sup> BANKS WITH AN ASSIGNED UNIFORM BANK RATING OF 3, 4, OR 5.  
 SOURCES: BANK CALL REPORTS, FDIC EXAMINATION DATABASE

**CHART 3**



imum amount of capitalization to assimilate the rapid asset growth and absorb operating losses and impose higher capital ratios for new banks during their first three years of existence. Generally, after three years these capital restrictions are eased and a typical de novo bank will leverage its equity to the same degree as a well-managed established bank to improve return on capital. The ability of a new bank to deploy its capital fully after three years when paired with a loan portfolio that usually has a higher percentage of unseasoned loans contributes to the poorer performance of new banks relative to established banks. *It is likely that the crucial period in the life cycle of a de novo bank, as it matures into an established bank, extends beyond the first three years of operation until its first experience of a recession.*

### ***Issues to Watch in De Novo Banking***

As the experience of the 1980s clearly demonstrates, de novo banks are more susceptible to economic downturns than established banks. A new bank that had not been recession tested was about twice as likely as an established bank to receive a poor examination rating or fail. At third quarter 1999, 203 de novo institutions, or 15.2 percent of the Atlanta Region's financial institutions, which hold \$11.1 billion in assets, have never experienced the effects of a recession. Also, as seen in Table 1 (page 22), the ratio of de novo banks to established banks is becoming very high in some of the

Region's fastest-growing urban areas. It is unclear how new banks will affect competition and profitability in these areas, and it is uncertain how these markets will be affected in a recession. Ultimately, de novo banks in these fast-growing urban areas may be vulnerable during an economic downturn. Recognizing this vulnerability, management of new banks should be aware of the greater risks that are innate in the early life cycle of a de novo bank and how changes in the economy could affect their institutions.

*Atlanta Region Staff*

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