

Rural Populations in the 1970s

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A COUNTRY THAT WAS characterized by urbanization even before its formation as a nation, the United States has continued its transformation from a rural to an urban society. Now, almost unnoticed, there is the countercurrent population shift to rural areas. This shift seems to be initiating a period of turbulence and change in rural America.*

While the dominant characteristic of rural life remains—and, despite change, is likely to remain—spaciousness, changes in population distribution create a new countryside: “Growth in urban technology and complexity of life serves to increase the differences between urban and rural areas. Those areas relatively untouched by urbanization become anachronistic; those areas in transition to urbanization become the scenes of a complex identity crisis.”¹

The urbanizing trends that transform rural life consist of the “strip development” and the “service villages” that cluster around interstate exits. Any institution, such as library or school, which functions in rural America by distributing its services across distance, faces frequently conflicting cultural, societal, and governmental pressures that make its course a stormy one.

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*The opinions expressed in this article are the authors' own. Points of view or opinions stated do not, therefore, necessarily represent official U.S. Department of Education position or policy.

A Growing Population

This growing rural population trend may have taken us by surprise. The rural population was 53,478,000 in 1970; it had increased to 56,954,000 in 1975.² Between 1970 and 1975 the population of rural America grew 6.5 percent, a rate more rapid than that of metropolitan America, where the corresponding increase was 4.2 percent.

Fifteen years after the 1960 decennial census there were 5.5 million more Americans in the rural countryside. About 28 percent of all Americans are now country dwellers and in 1970 36 percent (eighteen) of our states had 40 percent or more of their population as rural residents.³

Geographic Remoteness

While the bulk of rural residents are in nonfarming occupations, typical rural occupations, such as farming, livestock raising, horticulture, forestry, mining, and recreation, determine population patterns. Agriculture, a primary consumer of space, utilized 45 percent of the nation's land in 1975, but only 2.5 percent of its population. In substantially rural states the allocation of land to agriculture was 44 percent. For remote rural places the median allocation of agricultural land was 63.6 percent.

While the total rural population grows, its distribution pattern remains one of comparative sparsity. The continental United States has a population distribution of sixty persons per square mile. In the substantially rural states, that distribution is 26.5 persons per square mile, and drops to 19.0 persons per square mile in areas of rural isolation. Even among the most isolated places, though, there are differences. Among the remote places sampled, Essex County, Vermont, had nine persons per square mile. Meagher County, Montana, had one person per square mile, but Unicoi County, Tennessee, had eighty-five persons per square mile.

The pattern of rural population centers is one of small clusters, despite the growth of the semi-urban strip developments and interstate service villages. In remote rural places, towns are smaller, with most residents living in the countryside. In a sub-sample of isolated counties, towns were generally small, with a significant proportion (12.7 percent) reporting fewer than 100 residents. A majority of remote rural towns had a population of 500 persons or less in 1975 (see Table 1).

Minorities in Rural Areas

Minorities are probably not an increasing share of the rural popu-

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TABLE 1. POPULATION OF REMOTE RURAL TOWNS, 1973-75

<i>Number of Residents</i>	<i>Percentage of Towns (cumulative)</i>
Fewer than 100	12.7
200	31.7
300	42.3
400	49.4
500	53.5
1000	68.3
2000	83.0
3000	90.8
4000	96.0
5000	98.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *1973 (Revised) and 1975 Population Estimates and 1972 (Revised) and 1974 Per Capita Income Estimates for Counties and Incorporated Places* (Current Population Reports, series P-25, nos. 649-98). Washington, D.C., USGPO, April, May 1977.

lation. However, they (particularly the black rural dwellers) continue to account for a substantial portion of the rural southern population. The 1960 census counted 90 percent of the rural population as white. Of the remaining tenth, 90 percent were black, 7 percent were reservation-dwelling native Americans, and the rest were Hispanic.⁴ Minority groups continue to be urban immigrants, moving to the cities, contrary to the trend of an increasing rural population. The substantial enclaves of minorities that continue as rural dwellers account for some of the most deprived people on the North American continent.

Deprivation in Rural Areas

The increasing population of rural America has not redressed the social and economic imbalance toward deprivation afflicting country life in the fifty years since the Great Depression. The rural deprivation differential is illustrated by the mean number of families living below the poverty level. In the substantially rural states in 1970, families had a poverty rate 86 percent greater than the nation as a whole. In this national sample of rural isolated places, the number of families living below the poverty level was 151 percent greater than the national rate. The 1970 mean percentages of families below the poverty level were: nationally, 10.7 percent; in substantially rural states, 19.9 percent; and in isolated rural counties, 26.9 percent.⁵

Relationship to Information Sources

Persons dwelling in remote areas have the same human needs everyone possesses, but their remoteness engenders a social system that must necessarily respond to a sparse population distribution. Relationships are affected by space and the relatively small clusters of people. The scattered distribution of people encourages a personalized relationship among country dwellers, which springs in part from the need for and consequent high value placed upon immediate sources of information. Organized information sources are in short supply and tend to be from the outside or urban areas. Therefore, their validity for the rural dweller is viewed with suspicion—a reflex of the high personal costs that can be incurred from no information or misinformation. Rural people remain ear-oriented because oral information comes from a verifiable source, as compared with the unseen sources of printed materials. Audiovisual materials may have a psychological entrée more acceptable than print because of the appeal to the eye and ear. Any information tends to bear more credibility if its mode is personalized and individualized. The professional who has survived the long, roundabout, anecdotal nature of a country school, library board, or grange meeting needs to perceive that a careful, lengthy, painstaking translation of new facts and ideas is being conducted in which these concepts are being transformed and tested for at-hand community relevancy.

The rural telephone is a prime source of information and a reducer of loneliness. Its inclusion as an artifact of humor in American mythology touches upon, but conceals, the “need to know” of persons living in remote places. As a safety device, the telephone cannot be overlooked. However, in a sample of rural isolated counties, despite the attributes of safety and of reduction of isolation through communication, family income prohibited the universal presence of the telephone; about 23 percent of the families had no available telephone service. The extent of telephone service varied greatly. Minnesota’s rurally isolated counties report a low 5.4 percent of households without such service. Opposed to this, one Mississippi county reported that 67.3 percent of its households had no telephone service. Table 2 illustrates the range of rural family telephone availability.

Travel

The dominance of distance in rural life places critical emphasis on time devoted to travel and on the necessary expenditure of energy. Any distribution system, such as rural library services, must deal with these

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TABLE 2. RURAL HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT TELEPHONE SERVICE, 1970

<i>Percentage of Households</i>	<i>Rural States</i>	<i>Isolated Rural Counties</i>
10	26.6%	46.4%
25	24.5	35.6
50 (median)	18.2	22.6
75	13.9	8.4
90	6.5	5.8
Range* (R ₁)	32.7	67.3
Range (R ₂)	6.1	5.4

*Range: R₁ indicates the least favorable end of the range and R₂ indicates the most favorable.

critical factors. In remote places 69.8 percent of the residents live in the countryside away from towns. This spatial distribution shapes their lives and the social and commercial institutions to which they relate.

One activity—travel to work by the individual—is a concern in familial economics. Such travel can: (1) reduce time devoted to family life; (2) act as a surcharge on residential costs; and (3) reduce the opportunity to use local social and commercial services, since all the available travel budget may be devoured by work-related travel. Daily, about 17.5 percent of all Americans travel beyond their county boundaries to their place of employment. Residents of rural states tend to travel less. Of the eighteen substantially rural states, only three exceed the norm: Kentucky (10 percent), New Hampshire (19.4 percent), and Minnesota (18.4 percent). However, these percentages may increase for remote rural places. The median for isolated rural communities is 18.6 percent. In the sample of commuting in remote places, there were some remarkably high proportions of the population traveling: Kemper, County, Mississippi, reported 30.5 percent; Scott County, Kentucky, 30.2 percent; and Tishomingo County, Mississippi, 25.7 percent.

Such personal expenditures of time and resources must be considered in any social service design. For those remote areas with a high incidence of commuting to work and a low percentage of telephone accessibility, those who design social services for even minimum levels of exposure and response will need to go beyond conventional delivery modes, hours of operation, and service sites. Hidden costs to these rural residents are the disproportionate share in taxes they pay—with which they purchase social services based upon an urban concept.

Remote Commercial Facilities

Commercial facilities correspond to their environmental setting.

Some statistical data exist which are descriptive of facilities and services available to rural residents. In a sampling of services available to 742,000 persons in remote areas situated in 66 counties, there were reported 2345 food stores, 641 auto dealers, and 401 furniture stores. These categories are highly selective, but permit some comparative impressions.

In the United States one food store serves an average of 778 patrons. In remote places, one food store serves the smaller market of 316 residents (see Table 3). A smaller market means a greater per person capital investment and a more limited selection. While bearing the disability of limited purchase options, persons in remote areas in 1975 spent a greater part of their per capita annual expenditures for certain purchases than their urban counterparts. Nationally, per capita annual outlays for these expenditures were \$2204.50, but outlays in the same categories for dwellers in remote rural places were 51.4 percent greater, at \$3338.

TABLE 3. RESIDENTS SERVED PER COMMERCIAL FACILITY, 1975

<i>Facility</i>	<i>Remote Rural Counties</i>	<i>United States</i>
Food store	778	316
Auto dealer	1715	1157
General merchandise	3702	1616
Furniture store	1782	1850

The comparative underdevelopment of the commercial structure in remote places and the reliance on personalized information inhibit the development of informed consumer awareness, making geographically remote residents vulnerable to the unscrupulous salesman and his personalized delivery system. Nor do television commercials, particularly those with promptings to a toll-free telephone number, assist the rural resident.

The rural businessman with his smaller capital, smaller volume, and lack of reliable market information is at a disadvantage, as are his patrons. The social agencies that could support strengthened consumer and business information suffer from the rural deprivation differential which inhibits the full participation of rural areas in national civic life.

Social Facilities: Life Support Systems

Available data on rural social services are as selective as they are for commercial services. Health services, despite a federal program of hos-

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pital construction (Hill-Burton), have not provided rural residents with equitable levels of standards for life support systems.

The number of physicians serving remote places is severely deficient. Nationally, practice is available at a rate of 167.4 physicians for 100,000 persons. The median number of physicians in isolated rural places is 49.5 physicians per 100,000 residents. Nationally, there are 66 hospital beds per 10,000 persons; substantially rural states exceed the national mean somewhat, with a median of 68 beds per 10,000 rural residents. However, in more intensely rural areas, there is a median of only 49.4 beds.

A severe deficiency exists in health care for isolated rural areas. Seventeen remote counties in the isolated rural places sample (representing 14.4 percent of the sample) had no hospital facilities available. Projections of this figure provide an estimate of 1.17 million persons in the United States with no resident county health care facilities.

Vulnerable children also seem to have fewer resources in rural areas. Nationally, families in the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program received \$190 monthly. In substantially rural states the mean was \$147 monthly; for remote places the mean was \$154. Those means are 22.6 and 18.9 percent below the national average, respectively. In 1970 the program provided assistance to 1,239,756 children nationally. Of these children, 193,374 (15.6 percent) lived in the 18 substantially rural states. Eleven of those states fell below the national mean for ADC family assistance (see Table 4).

TABLE 4. RURAL DISTRIBUTION OF ADC FAMILY GRANTS, 1970 (CUMULATIVE)

<i>Monthly Amount</i>	<i>Rural States</i>	<i>Isolated Rural Places</i>
Less than \$50		11.0%
100	22.2%	24.2
150	50.0	47.4
200	67.0	66.6
250	100.0	81.1
300		95.4
350		99.9

Federal financial assistance through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) was made available for the assistance of 46,269 institutionalized children nationally in 1971. Only half of the 18 substantially rural states reported any such use of federal funds for institutions, sheltering 7792 children.

Unfortunately, in this area substantially rural states provide fewer hours of staff training and a more diffuse concentration of time. As an example, 33 percent of children's institution staff nationally received more than thirty-one hours of training, but the nine reporting rural states trained only 16.5 percent of their staff members at that level. Nationally, children in institutions served by ESEA were assisted by staff members with an average of 27.8 hours of training. Children in the institutions of rural states were aided by staff with an average training time of 7.25 hours. ESEA Title I expenditures per institutionalized child averaged \$278.65 in the substantially rural states, with a low of \$186.80 in Idaho and a high of \$664.89 in Minnesota.

Obviously, library services to rural vulnerable children must take into account the lack of printed resources in their lives. Low family incomes tend to be spent on food, housing, clothing, and energy for travel and heat, rather than on books and magazines. Poorly funded and poorly staffed institutions can almost be guaranteed to lack other than the most primitive library services.

Education-Related Expenditures

This paper does not focus on the role of the rural library as such. However, it does treat here, as one of its perspectives, the expenditures which rural people have available for their educational functions. One marked illustration of the rural/urban differential as it operates in education is the annual revenue of public schools allocated per pupil. Nationally, the average annual per pupil revenue reached \$1715 in 1975. Federal assistance accounted for 8.8 percent of that amount, state assistance for 43.9 percent, and locally raised tax revenues for 47.3 percent. An analysis of the eighteen substantially rural states shows that assistance from federal sources was 27.7 percent below the national mean, and that amounts from state and local sources were each 66.6 percent below the national level.

Federal assistance for selected educational programs (elementary and secondary, handicapped, higher education, and libraries) amounted to \$6.23 billion. The eighteen substantially rural states received 21 percent of that amount (\$1.13 billion). Nationally, 3.2 percent of the \$6.23 billion (\$198 million) was allocated to libraries. For the eighteen rural states, the federal allocation to libraries in those individual states was a mean of 3 percent of the state's total federal allocation.

Libraries

Eleven of the eighteen states fall below the national average of

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federal funds obligated for libraries in 1976.⁶ Rural residents spend a lesser share of their own tax-raised revenue for community library support than do their urban counterparts. They rely more heavily on supplementary, nongovernmental sources for additional revenue. Yet, even with this assistance by transfer funds and local gifts, the rural expenditure for community library services fails to approach the national mean. Of the 8307 public libraries in the United States, 38.8 percent (3223) had annual revenues of \$10,000 or less in 1974. Of the 5417 rural public libraries, serving 28.8 percent of the national population, 51.1 percent (2768) had annual incomes of \$10,000 or less. That is, 32 percent more rural libraries were likely to be in a completely inadequate funding range than were urban libraries.

The deficiency in information sources in rural life was noted above. The school and the public library are the two local publicly funded information sources generally available to rural society. While public libraries in the United States were renewing their collections at an average rate of 7.1 percent annually, rural libraries' renewal rate was only 5 percent. The mean number of volumes per library nationally was 47,000. For rural libraries the mean was 20,000, 57 percent below the national mean.⁷

In audiovisual holdings, rural public libraries held an average of 320 titles per library, contrasting with 1000 titles for all public libraries in the nation. The mean for the 30,000 rural school libraries was 804 audiovisual titles. Rural school libraries hold an average of 5876 books. While maintaining smaller collections of books, the rural school libraries came closer to the national average. Only 16 percent of rural school libraries were below the national mean of school library holdings, while 57 percent of rural public libraries were below the national mean.

While rural community libraries rely somewhat more heavily on transfer funds and nonpublic funds for revenue, the principal expenditure in public libraries is for personnel. The training and education levels of rural librarians have not attained the national average for public library personnel. Public library salary rates are not available; however, rural public libraries as a group devote the smallest share of their expenditure dollar (44.8 percent) for personnel salaries. The major group of rural libraries, the 4187 agencies serving population areas of less than 10,000 expend the minimum share for salaries (38.5 percent) of all strata of public library agencies.

Some data for 1974 are available for the annual salaries of school librarians/media specialists. In that year their national mean salary was \$11,219. In seventeen of the eighteen substantially rural states (Arkansas

did not report), the median salary was \$9844. Salaries in these seventeen rural states ranged from \$8196 (Mississippi) to \$12,854 (Minnesota). Of these states, sixteen were below the national mean; one was above.

Level of education among rural librarians is also lower than the national average. In 1974, when 27 percent of all public librarians served in rural areas, 58.1 percent of rural public librarians did not have a bachelor's degree, compared with 32.9 percent nationwide. Twenty-one percent of all rural public librarians did have a bachelor's degree and another 22 percent also had a graduate degree (compared with national figures of 20 percent and 47 percent, respectively).

Educational Achievement Among Rural Residents

In both rural and urban areas of the United States, the proportion of persons completing four years or more of college increased between 1968 and 1975 (see Table 5). Men in metropolitan and rural areas made substantial gains in completing four or more years of higher education within the five years from 1970 to 1975. However, the astonishing gains, proportionally, were for rural women (28.8 percent, compared to 29.2 percent for men), and, although the base remains small, for rural black men (56.5 percent). The impact of even these figures is minimized, however, by the gains of metropolitan black men (79.1 percent) and black women (44.7 percent).

The increase in the number of adults completing four or more years of college education is an important factor in education of the rural family. Table 6 shows the influence of parental education on the test scores of offspring in five subject areas. In Table 7, these data are organized by type of residential area.

One method of assessing educational status by community is to present the percentage of persons who fall below the presumably normal grade level (see Table 8). Rural high school students exhibited the greatest displacement from their expected educational status. When these data were related to Tables 6 and 7, it was found that if the adult maintaining the family had not completed high school, the proportion of 5- to 17-year-olds enrolled below the mode (anticipated level) was significantly larger than for all persons of that age group. However, where the parent had completed one or more years of college, there was no significant difference in level of enrollment.

Libraries serving students or a general population with lower reading levels should be acutely sensitive to the need to provide materials at different levels of complexity and difficulty. The adult with

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TABLE 5. PERCENTAGES OF ADULTS COMPLETING FOUR YEARS OF COLLEGE, BY RESIDENTIAL AREA, RACE, AND SEX, 1968 AND 1975*

<i>Resident</i>	<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>		
	<i>1968</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>% Change</i>	<i>1968</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>% Change</i>
Urban						
White	16.4	21.4	30.5	9.1	12.2	34.1
Black	4.3	7.7	79.1	4.7	6.8	44.7
Combined	15.3	20.3	32.7	8.6	11.7	36.0
Rural						
White	10.2	12.3	20.6	6.7	8.5	26.9
Black	2.3	3.6	56.5	5.4	4.2	-28.6
Combined	9.6	12.4	29.2	6.6	8.5	28.8

*Adults are defined as citizens at least twenty-five years old.

TABLE 6. INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL EDUCATION ON TEST SCORES OF OFFSPRING, 1976*

<i>Parental Educational Level</i>	<i>Subject</i>				
	<i>Science</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Literature</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>
No high school	-8.4	-10.8	-11.1	-10.9	-14.4
Some high school	-7.7	-10.7	-6.0	-6.5	-11.3
High school graduation	0.1	1.2	-0.3	-0.6	-1.3
Post high school	5.0	6.4	5.6	6.9	-8.8
U.S. median (out of 100 points)	47.0	62.5	61.8	61.3	57.1

*Statistics are expressed as amount of deviation from the national median for each subject.

TABLE 7. INFLUENCE OF RESIDENTIAL AREA ON TEST SCORES, 1976

<i>Residential Area</i>	<i>Subject</i>				
	<i>Science</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Literature</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>
Extreme rural	-3.6	-4.1	-2.6	-2.4	-4.1
Small community	-1.5	0.0	-1.4	-0.7	0.3
Low-density metropolitan	-7.4	-10.4	-7.7	-7.2	-14.0
High-density metropolitan	5.1	6.6	5.6	5.3	9.9

reading difficulties nevertheless usually shares the intellectual concerns and interests of his or her more literate neighbor. The phrase "high interest, low reading level" sometimes masks rewritten children's materials. Clear, brief materials in areas of sociology, history, psychology, government, and consumerism are often more in keeping with local adult needs.

TABLE 8. PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS BELOW MODAL GRADE LEVEL, 1976

<i>Residential Area</i>	<i>Ages 5-13</i>	<i>Ages 14-17</i>
Metropolitan	4.1	9.0
Central city	4.8	11.4
Outside central city	3.6	7.6
Rural	5.8	12.1

Functional illiteracy is considered an educational disability often associated with economic liability and extreme difficulty in obtaining access to full civic life. In Table 9 functional illiteracy is measured by grade level completed. The table indicates that the sharpest improvement in completion of five years of elementary education was attained by rural white women. Rural black men experienced the least change. In general, rural rates of functional illiteracy compared well with metropolitan scores, with both male and female rural whites exhibiting remarkable reduction (31.0 percent and 34.6 percent respectively).

TABLE 9. PERCENTAGES OF FUNCTIONAL ILLITERATES, BY RESIDENTIAL AREA, RACE, AND SEX, 1968 AND 1975*

<i>Resident</i>	<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>		
	<i>1968</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>% Decrease</i>	<i>1968</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>% Decrease</i>
Urban						
White	3.7	2.9	21.6	3.8	2.8	26.3
Black	14.8	10.7	27.7	10.7	7.0	30.0
Combined	4.8	3.7	22.9	4.5	3.4	24.4
Rural						
White	7.1	4.9	31.0	5.2	3.4	34.6
Black	34.8	30.2	13.2	25.7	19.0	26.1
Combined	9.4	6.6	29.8	7.0	4.7	32.9

*"Functional illiterate" is defined here as a person age twenty-five years or older who has completed less than five years of elementary education.

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Isolated rural places were studied for mean grade-level completion of those over twenty-five years of age. Statistics showed that a significant proportion of the population finished less than twelve grades, and an extremely high proportion lacked a high school diploma. In fact, nearly one-fourth (23.8 percent) of the population of thirty-one to forty of the rural isolated places sampled had not completed high school. The range in the states sampled for percentage of the population with a high school diploma was from 22.9 percent to 85.7 percent; the median was 63.3 percent. For the eighteen substantially rural states, the median was 51.8 percent of the population without a high school diploma, based on mean figures by state; the range was 33.3 percent to 62.2 percent.

Rural American tends to be an educationally deficient sector. For years its manpower has migrated to urban America. Educational facilities and services, dependent upon transfer payments from federal and state governments, have remained well below national norms. For example, rural libraries (public more than school) do not attain a level of support for education commensurate with need. Although federal and state library programs are designed to attain educational parity, they fall far below that goal. While rural Americans have made some astonishing successes in attaining higher educational levels, their numbers are still more afflicted with illiteracy than are urban and suburban populations.

Adult Education

Adult education has been developed to offset such disabilities. Frank Fratoe recently described some of the education problems of farm residents and adult education:

Farm residents who have not completed college or high school can use an alternative path to expand their learning skills—adult education. Unfortunately, fewer farm residents seventeen years old and over pursued this opportunity in 1975 than did their nonfarm counterparts in the four major geographic regions. Of those who did enroll almost all were white despite data suggesting that farm blacks need adult education experience the most. The largest overall differences can be noted in the South, where the proportion of metropolitan residents taking adult education (13 percent) was about three times that of farm dwellers who did so (4.4 percent).⁸

Another factor needs to be considered as well. The mean age of rural

Americans tends to be somewhat greater than that of urban citizens, and as a group, older Americans have a greater educational deficit than do the young (see Table 10). Nearly one-half of all Americans sixty-five years and older never attended high school. As of 1978, 49 percent of the men and 44 percent of the women in this age group had stopped formal schooling by the eighth grade.⁹ A low level of attraction seems to hamper rural adult education. The minor rate of participation by black males is troubling, for as a group rural black males have the least movement out of illiteracy. Rural residents in general, however, participate at a rate equal to or surpassing that of Northeast metropolitan participants. But farm residents, and especially black participants, one of the weakest groups for educational attainment, are not being served (see Table 11).

Rural Family Life

There were 16,086,000 rural families in 1970. In 1977, there were 18,755,000.¹⁰ In 1977, 2,058,000 of these were families headed by a female (10.9 percent). Of the 17,149,000 white rural families in 1977, 9 percent had a female head. Of the 1,416,000 black rural families, 34 percent had a female head.

From 1975 to 1977, 3,815,000 persons moved from metropolitan to rural areas; 3,578,000 were white; 197,000 were black. However, a nearly equal number of black persons entered urban areas—194,000. In contrast, 2,975,000 white persons moved from rural areas to metropolitan areas, for a net increase of 603,000 white persons in rural residency.

Older persons were a substantial share of those moving to rural areas. From March 1975 to March 1978, 573,000 older persons changed from an urban to a rural residence.¹¹ Persons 55 years and older are a significant demographic group in rural America, where they constitute 35.8 percent of the 43 million persons in the United States over that age. While substantial numbers of citizens fifty-five years and older moved to rural areas recently, those areas have maintained an older population for many years. In the eighteen substantially rural states, 10.5 percent of the population in 1975 was age sixty-five or older versus 9.8 percent for the United States as a whole. In a sample of isolated rural places, the median population in this age bracket reached 14.1 percent of total population.

The principal minority groups, blacks and Hispanics, share rural life with a predominantly white population. These minorities tend to be urban dwellers or to move to urban areas. In 1970, 5,714,000 black

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TABLE 10. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF RURAL ADULTS 68 YEARS AND OLDER, MARCH 1978

<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Elementary		
Less than 5 years	10.8%	8.7%
5-7 years	16.4	13.8
8 years	21.4	21.6
High school		
1-3 years	15.0	16.7
4 years	19.0	23.4
College		
1-3 years	8.1	8.8
4 or more years	9.4	7.0

TABLE 11. PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION, BY RESIDENTIAL AREA, 1975

<i>Residential Area</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Total*</i>
Northeast metropolitan	9.5%	1.1%	10.6%
Rural	10.3	0.1	10.4
Farm	7.0	—	7.0
Nonfarm	10.5	0.1	10.6

*Civilian population aged 17 years and older.

persons were rural residents; by 1977 their numbers had risen to 6,427,000—a 12.5 percent gain. However, this increase was due to more births and fewer deaths rather than to urban-to-rural migration. A national trend appeared for the small population of Hispanics, whose increase from 1974 to 1977 was 8.5 percent. In numbers, these citizens decreased 234,000 (11.6 percent) in the countryside, but increased 707,000 (8 percent) in metropolitan areas. In 1970, 56,338,000 white persons lived in rural United States. Their number was 62,158,000 in 1977. The proportional increase was 10.3 percent.

Rural Family Income

Family income compared by residential location illustrates sharply the social differential that divides rural and urban America. Occupational income is, of course, the major support of most Americans; however, the same occupations provide a much lower level of family

well-being in rural United States than in urban United States (see Table 12). The mean earnings for rural males are more than 25 percent below those for suburban males, and more than 15 percent below those for central city males. In all but one of the major occupations, earnings of rural workers are below those of workers from other geographic areas. Female salaries for all occupations fall well below those of males, with those for rural females at the bottom of the scale.

TABLE 12. ANNUAL EARNINGS, BY OCCUPATION, RESIDENTIAL AREA, AND SEX, 1977 (IN THOUSANDS)

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Central City</i>		<i>Suburban</i>		<i>Rural</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Professional/ Technical	\$19.5	\$11.2	\$21.2	\$11.4	\$16.7	\$9.2
Management/ Administration	19.2	10.7	20.7	10.6	16.0	7.8
Sales	14.9	6.0	17.0	6.0	14.5	5.0
Clerical	11.8	8.2	13.3	7.9	12.5	6.9
Craft	13.3	7.6	15.0	8.5	12.4	7.0
Operative	11.5	6.8	12.3	7.3	10.5	6.6
Transportation/ Equipment	12.2	—	13.6	—	11.0	—
Labor (except farm)	9.6	—	10.0	—	8.4	—
Farming/Farm management	—	—	10.7	—	7.7	—
Farm labor/ Supervision	—	—	8.3	—	5.4	—
Service	9.5	5.6	10.7	5.3	8.5	4.6
Private household (domestic)	—	2.3	—	2.0	—	1.5
Mean total	14.4	8.1	16.4	8.1	12.2	6.6

Table 13 shows the same occupational groupings with numbers of rural residents employed. Clerical and service occupations employ the most rural women, accounting for 48 percent. Rural women employed in professional occupations constitute about 24 percent of all professional women employees and 14 percent of all employed rural women.

The occupational characteristics of rural United States do not furnish a family economic base comparable to that of other sectors of

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TABLE 13. EMPLOYMENT OF RURAL RESIDENTS, 1977 (IN THOUSANDS)

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Professional/Technical	1,831	1,618
Management/Administration	2,131	586
Sales	724	622
Clerical	752	3,040
Craft	3,577	205
Operative	2,303	1,713
Transportation/Equipment	1,120	95
Labor (except farm)	1,272	145
Farming/Farm management	1,070	52
Farm labor/Supervision	608	175
Service	1,175	2,332
Private household (domestic)	9	384
Total	16,572	10,967

TABLE 14. MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME, BY RESIDENTIAL AREA AND RACE, 1977

<i>Residential Area</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Combined</i>
Rural	\$13,318	\$ 7,435	\$12,831
Central city	15,009	9,361	13,952
Suburban	17,371	12,037	17,101

America (see Table 14). In 1975, twelve of the eighteen substantially rural states had a median family income of \$10,968, 8 percent below the national figure of \$11,921. Among these states, the lowest median family income was \$9559 and the highest was \$13,611, both below the median of \$13,798 for all rural families.

In rural isolated places, family income paralleled other indices of deprivation. The 1975 median family income was \$6763; the mode for these isolated rural places was in the \$6000-\$6999 annual range. Sixty-five percent of isolated counties had a family income below \$6999 annually.

In 1977, 14 percent of rural residents lived below the poverty level. That amount represented a significant improvement over the 19.3 percent (11,981,000 persons) for 1970. However, 54 percent of the rural poor lived in areas of high concentrations of poverty. Rural whites had a poverty rate of 11.4 percent in 1977, but rural blacks experienced the astonishing poverty rate of 38.2 percent. However, even this represents

an improvement, since the rural black poverty rate in 1970 was 52.6 percent. In 1977, 19 percent of heads of rural white families below the poverty level were unemployed, compared to 59 percent of the heads of rural black families below the poverty level.

Rural women tend to be particularly vulnerable economically. Of 85.2 million women in the United States in 1975, 62.4 million reported receiving income. Of the 9.3 million black women, 7.2 million reported receipt of some income. A depressed pattern applied to all women, black and white. The mode (i.e., the single category including the greatest number for women receiving income was \$1-\$1999. An estimated 19,661,000 women—about 30 percent of all women reporting income—were in that income category in 1977. Rural women reported a median income of \$2828 in 1975, although, like their urban sisters, the majority shared the \$1-\$1999 income category. Rural black women reported median income of \$2152, the lowest of the population groups.

Women headed 2,058,000 rural families in 1977. Rural families with female heads increased by 12.1 percent between 1970 and 1973. Receipt of child support is directly related to the level of educational attainment. About 45 percent of mothers with four or more years of college received some form of child support from the fathers of their children, compared to 29 percent of mothers who were only high school graduates, and just 11 percent of mothers who did not complete any years of high school. The mean amount received by college graduates (\$5290) was sharply higher than the mean amount received by mothers who were high school graduates (\$1960). With characteristically lower educational levels, rural women are probably at a disadvantage in receiving any degree of adequate child support. This is reinforced by data from regions of the United States reporting child support. The annual mean for the Northeast was \$3210; for the South, \$2130; and for the North central area, \$2240. Within the southern region, women in the east south central division (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi—all substantially rural states) received a mean annual payment of \$1510—38 percent below the national mean.

In 1976 Social Security payments to retirees in rural remote places were an average \$190 monthly. The mean annual family income for residents of remote places in that year was \$6465, compared to \$2281.32 for the remote rural retired. The elderly are heavily reliant on library services for their reading materials due to low incomes.

Voting

Rural residents tend to maintain a sturdier political interest (as

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indicated by voting in national elections) than do other publics. In the 1972 presidential elections, 56.7 percent of registered American voters cast ballots. Rural states responded most heavily. Vermont, the most rural of states, recorded a 62.2 percent voting rate of registrants, and in Iowa, a substantially rural state, 63.6 percent of the registered electorate voted. The rural states as a group ranked high, but with significant regional differences. Of the rural states, the median percentage of eligible citizens who voted was 62.2. No southern state except Kentucky scored above 48.5 percent. Among other states, Minnesota and South Dakota recorded the highest voter participation (68.9 percent).

Rural isolated places consistently report heavier voter participation than do their parent states. For example, Alabama has a state voting rate of 43.6 percent and a rural isolated area rate of 61.5 percent. Idaho has a state voting record of 63.8 percent and a rural isolated area rate of 70.5 percent. Kentucky's voting record of 48.5 percent statewide becomes 51.3 percent in its rural isolated communities.

Conclusion

Given the litany of deprivation in economic, educational, and service terms presented above, why do people reside in rural areas? Libraries designing services for rural residents need to stress the advantages of rural living while compensating for the disadvantages. Freedom from overcrowding, air pollution, noise, high crime rates, artificial environments, and depersonalization are definite pluses in rural living. Emphasis on family and religious life is also an important aspect of rural living. Politics at the local level is personalized in rural areas. Many rural areas have poor or no radio and television reception, opening the door to printed sources of information and recreation. The closeness to nature and natural resources carries with it responsibility, however. Materials on the intelligent custody of natural resources speak directly to the rural resident. Often, rural isolation allows for the sustenance of ethnic heritages and specific cultures that crowded cities gobble up. Libraries can do a booming business with local history projects.

Rural public and school libraries, like rural dwellers, are afflicted by great distances, high energy costs, and low incomes. The challenges for imagination and creativity in rural librarianship are high. The intrinsic rewards can be great, despite the typically lower salary levels, since rural librarians can share in the advantages of rural living, while helping to dispel some of the disadvantages.

References

1. Drennan, Ann P., and Shelby, Anne. "Library and Information Service Needs of the Geographically Remote." In Carlos A. Cuadra and Marcia J. Bates, eds. *Library and Information Service Needs of the Nation*. Washington, D.C., USGPO, 1974, p. 171.
2. U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Estimates of the Population of Counties and Metropolitan Areas: July 1, 1974 and 1975* (Current Population Reports, series P-25, no. 709). Washington, D.C., USGPO, Sept. 1977, p. 3, table A.
3. For purposes of this paper the following eighteen states are identified as "substantially rural." These states are considered a "sample" and are a principal unit of inquiry. In 1970, 16 percent of these states had a population that was more than 50 percent rural. In terms of this paper's definition, Vermont, with some 60 percent of its population as country dwellers, is the most rural of the United States. The eighteen are: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, and West Virginia. These eighteen had a substantially rural population of at least 40 percent.
4. Drennan and Shelby, op. cit.
5. The concepts "remote" and "rurally isolated" are difficult to define or determine statistically. This paper equates the two. For a statistical illustration of remoteness, a random 10 percent sample was drawn of all counties of less than 20,000 population within the eighteen substantially rural states. For some purposes, a 50 percent sub-sample was drawn.
6. The library programs included are: Library Services and Construction Act, Titles I, II, and III; consolidated programs under Title IV of ESEA, School Library Resources, Elementary School Equipment; and Title IIA and IIB of HEA, College Library Assistance, Library Training and Research.
7. Most rural libraries (4187) had an average collection of 10,800 volumes.
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