

PEOPLE OF RURAL AMERICA

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People of Rural America is part of the 1960 Census monograph series, sponsored by the Bureau of the Census and the Social Science Research Council. Like other books in the series, it has the virtue of being prepared by competent authorities and is inexpensive, but suffers from lateness of publication, given the focus of analysis on 1960 data.

The authors—two of whom are agricultural economists and one a sociologist-demographer—have structured much of the analysis around the theme that “. . . the location of rural areas with respect to a large metropolitan area is crucial in determining the character of rural areas.” A basic measure of the rurality of counties—and of their populations—was devised based on the distance from a metropolitan area and on the size of the population of that area. Data relating to certain census subjects were then tabulated and analyzed on this framework. The topics discussed are number and distribution of rural people, their age and sex composition, fertility, education, employment and income.

Earlier research has indicated the logic of the major hypothesis, so not surprisingly the authors do find many relations between the characteristics of rural people and their distance from metropolitan centers of various size. In general, the closer the proximity to a large metropolitan area, the more urban-like the

rural population is. Exceptions are numerous, however, and sometimes rather inexplicable.

An outstanding feature of the monograph is several beautiful maps in color of the relative rurality of counties and of the fertility of the farm population. Some of the discussion is rather tedious, perhaps unavoidably in view of the many statistics and their relations to one another that must be covered. The work is more suitable as a solid reference than for a flow of easily read ideas and conclusions. It does not deal with all aspects of rural demography, but the choice is probably deliberate. Migration of rural people—a major area of recent concern—is essentially not discussed, nor is there much coverage of trends in the size and distribution of rural population over time. Rather extended treatments, on the other hand, are provided on the analysis of rural fertility and of income.

The authors close with proposals for a revised residence classification scheme in future censuses. These emphasize a cross-classification of the metropolitan-nonmetropolitan and urban rubrics, together with increased delineation of rural villages and a dropping of the farm category.

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