

COMMENT ON TRENDS SHOWN BY POPULATION CENSUS

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The data presented in the excellent memorandum prepared by the staff of the Bureau of the Census for this panel seem in general to confirm the broad impressions many sociologists have of what, in the relevant respects, is going on in American society. They do, however, pin them down more precisely than has been possible before, and on the whole show that the changes are even more massive and rapid than we had thought they were. An overall index of this is of course the very large volume of geographical mobility as such, which is clear evidence that the country is not settling down to a stagnant phase in which change generally is slackening off.

From the point of view of its bearing on the social structure, the most striking development is the rapid increase of the "metropolitanizing" of the population, which has both shifted the rural-urban balance, which has been discussed for so long, substantially further in the urban direction, and has focused attention on major change in the character of urban communities. Here of course the relative decline of the central cities and the very rapid increase in population of the peripheral parts of the metropolitan areas are the most salient phenomena.

The "industrial-metropolitan complex" as it may be called, has clearly come to a position of dominance in American society, and the end, of course, is not yet. I would like to attempt to conceptualize some of the salient features of this process under three headings, namely inclusion, differentiation and up-grading.

By inclusion I mean the process by which, once a developing new type of structure is relatively well established, increasing proportions of the population come to be included in it. On this point the evidence is striking indeed. On the positive side it is the increasing proportions which are involved in the new conditions of residence and work, while on the negative side the striking thing is the steady draining of the reservoirs of the older type of social organization, not so much rural in general as the types of rural community characterized by a tendency to subsistence agriculture, low educational levels, sometimes prominence of extended kinship groupings and the like - the Appalachian and Ozark highlanders and the rural Southern Negro are the prototypical cases.

Within the new social structure and between it and some of the other components there is then a process of differentiation. By this I do not mean the establishment of just any sort of diversity of social traits - many previous diversities have, as Dr. Taeuber remarked, been lessened in the course of this process. I mean rather the development of specific lines of differentiation between major components of the structure of the system, by virtue of which they develop relations of functional complementarity. This is true of urban and rural communities when the latter progress beyond the

subsistence stage so that the countryside produces food and raw materials for urban-industrial populations and the latter produce components of a rural standard of living which would not be possible on a subsistence basis. Internally to the urban community it is the case for differentiation between sub-areas primarily devoted to residence and those primarily devoted to occupational organizations. On this basis it is my thesis that there has been a progressively increasing process of differentiation.

The third aspect of the process I have called upgrading. This is most tangibly illustrated by the case of the rural subsistence reservoirs. By migrating from such communities into urban-industrial ones these populations are both included in the dominant structures and are upgraded with regard to the level of qualifications for social function and expectations of performance. Perhaps the most obvious index is education. Those with the educational level of the traditional rural Southern Negro are obviously disqualified for any but the lowest level jobs in an urban-industrial system. The trend of occupational change, however, has been markedly in the direction, first of reduction of the proportion in the unskilled category, and second of increase of the highest level jobs, notably the professional managerial categories. The whole occupational system has been undergoing a process of upgrading, of which the upgrading of new migrants to the metropolitan communities - and especially of their children - is a major phase.

Agriculture and the extractive industries, which are the economic mainstays of the rural communities as they have been developing, are clearly becoming more differentiated and upgraded. The lower level, subsistence type part of the rural system is the one which has been losing population most rapidly. The high productivity areas of major market agriculture, have not been gaining population because mechanization and applied science have been reducing the need for numbers of manpower, but they have not basically been eroded as communities. The trend has been to performance of specialized functions in the society, and to performing them at increasingly high levels of efficiency.

The development of the metropolitan communities has thus been part of a differentiation process by which functionally higher level rural communities have also come to play a part. There are two other aspects of the rural side of the picture - by Census definition of communities of less than 2500 population. One is the increasing recreational use of rural areas by urban populations; in the broadest sense recreation has become one of the most important "industries" in our society - much of it of course urban, but much not. The other exception is the extreme fringe of the metropolitan areas where many suburbs are classed as rural because the particular political unit still remains under 2500, but in social character they are of course mainly urban.

The new metropolitan community as documented

in these figures, may be said to constitute an important new phase in the process of differentiation of urban communities as social structures. The basic quantitative indices of this are the relative decline of the central cities and the figures of growth of the suburban rings.

The preindustrial urban community basically did not differentiate places of residence from places of work. Perhaps the prototypical figure was the artisan whose shop was in the same premises as his residence, but the same was true of the small merchant and the professional practitioner. The cities which developed after the industrial revolution then were organized above all about the differentiation between place of work and place of residence, with the central city being in the first instance the place of work. This of course was the period of urban public transportation systems, the street car, the elevated and the subway.

The new era is in part a function of motor transportation and superhighways and parkways. Not only have average distances travelled in the normal work-home cycle increased, but above all the automobile lends far greater flexibility because of its freedom from specified routes. In any case increasing proportions of the residential community are coming to be more specialized in residential function. This is concomitant with a substantial upgrading of housing standards, most notably the enormous increase of separate one-family dwellings, with yard space. Hence access to the outdoors, with yard and garden and absence of the "asphalt jungle" of the city streets is a major feature which belongs in the category of upgrading.

Meanwhile many of the previous functions of the older central city have been moving out and becoming further differentiated. A far greater proportion of employment opportunity is coming to be found on the outskirts of the city and of course shopping has been greatly decentralized so that the central city department store, though surviving, is of greatly reduced relative significance. Hence transportationwise, in place of the old pattern of movement in and out of the central city along the radii, there has developed a much more complex criss-crossing pattern between residential, industrial and other sub-communities over the whole range of the metropolitan circle.

This means in turn that the central cities have acquired far more specialized significance, centering on high concentrations of special function like banking and finance, legal services, government of course and a few others. These are cases where personal access of the most important people to each other is a great asset. New York city is of course the premier example. Such a concentration of course requires a substantial support base of service-facilities which makes them centers above all of clerical employment.*

* With respect to this whole picture of the developing metropolitan community I am much indebted to Dr. Winston White of Harvard University.

An interesting point of a special feature of this differentiation process is brought out in the data presented (Item O), namely that 16% of households "consist of primary individuals, mostly living alone" and not of families. Clearly this documents a new stage in the process of the "isolation of the nuclear family". The trend has been very strongly toward the extrusion from households which are primarily composed of families of persons who are not family members. The general decline in domestic service, particularly living-in, is well known. A second category which has declined greatly is that of "roomers", but in addition to this, relatives not members of the nuclear family, especially parents or siblings of one of the married couple, have greatly declined. The increase of households consisting of "primary individuals" is of course the other side of this coin. One of the very interesting features of it is the problem of how far these persons are isolated in the sense of "being abandoned" and how far they have gained a new independence, which under previous circumstances was not possible. The desirability of the change from the point of view of nuclear families seems to me on the whole to be clear, though not without important exceptions. I suspect that the independence is also valued by the "isolates" in a larger proportion of cases than is generally recognized. Partly this is because new modes of communication and transportation make it possible to combine independence of residence with the desired amount of contact to a considerably higher degree than previously.*

* The basic data on this problem area down to 1957 are excellently brought together and analyzed in Glick, *American Families*. This figure, however, represents a sharp accentuation on the trend which Glick emphasizes.

I would like finally to comment on one further major point. Along with the decline of relative magnitude of the central cities - taking account also of the processes of annexation - a very striking finding, made very clear in these data, is the major influx of Negroes - and partly, especially in New York of Puerto Ricans - into these central areas. The racial problem of course is in many respects a special one, and it is important not to underestimate the difficulties which the inclusion and upgrading of the nonwhite population in American society entails.

Nevertheless, because of the high salience of the particular case, it is easy to overlook the extent to which the problem of the urban nonwhite masses is primarily a class, rather than a "caste" problem, in a special sense. This is the sense in which it is not a static matter of a frozen status of an underprivileged group, but one which fits into a dynamic pattern of "ecological succession". The reference point of course lies in the "reservoirs" the striking drainage of which is so clearly documented in this material.

The big city slum has long been the first port of call for the upwardly mobile immigrant

elements into the urban world, at the turn of the century above all the peasant masses from Europe. Various indigenous elements have of course also been involved along the line. In the perspective of the general situation it seems clear that the rapid increase in the non-white lower class element in the cities is the latest phase in a process of long standing. The most important inference to be drawn from this is the high probability that it will prove to be temporary. The dispersion of the Negro into the new suburbia is as yet minimal, but there are clear signs that it is beginning. There is every reason to assume that the forces making for its acceleration are very powerful and that as early as the 1970 Census a major change will be visible. Two forces in particular operate in that direction, namely educational upgrading, and the erosion of the bottom layers of the occupational hierarchy, probably now accelerating because of automation.

The intriguing possibility is that this is not only the latest but will prove to be the last of the long series of "peasant" infusions into the American urban community. Indications point strongly in that direction. On the one side is the demonstrated absorptive power of the metropolitan-industrial complex as I have

called it; this clearly points toward the increasing predominance of "middle-class" patterns of life. On the other side is the exhaustion of the older reservoirs from which such population elements can come which lie within American jurisdiction, and the improbability that mass lower class immigration from outside will again be permitted. Considering the structuring of the "social problem" at least since the Civil War period, the gradual disappearance of the older type of urban lower class will certainly be one of the major social transformations of our time - incidentally one which was not foreseen by the social prognosticators of the last generation and is barely being considered even now.

From the point of view of the general social scientist the development of the U.S. Census is indeed a great boon. It is one of the developments which has contributed most to placing the task of empirical generalization about our society on a solid empirical base. I am indeed grateful to have had access to these early compilations of the 1960 results and to have been given the opportunity to suggest a few points about their significance in the light of sociological analysis of the trends of development of our society.