

changes in twentieth-century rural society

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At the outset we should define our terms. We are concerned in this session with *rural* society and not only with agricultural society, a distinction not always precise but nonetheless real. While farm life is rural, rural life is not confined to the farm; while the problems of the farmer and rural dweller today are often congruent, they are not always so. The 1960 census listed the *farm* population of the U.S. as 14.8 million and the *rural* population (including farmers) as 54 million. When we speak of rural society, therefore, we speak of one quarter of the national population, a minority of whom earn their living by farming.

None of us need to be told that changes in *rural* society over the past half century have been more drastic, perhaps, and have come more swiftly than changes in other sectors of society. One need only to take a brief trip through any part of rural America for evidence. Grant Wood's "American Gothic," that classic symbol of the rural character, appropriately enough hangs in a museum, for what it represents no longer really exists. The changes that have very nearly eliminated the people in that painting from the American scene are not recent; almost all the factors which lie beneath the transformation of rural life were already recognizable early in this century. The Report of the Country Life Commission, submitted to the Senate in 1909, could be read today with only a few changes to update its relevance.¹ A decade later, in 1919, the Committee on Country Life (founded in 1917) held its first National Conference for the study of rural life problems. The yearly reports of these conferences, which still continue, furnish a running commentary on rural social, economic and political changes.²

A discussion of changes in rural life since 1900 must be placed first of all within the context of the general changes that have occurred in American society during that period. Let us address ourselves briefly, then, to the first question: how has American society itself changed during these years?³ One must begin with certain massive facts. First, over

the past half century there has been an enormous rural-urban interchange of population, something neither surprising nor unexpected in a society where internal migration is a way of life. Since World War II nearly thirty million Americans have moved from rural to non-rural areas, a number equal to the entire population of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman has estimated that between 1950 and 1965, 500,000 to 600,000 persons migrated from the country to the city each year; present statistics from the Department of Agriculture indicate that 70% of the population now lives on 1.2% of the land.⁴

Second, as a result of this internal migration, and of course many other factors, the United States has become an *urban* society. This is neither a new nor startling fact, for it represents the culmination of a trend more than a century old. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the combined population of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles alone now equals the farm-rural population of the entire nation. This is not the place to explore the ramifications of this trend toward total urbanization, a characteristic not only of twentieth-century American society but of the world at large. What has happened in the United States, of course, is simply one manifestation of "a gigantic and pervasive revolution, the urbanization of the world. . .," as one sociologist calls it, by which all societies are becoming "urbanized, mechanized, industrialized, commercialized, specialized, and interdependent."⁵

Third, twentieth-century American society, like other Western cultures, has been transformed by technology, another fact which needs no elaboration here. The American social system has been under continuous pressure, by reason of an endemic technological revolution, for at least a century. If there is one salient fact about the recent history of American social change, it has been the growth and effect of scientific and technical knowledge.

Fourth, the United States in the twentieth century has developed a highly organized, elaborately interlocked, extremely complex economic system, accompanied by a tremendous increase in productivity and usable wealth. The extent of American affluence is difficult to comprehend at first glance. American productivity doubled between 1929 and 1960, and income more than doubled—a rate of increase unmatched by that of any society in modern history. As Galbraith has shown, today's American society is rich beyond even Roman dreams.

Against the background of these and other changes in social, technological and economic conditions over the past half century, we may next ask the second question: what changes have occurred in our major social institutions, institutions which rural society possesses in common with society at large? Sociologists seem to agree, more or less, on the following:⁶

1. Within the family unit, diminution of extended kinship ties, decreased continuity between generations and shifts in the position of women.
2. Alterations in social stratification, marked by a decrease in unskilled and laboring groups and an increase in so-called "white collar" and semi-skilled groups.
3. Greater importance of formal education as a mode of socialization, a selective mechanism and a channel of social mobility.
4. Increased interdependence of all sectors and units in society, with increased societal complexity. It is nearly impossible in twentieth-century society for anyone to lead an isolated or uncomplicated life. Political, economic, social and cultural interpenetration is one of the most obvious trends in modern society.
5. Alterations in political life, among them the growth in size and scope of governmental activity and influence; the development of organized interest groups; the growth and use of Federal authority; vast accretions of administrative and bureaucratic power; the emergence of the "welfare state"; the enormous expansion of the military as a political-industrial force.
6. Changes in social organization toward greater centralization, formality and impersonality. As the individual becomes more dependent on society in general, writes Robin Williams, "the long-term movement toward the dominance of large-scale formal organizations, is perhaps the most obvious single trend in the social structure of the twentieth century."⁷
7. Marked shifts in emphasis within the American system of social values. Sociologists have suggested that Americans of the 1960's, while retaining much the same beliefs that they did a half century ago, believe in them to different degrees and with different applications.⁸

This brings our third question: since rural society has naturally participated in twentieth-century social change, how has such change been reflected in the composition and quality of rural life? First, let us look briefly at recent changes in the agricultural sector of rural society.⁹ To put it bluntly, there are fewer farmers and farms than ever before. Since about 1910 the number of farmers and farms has continually and drastically decreased. From 1910 to 1950 farm population dropped 25%; the 1960 census showed an even larger rate of decrease over 1950, so that farm operators and workers now comprise less than 10% of the American labor force. At the same time, the number of farms has decreased sharply—however, these figures tend to be somewhat deceptive, since the trend has been for small farms to be absorbed into larger ones. (Michigan, for example, loses nine small farms every day, but gains three larger "commercial farms."¹⁰) By 1980 it is predicted that between 60% and 70% of all Michigan farms will be classified as "commercial," a trend char-

acteristic of other states with significant agricultural population. Nor is this all.

Nationally, the number of farms in the United States is due shortly, according to the latest predictions, for an even more spectacular decline—a million, or nearly one-third, will disappear in the next thirteen years. The decline will be greatest in the Northeast, the Southeast and Southern delta regions; least in the Great Lakes states, the corn belt, the plains states and the mountain and Pacific areas in that order. Instead of the 3,200,000 farms it has now, the United States will have 2,200,000 in 1980.¹¹

Yet despite the shrinkage in the number of farms and farmers over the past fifty years, American agricultural production has skyrocketed—fewer farmers, on larger farms, produce more food and fiber than ever before. Higher crop yields, improved plant and animal strains, control of pests and diseases, better fertilizers, the substitution of mechanical for animal power, the development of new land reserves and technological advances in machinery, among other factors, have all contributed to this spectacular productiveness. Between 1915 and 1950 agricultural production rose 75%, while within the past fifteen years it has more than doubled again.¹²

As farm population shrinks and large farms replace small ones, more and more farmers will of necessity turn to nonagricultural sources of income. In 1967, according to USDA figures, more than one-half of all American farmers had more non-farm than farm income; in other words, every other farmer earned less money from farming than he did from other enterprises, thereby forging an ever-tighter bond between farm and non-farm life in rural communities.¹³

Even these sparse indices suggest some of the tremendous changes in American agriculture over the past fifty years. Today's farm is larger than ever and more productive; its aim is not now, nor has it been for a generation, to provide the farmer with either a subsistence or a "way of life." It is a profit-making business, like any other business, invaded and transformed by the credit-card, hormone research, antibiotics, genetic manipulations, radioactive elements, new power sources, the latest accounting methods, even computers. John H. Davis, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, coined a highly descriptive term in 1956 to describe modern farm life—he called it "agribusiness." "The farmer in a business suit," writes Davis,

has taken the place of the old homesteader. His horsepower is bred in factories and his stock is fed by the white-frosted scientists in the laboratories that produce those fabulous substances known as antibiotics and hormones. His family farm is a costly, efficient, revved-up complex of fields, barns, and equipment with a gluttonous hunger for capital and managerial knowhow.¹⁴

The outstanding fact about the American agricultural economy since the close of World War II is that it has changed its base from the

operator-owned small farm to an agricultural business, demanding capital, complex managerial skills, specialized labor, greater technology and complete integration of the farm enterprise. The modern farm is a specialized corporate concern; once an unorganized industry, farming and its related occupations are one of the most thoroughly organized.¹⁵ Nearly every segment of agriculture supports educational and promotional organizations; general farm organizations, with government help, deal with problems of production, marketing and consumption; marketing and purchasing cooperatives penetrate into every community; private groups and public agencies interlace agriculture nationally. The farmer within the past generation has become something of the organization man and something of the bureaucrat.

As the life of the farmer has changed, so has the rural society of which he is a part. Numerous attempts have been made to identify and chart the alterations in rural life that mid-twentieth century conditions have wrought; not all, of course, agree on exactly what these have been, or on which can be specifically labelled "rural," or on the relative importance of some changes over others.¹⁶ But to choose among the more significant changes in rural life over the past half century, I should identify four: first, the increased interdependence of rural and urban life; second, what sociologists have called "rurbanization," that is, the interpenetration of rural and urban traits and values; third, changes in the character of rural population and the emergence of an ambiguous "fringe" society; fourth, the development of different relationships between rural society and government. I should like briefly to explore each in turn.¹⁷

Even the most casual observer cannot fail to note how closely today's rural life, both farm and non-farm, is intertwined with other sectors of the economy and society. The evidence confronts one at every turn. We know that more farmers are engaged in non-farm work than ever before, most of it in the city. The vertical integration of production, processing and distribution of agricultural products has indissolubly linked farm and city economic life. Expanding trade and service areas, surrounding cities, draw an increasingly large rural trade; supermarkets, shopping plazas and discount houses are rapidly superseding the crossroads store; the rural family's doctor and dentist practice in the city; the rural dweller goes to the city hospital for illness and to the city dealer for his car.¹⁸ Freeways, commuter buses, two cars in every rural garage—these have brought rural people directly into the orbit of urban life, and likewise have brought urban ways to rural society. Today's rural resident cannot survive without the city and its services; the city depends more and more on rural patronage for its economic well-being. Marketing specialists estimate that a city of 25,000 reaches as far as 50 miles away (and in the West, sometimes twice that far) for a significant amount of

its trade. One great change in rural society, then, has been its closer linkage with the city.

A result of this has been the "rurbanization" of country life, that is, an interchange of values and patterns of living between rural and urban societies. Farm population today resembles the urban population more than it does the farm population of 1900. Rural life, subject as it is to contemporary mass and urban pressures, is rapidly losing many of its differentiating characteristics, so that those attitudes and standards which guide both rural and non-rural people in their daily affairs are drawing closer together. Rural and urban people are becoming more alike in living habits, appearance, behavior, values, interests, even in the crimes they commit. Studies of national public opinion polls have shown that rural and urban people respond similarly to a majority of questions, with the degree of agreement so clear that it is often difficult to establish either "rural" or "urban" attitudes. It is only a matter of time, a relatively short time, before rural-urban differences in most standards of living, attitudes and values will have virtually disappeared.

"Rurbanization," or rural-urban fusion, is fast erasing old distinctions between town and country life. Social institutions, such as welfare, recreation, government, education and religion, are much the same today whether in country or city. Rural people are increasingly cosmopolitan in their outlook, social relationships and behavior to an extent which their fathers, much less their grandfathers, would have thought impossible. It seems significant that rural groups may now arrange through Sears or Montgomery Ward for excursions to Las Vegas or for round-the-world tours.

Many traditional open-country rural institutions, such as the one-room school, the country church, the grange hall or the sharply-defined rural neighborhood, have begun to disappear. The "little red schoolhouse" changed into the consolidated school and then into the community school, indistinguishable from its city counterpart except that it is often better designed and has more space. The appearance in rural communities of fire, police, sanitation and other such urbanized services, or of consolidated hospitals and libraries, helps to mark the change from rural to urbanized life. "Saturday night in town" is fast disappearing, since the rural dweller can spend any night he wishes in town and is in many ways a part of town life through the week. "Rurbanization," then, is one of the primary evidences of present-day rural change. The suggestion has been made, in fact, and not half-seriously, that the American farmer may one day in the future live in town and commute to his farm, as he did in medieval times.¹⁹

Another manifestation of change in the rural community has been a conspicuous revision of the character of the rural population and its social organization. Not only has the disparity between farm and non-farm rural population widened, but a new "fringe" society, neither city

nor country, has developed over the past 25 years.²⁰ This fringe population, still difficult to classify, includes those people who live beyond the organized suburbs—who may farm a bit and who may commute to work in the city or its environs—yet who are neither closely integrated into rural community life nor separated from it—clerks, office workers, service people, truckers, factory employees, semi-skilled workers, minor civil servants. The trailer park, a comparatively recent form of fringe living, houses a new kind of rural society, such as construction workers, military personnel, young couples, retirees and an unclassifiable assortment of transients, making a more or less impermanent population.

The fastest growing element of the population today, this “fringe” apparently marks a transition stage between suburban and rural life. Attempts by small towns to supplement or replace the old rural-farm tax base with another—service or tourist areas, “industrial parks” and the like—have created fringe areas by the hundreds. Their impact on rural life by reason of changed tax bases, demands for new services, an influx of adults, increased non-agricultural employment opportunities and the intrusion of predominantly urban standards and values have been great, swift and incalculable. Since some of these fringe communities eventually turn into suburbs, they constitute a key stage in the urbanizing process.

A fourth change in rural life has been a major shift in the relationship between rural society and both state and federal governments—a reflection of a general trend in societal-governmental relationships, but one of especial importance to rural communities. The rural community since World War II has become increasingly reliant on government at both levels for assistance, control and leadership. As rural society became more closely linked with the national society and economy, so Federal and state governments became more directly operative on all sectors of rural society, farm and non-farm alike. Social problems rising from population movement and urbanization—schools, roads, health services, sewerage disposal, water supply, welfare and relief—require government aid, and with such aid come policy, funds and control. What rural communities now need to do, to achieve and maintain acceptable modern standards of living and service, can be done only with subsidies, matching funds, loans or grants. Rural society, then, for the foreseeable future, will depend more than ever on government for support and direction. This is equally true both of its farm and non-farm elements; it is doubtful that many farms could exist without the USDA and its multitude of agencies, without state colleges of agriculture, experiment stations, extension services, conservation departments, the Forest Service, rural electrification, the Farm Credit Administration and assorted crop controls, price supports, storage and marketing facilities, insurance and so on.

Simultaneously, by reason of shrinking populations and widespread legislative reapportionment, rural society has lost a good deal of influence in state and federal politics. In simple arithmetic, fewer farmers

mean fewer farm votes; the rural dweller's political effectiveness diminishes while government's influence on his life grows. Nor is the pattern of politics in fringe and suburban areas the same as in rural society; their political allegiances are different, their leadership not rural, their political organizations built on a different base. In actuality, the suburban vote is now the decisive factor in a number of urban areas, and the fringe vote similarly important in county and occasionally state politics.

The impact of these changes in rural life over the past half century have been varied, far-reaching, basic. The configuration of change is far too complex to explore fully here, but certain results of these changes seem clear. I should identify five which seem to me particularly important. First, the trend toward depersonalization in rural life; second, a change in relationships within the rural family; third, the relocation of decision-making in rural society; fourth, certain modifications in rural social organization and its connections with other sectors of society; fifth, changes in the relationship of country life to the country itself, to the land, to nature.

As every observer of rural life has noted, and as no doubt every rural dweller himself has remarked, the face-to-face quality of personal relationships which has traditionally characterized country life is fast disappearing. Rural and small-town contacts are still more intimate and informal than those of the city, but there is a visible trend toward depersonalization in non-urban society. There are fairly obvious reasons for this: the transience of certain elements of the rural population; the separation of social and economic interests among those who live in the country and work in the city; the influx of suburban and semi-rural population into rural areas and the transfer with them of urban attitudes; the increased influence of non-rural institutions on rural people; the slow absorption of new arrivals in rural life; and others as well. It is unlikely that the day will come when country dwellers fail to greet one another on the road or street, any more than it will come when city dwellers do so, but differences in rural and urban relationships between individuals have perceptibly narrowed. The personalized quality of farm-rural acquaintance and socializing patterns is less apparent than among, say, the generation of thirty years ago.

Rural sociologists over the past two generations have noted consistently developing changes in organizational and relationship patterns within the rural family. It is no longer the same close knit social and economic unit—automobiles, consolidated schools, multiple incomes, radio and television and the expansion of recreation and service centers, among other things, have seen to that. Parents and children now may normally have much more activity beyond the home and family than within it and many interests which extend far beyond the limits of farm or town. Numerous studies have shown that in such matters as family

function and size, mate selection, kinship relations, authority arrangements and attitudes toward sex, marriage and divorce, for example, the rural family resembles the urban family much more closely than before.

A third effect of the closer integration of rural and urban life has been the removal of decision-making, in some important areas of rural policy, out of rural society. As rural and urban life intermingle, especially in the economic sector, those decisions which deeply influence rural society are increasingly made by non-rural dwellers. With the growth of commercial farming and the expanded employment of rural residents in non-rural business and industry, many policies which affect the direction and quality of rural life are no longer made by rural people. More and more of the judgments and rules which control and direct rural society today are made by state agencies, legislatures, bureaus, school districts, tax districts and so on.

Fourth, there has been a fundamental change in rural social organization. The deep-seated tradition of self-determination and personal independence, so long innate in rural society, has been partially replaced by a growing sense of interdependence. Today's rural dweller realizes that he is neither isolated nor insulated, that he belongs within a complex and intricate social construct from which he cannot be separated. There has been a significant decline in rural society of the importance of *primary* relationships (kinship groups, locality groups, church groups, close economic interest groups) and an increase in the importance of *secondary* relationships, such as cooperatives and farm organizations—the NFO, Farm Bureau, government agencies and business firms, for example. By reason of expanded education, improved communication and transportation, population change, industrial decentralization, economic integration and other factors, rural society is closely tied into a number of secondary social organizations. Rural residents belong to the Lions, Kiwanis, Masons, Knights of Columbus and Chambers of Commerce; Boy Scouts, Community Chest, Red Cross and other organizations are very much a part of rural life.²¹

More difficult to define, but nonetheless characteristic of recent rural life, has been the development of a different relation between the rural dweller and nature, or put another way, a gradual separation of country life from the country. This has been most visible, perhaps, on the farm, where mechanization and efficiency have powerfully affected the farmer's relationship to his land and animals. The increase in the numbers of "sundown farmers" who work in a factory by day and tractor at night by headlight; the introduction of big business methods in farm production; the virtual extinction of the horse and the disappearance of the five-cow dairy sideline—these are manifestations of the fact that the farmer, despite the persistent myth of his communion with nature, no longer has so much to do with it. Eggs, traditionally the farm wife's source of spending money, are now produced in volume by chickens in

wire cages, literally untouched by human hands. Although 4-H Clubs keep something of the traditional 'spirit of "nature" alive, it is also clear that Nature, with a capital *N*, no longer has the same meaning in rural life it once possessed. The "bedroom" resident who works in the city while his wife clerks in a supermarket and his children bus to a new school does not have much to do with Nature, beyond the garden behind his garage. The farmer now alters Nature to his interests—cows freshen the year around, lambs are born in the fall to bring a better price, the flow of production is no longer seasonal, the rhythm of nature no longer his guide.

What problems have been created by these, and other, changed conditions and relationships of rural life? Some of the more important can be grouped, I believe, under four general headings:²²

1. Loss of a sense of community, a lack of cohesiveness in rural society. The trend of rural life over the past half century has been centripetal; the impermanence of some of its population, the gravitational attractions of city life, the transfer of the decision-making process beyond the community—these and other things have tended to loosen the once tight bonds of rural society. It has been difficult for the rural dweller to maintain a sense of place, of roots, of community identification. Rural areas now, though fifty miles distant, tend to identify with the nearest metropolitan area both through convenience and necessity; at the same time the metropolitan area ("Greater Minneapolis," "Wayne County," "Chicago-land") has tended to include and absorb the rural community. Rural life is no longer so sure of itself, nor certain of its values.

2. Loss of enlightened, energetic rural leadership. The movement to the city, loss of population, economic integration of country and city, the social involvement of rural with urban life and other factors have tended to draw off the best rural leadership. One study of a rural Iowa community has shown that sixty percent of the area's high school graduates left the community within a year of graduation; at the same time that young people move out, older people tend to move in, thus replacing the most productive and energetic potential leadership group with the least.²³ Nor is there consistently available in rural communities where leadership does exist, a modern, responsive, adaptable planning structure within which good leadership may operate. The more attractive sources of power and challenges to leadership do not lie in rural areas today; too often leadership in the rural community tends to gravitate toward the remnants of an older elite, into the hands of less sophisticated and less educated groups whose qualifications may rest chiefly on seniority. To develop and to retain better informed, more aggressive and imaginative rural leaders, and to establish contexts within which they can function effectively, is one of the most pressing problems of contemporary rural society.

3. Difficulties of absorbing new arrivals into full membership and participation in rural community life. No adequate machinery exists for uniting the professional man, the rural factory worker, the white collar employee, the farmer and small town merchant, for example, into a cooperative and cohesive group. Newcomers to rural communities often find it difficult to establish themselves as full participants in political, social and institutional life. Conflict—over schools, taxes, roads, welfare, services, zoning, voting franchises, recreational facilities and the like—is more common than cooperation between old residents and new arrivals.

4. Inadequate opportunities for employment, business enterprise, investment, education and recreation. Rural unemployment is high, youth delinquency rates rising, investment declining, community life stagnant in many rural communities—these are the marks of a deteriorating society. Of the fourteen million jobs created in the United States over the past fifteen years, only a few have appeared in rural areas. For every 177 rural youths who reach working age each year, there are only 100 rural jobs. The great pull of twentieth-century urban life robs the rural county of population, opportunity, energy and leadership; for a century the legend has been that you go to the city—as Horatio Alger's heroes did—to make your fortune, and there is not much in rural life today to counteract it. Of the 600,000 people who arrived in American cities last year, almost all of them came from a static society which seemed no longer to offer opportunity or challenge, and to some offered no longer even a competent living. Despite the myth of the pleasures of country and small town life, a large proportion of rural migrants, realistically, are likely to gain greater rewards from moving to the city than they can expect to receive by staying at home. Migrants to the Detroit auto plants, for example, no doubt receive better educational facilities, medical care, welfare and community services than ninety percent of their hamlets of origin could ever provide, to say nothing of wages.²⁴

The speed and magnitude of change have created deep-seated conflicts between the traditional system of goals and values held by the rural dweller and the goal-value system of the mass, urbanized, industrialized twentieth-century society which constantly intrudes upon it. The reports of the numerous conferences and discussions of rural life over the past twenty years almost unanimously display confusion, uncertainty and doubt concerning the rural community's concept of itself and its justification for existence. Do the traditional values of rural living still have relevance? Do they, or should they, have validity in an industrialized, urbanized century? Are the aims of rural life worth pursuing—indeed are they remotely attainable—in a culture to which they seem no longer useful? Is American rural society to be preserved, and if it is, can it survive the tremendous pressures which the past fifty years have brought and the next fifty will bring against it? These and similar

questions furnish themes for dozens of editorials, conferences, studies and bulletins year by year. The deeply-held, long-cherished and traditionally-rooted value system of rural society seems today directly at odds with the dominant values and goals of an increasingly urban, technological, industrialized culture, to which it must somehow adapt. The most urgent problem of American rural society today, writes Olaf Larson, centers on "its adjustment to the rapid cultural changes associated with the complex of impersonal social forces represented especially by science and technology," and he might have added, by the very real impact of urbanization.²⁵

The crisis in rural life brought on by this conflict of rural and urban values, however, has recently begun to elicit a number of interesting reassessments of country *vis-a-vis* city situation. The urgent and potentially explosive crisis in urban life has in turn focused a great deal of attention on rural problems as they relate to and influence those of the city. A possible contributory cause of urban unrest in the long, hot and destructive summer of 1967, urbanologists have conjectured, may have been the accelerated pace of migration to the cities, especially toward the North from the South. This has tended, according to Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, to "create a stress situation" which "leads to riots, human withdrawal, and is altering man's reactions and attitudes toward society and his fellow men," and which has "twisted America's distribution of people and space out of kilter." Some relief for urban tension and violence, then, may lie in making country life sufficiently attractive to reduce and eventually stem the flow of migration cityward. Ironically, therefore, there is greatly increased interest in the problems of *rural* society in order to alleviate some of those currently facing *urban* society.²⁶

At the same time, the contemporary crisis of the city, viewed from the country, has brought new confidence to those who were not long ago beginning to feel that urban sprawl would eventually engulf them all and that this was perhaps the inexorable verdict of history. It is equally ironic that at the very time that rural patterns and urban life are drawing more closely together, rural society's rejection of the city has never been more emphatic. The city's persistent troubles—from smog to schools to riots—have begun to convince the country dweller that his way of life has something to offer the future that urban society does not and cannot. The aims of rural life are gradually being refined into a belief that the country should be as unlike the city as possible—that it resist the city, offer alternatives to it and preserve from it those virtues and values so long associated with rural American culture. If this sounds as if it were a continuation of the Jeffersonian-agrarian theme, or of the ancient city-country dichotomy, it is because it is precisely that.²⁷

Jefferson's view of the "great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health, and the liberties of man" attracts greater numbers of supporters

each year, as the evidence of a thousand suburban developments named “Country Acres,” “Pine Manor” or “Walnut Heights” attests. If the city represents crime, crowds, traffic, pollution and taxes—among other things—then rural society is presumed to represent space, fresh air, neighborliness, tranquility. Urban dwellers today, the same ones who have tended to look at rural residents as “hicks” and who have traditionally professed hostility toward many aspects of rural values and culture, dream of a place in the country (or at least the suburbs), set up barbecue pits on thirty-second floor balconies, scour the countryside in search of quaint buttermilks and milkstools and (as the figures show) form square dance clubs by the dozens. As city life complicates and its problems thicken, city dwellers go to great pains and inconvenience to preserve cherished rural practices and ideas.²⁸ Sentimental vestiges of rural living, such as “every boy should grow up with a dog,” to cite an example, make boys, dogs, parents and neighbors miserable in thousands of apartment houses, while few city shopping centers are without a “Country Store,” complete with fake coal stove and red crepe-paper flames.

This resurgence of resentment against the city has brought with it a parallel reawakening of rural confidence, a renewal of rural nerve. If the city is bad, then those values of rural life which have been in eclipse in our century may be good; it may not be the final verdict of history, after all, that megalopolis must cover the land—or if such seems to be, it is worthwhile to resist it. An excellent example of this is represented by a full-page advertisement titled “Crisis in our Cities: What Can Rural America Do About It?” sponsored by the National Rural Cooperative Association in September, 1967.²⁹ After noting the shift of population to the cities and locating reasons for it in the lack of opportunities in rural life, the text continues:

Since its early days, our nation has periodically faced a crisis in its cities.

And, since the early days, the root cause has been the same . . . people flocking to the cities in search of something better . . . people leaving areas of little opportunity in search of fulfillment for themselves and their children.

In earlier times, the people came from overseas. Nearly all of them came from the land which no longer provided them with a living.

Today the people who fill our cities in search of a better life . . . nearly 600,000 of them a year . . . come from our own countryside, nearly all of them from the land which no longer offers them a living.

Explaining that modern city life involves a number of unpleasant features, the advertisement points out that seventy percent of the nation’s population is crowded “into space covered by brick and mortar and macadam, overladen with smog-filled air . . . treeless, flowerless, hopeless.” Rural America, the advertisement asserts, offers relief and remedy:

Rural America boasts more than space. It has fresh air and sun and sky and water. It has room for kids to run barefoot through grass covered with early morning dew, hills covered with clean snow for sleds and skis, fields for people and dogs to romp in.

And it has more.

In the towns and villages of rural America there are uncrowded streets and sidewalks. There is electric power and transportation. There are good roads to bring the products of hard-working people to the great market places.

It behooves rural America, then, to reaffirm its traditional goals and develop the opportunities it lacks, so that it can "provide the space and living room city people so desperately seek," and "restore the balance between rural and urban America." The National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders, appointed by President Johnson and headed by Governor Kerner of Illinois, seven months later made exactly the same recommendation in somewhat less eloquent language, suggesting that one way to eliminate urban violence is by "getting people out of big, crowded cities and into small towns and rural areas."³⁰

The point of this is clear. Whatever the rhetoric, these statements represent what many non-urban Americans feel and what they believe the future of their kind of life may be. Rural society holds values urban society does not; it involves a recognition and preservation of sets of values a balanced and healthy nation must retain. The goal of rural life, then, is to maintain those anti-urban values, the "real values," as the advertisement puts it, which accrue from the rural experience. However rural society has changed, and may change, what it means in the American mythos does not.

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footnotes

1. For the Commission report, see Senate Document 705, Sixtieth Congress, 1909. The members included Henry Wallace, Liberty Hyde Bailey, Gifford Pinchot and Kenyon Butterfield, among other noted authorities on farm and rural life. The report listed as problems: deficiencies in rural education, soil depletion, inadequate rural credit, lack of rural community organization and leadership, rural health problems, poor communications, need for agricultural research, movement to the city and others. The Commission hoped to encourage, with Federal assistance, "a gradual rebuilding of a new agriculture and a new rural life."

2. Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country Life Movement* (New York, 1911), provides information on the early history of the "Country Life Movement" of the early decades of the century. The reports of the American Country Life Association, organized by the original 1917 committee, furnish a mine of historical information of changes in rural life over the years. *The Yearbook of Agriculture*, published annually by the Department of Agriculture, is another invaluable source of information on rural-farm developments. See especially the edition of 1940, *Farmers in a Changing World*, a twelve-hundred page survey, and the edition of 1963, titled *A Place to Live*, a comprehensive recent treatment.

3. A convenient survey is Robin Williams, "American Society in Transition," in James Copp, ed., *Our Changing Rural Society* (Ames, Iowa, 1964), 3-39.

4. Madison, Wisconsin, *Capital Times*, November 11, 1967. According to the 1960 Census, North Dakota, with 65% of its population classified as rural, is the nation's most rural state, followed in order by Mississippi, Alaska, West Virginia, Vermont, South Dakota, North Carolina, South Carolina, Arkansas, Kentucky and Idaho. The South, with 41.5% of its population classified as rural, is the most rural region; however, following the movement of the Negro to

the city since 1940, the nationwide proportion of Negroes living in rural areas is now less than the proportion of whites.

5. Chauncey Harris, "Pressures of Residential-Industrial Land Use," in William Thomas, ed., *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth* (Chicago, 1956), 881. David Weimer, *City and Country in America* (New York, 1962), is an excellent historical treatment of the rural-urban themes in American life.

6. Williams, "American Society," provides a good summary.

7. Williams, "American Society," 24. One-half the American labor force, for example, is employed by only five hundred industrial corporations.

8. Talcott Parsons, for example, suggests that "instrumental activism," that is, the positive evaluation of anything which supports or increases the capacity to achieve or produce, is the dominating value of American society today. See Max Black, *The Social Theories of Talcott Parsons* (New York, 1961) for an examination of Parsons' ideas.

9. For an excellent summary see Roland Mighell, *American Agriculture* (New York, 1955), Chaps. 1 and 2. See also the report of an important symposium held at Michigan State University in 1961, attended by five former Secretaries of Agriculture—Wallace, Wickard, Anderson, Brannan and Benson—published as *Agriculture in an Uneasy World* (East Lansing, 1961). Consult also the report of the American Assembly, *United States Agriculture: Perspectives and Prospects* (New York, 1955).

10. John Doneth, Michigan State University Department of Agricultural Economics, Detroit *Free Press*, August 29, 1967. A "commercial" farm is one with \$20,000 or more yearly gross income. Michigan had 200,000 farms in 1930, and in January, 1967, an estimated 94,000. Nationally, the number has decreased from 4,097,000 in 1959 to 3,252,000 in 1967.

11. Report of the National Advisory Committee on Food and Fiber, Detroit *Free Press*, October 4, 1967. The Northeast, according to predictions, will lose nearly 40% of its farms, the Southeast and Southern Delta more than 30%.

12. Olaf Larson and Everett Rogers, "Rural Society in Transition," in Copp, *Changing Rural Society*, 65 ff. See also Otto Heiberg on social and economic trends in agricultural change, in *Proceedings of the American Country Life Association* (Berlin, Wisconsin, 1960); Reuben Hecht and Eugene McKibben, "Efficiency of Labor," *Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington, 1960), a Department of Agriculture publication. The USDA report on farm income in 1966 shows that commercial farms made up 16.2% of all farms, as compared with 7.9% in 1959, but these commercial farms accounted for 55% of total net farm income.

13. Detroit *Free Press*, August 9, 1967. The average nonfarm income was \$2738, compared to \$2071 in 1959.

14. John H. Davis and Kenneth Hinshaw, *Farmer in a Business Suit* (New York, 1957), Intro., x, and Davis, "From Agriculture to Agribusiness," *Harvard Business Review*, XXXIV (1956), 107-15.

15. Earl Butz, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Purdue University, "Agriculture in 1970," in Stanley Andrews, *The Farmer's Dilemma* (Washington, D.C., 1961), 160-62. See also Sherman E. Johnson, "Changes in American Farming," *Department of Agriculture Miscellaneous Publication #707* (Washington, D.C., 1949).

16. For example, Edmund Brunner and J. H. Kolb, during the thirties, published a pioneer survey, *Rural Social Trends* (New York, 1933); in the forties Carl C. Taylor edited an important collection of essays, *Rural Life in the United States* (New York, 1949). Two recent studies are Everett Rogers, *Social Change in Rural Society* (New York, 1960), and James R. Copp, *Our Changing Rural Society* (Ames, 1964). For a theory of rural change, see C. P. Loomis and J. A. Beegle, *Rural Sociology: The Strategy of Social Change* (Englewood Cliffs, 1957). Philip F. Aylesworth, *Keeping Abreast of Change: USDA Federal Extension Service, Agricultural Information Bulletin #215* (Washington, D.C., 1959), lists forty-three changes in rural society since 1900.

17. For an excellent summary, see Olaf Larson and Everett Rogers, "Rural Society in Transition," in Copp, *Changing Rural Society*, 80-108. Useful also is Joseph Ackerman, "An Appraisal of our Changing Rural Communities," *Proceedings of the 33rd Conference of the American Country Life Association* (Chicago, 1954).

18. See Arthur Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in a Mass Society* (Princeton, 1959); and also Dwight Naismith, "The Rural Small Town," in *A Place to Live* (Washington, 1963).

19. Otto Heiberg, "The Community in 1965," *Proceedings of the 39th Conference of the American Country Life Association* (Berlin, Wisconsin, 1960).

20. A pioneer study is Solon T. Kimball, *The New Social Frontier: The Fringe*, Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin #360, Michigan State University (East Lansing, 1949). See also Milo Swanton, "Overalls and Gray Flannel Suits," *Proceedings of the 30th Conference of the American Country Life Association* (Chicago, 1957), 80-88; and Thomas Ford and Willis Sutton, "The Impact of Change in Rural Communities and Fringe Areas," Copp, *Changing Rural Society*, 198-229.

21. See the report of the Committee of the International Conference on Social Work, *Rural*

and *Urban Community Development in the United States* (New York, 1962), for further discussion of this trend.

22. The theme of the 1960 meeting of the American Country Life Association was "Rural Life in 1965," a thorough discussion of rural problems projected into the near future, reprinted in *Proceedings* (Ames, Iowa, 1960).

23. J. M. Bohlen and R. E. Wakeley, "Intentions to Migrate and Actual Migration of Rural High School Graduates," *Rural Sociology*, XV (December, 1950), 328-34.

24. See Dwight A. Naismith, "The Small Rural Town," *The Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington, 1963), 177-85. Recognition of this has led to some far-reaching and controversial discussion. Robert A. Levine, assistant director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, pointed out in 1967 that most rural poor would probably be "better off in urban slums than starving in the Delta and other parts of the South." Conceding that rural-to-urban migration is a long-term trend, Levine suggested that rather than attempting to reverse it, government agencies might more profitably "facilitate the movement under good conditions. . . , using our money for effective programs which will prepare people for movement." See Detroit *Free Press* Washington Bureau dispatch, October 23, 1967.

25. Olaf Larson, "Basic Goals and Values of Farm People," *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames, Iowa, 1961), 143-58, an informative discussion of the value problem. See also John M. Brewster, "Rural Beliefs and Values," *Proceedings of the American Country Life Association* (Ames, 1960), 46-54, and Roy C. Buck, "An Interpretation of Rural Values," in the 1960 edition of *Yearbook of Agriculture*.

26. Congress, for example, on October 27, 1967, approved a bill establishing a Commission on Balanced Economic Development to search for ways of establishing a more equitable rural-urban balance; later, on December 9, the President's National Advisory Committee on Rural Poverty suggested a massive program for rural rehabilitation, as a way not only to improve the quality of rural life but to reverse the trend toward urban crowding.

27. See, for example, Elmer Peterson's *Forward to the Land* (New York, 1941), an eloquent plea to return to the small town, small farm way of life; or the address of Paul Johnson, editor of *Prairie Farmer*, to the Country Life Association meetings of 1956 in *Proceedings*; or the address of A. F. Wileden in *Proceedings* (1957). Harry Jaffa's "Agrarian Virtue and Republican Freedom," in *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames, Iowa, 1961), 45-62 is an excellent historical essay on the agrarian theme in American thought.

28. A good study of the anti-urban tradition in America is Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual versus the City* (Cambridge, 1962).

29. See *Newsweek*, September 18, 1967.

30. *Chicago Tribune*, February 3, 1968. John A. Baker, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, and William McCandless, federal co-chairman of the Ozarks Regional Commission, testified at length concerning this recommendation. McCandless visualized a rejuvenation of small town life, dependent on rural rehabilitation, "to meet the hopes and aspirations" of American society.