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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Economic Research Service

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RECENT CHANGES IN THE AGED POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES *

Talk by Gladys K. Bowles
Economic and Statistical Analysis Division
at the 41st Annual Agricultural Outlook Conference
Washington, D. C., 1:30 P. M. Wednesday, November 20, 1963

At the time of the first annual agricultural outlook conference in April 1923, persons 65 and over comprised about 5 percent of the population of the United States. Now, 40 conferences later, persons of these ages number nearly 18 million and are 9.4 percent of the total. The increasing number and proportion of older persons, changes in their distribution throughout the country, and in their population characteristics have significant social and economic implications. The behavior of individuals in relation to the production and consumption of goods and services varies with age and other characteristics, as do social-psychological attitudes and welfare and public assistance requirements.

This paper deals with recent changes in the growth and selected characteristics of the elderly population in the United States. But, as T. Stanton Dietrich of Florida State University commented at the 1962 Annual Southern Conference on Gerontology:

> "I do not think we must relegate the older population to a compendium of statistical facts . . . These statistics represent people. Their economic, psychological, physiological, and sociological needs have increased with their numerical growth. Thought, care, and planning are sorely needed as never before in our history . . . I would emphasize the fact that while we think of the older population as people and not simply as statistics, we also should remember they are an integral, not separate, part of our entire population." 1/

Over a third increase in decade. (Refer to table 1 and chart 1.)

Many of the trends in the growth patterns of the elderly population are widely known. Nevertheless, it is useful in this session on aging to comment briefly on some of the major changes and trends.

In April 1960, about 16.6 million people in the United States were 65 years old or older. This was an increase of 35 percent over the number of such ages in 1950. The rise was brought about in varying degrees by differences in size of cohorts of persons born between 1885 and 1894 in comparison with those born between 1875 and 1884, net immigration from other countries, and to increased expectation of life. T. Lynn Smith, of the University of Florida, has estimated that these

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* The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Virginia C. Martin in the preparation of this paper.

1/ T. Stanton Dietrich. Comments on paper by T. Lynn Smith, (see footnote 2/).

factors accounted for 65, 18, and 17 percents of the increase, respectively. 2/

In addition to the group generally considered the elderly, another 16 million persons were between the ages of 55-64 in 1960, about three-fourths of whom will live to become a part of the elderly population in the present decade.

Women increased more than men. (Refer to table 1 and chart 1.)

Among the elderly, every single-year-of-age group was larger in 1960 than it was 10 years earlier, 3/ and, as chart 1 shows, the increases have been somewhat larger among women than among men. Between 1950 and 1960, women increased by 40 percent, half again the increase in the number of older men. As a result, there was an even larger number of women in these ages for every 100 men than there had been in the preceding decade, a situation that has become widely publicized and that has many implications for action programs for the elderly.

Because of age differences at time of marriage, the greater tendency of men to marry or to remarry, and the longer life expectancy of women, more women than men find themselves without their spouses by the time they reach age 65. Programs and plans for the elderly need to take account of the larger proportions of women who may be living alone when they reach advanced ages.

Nonwhites increased more than whites. (Refer to table 1.)

In recent decades, the nonwhite population 65 and over has increased at a more rapid rate than has the white. However, because of different age structure within the white and nonwhite populations, the nonwhite is still a younger population, on the whole. Only 6 percent of the nonwhite population in 1960 was 65 and over compared with 10 percent of the white.

Older persons increased more in urban areas; are a higher proportion on farms. (Refer to table 1 and charts 2 and 3.)

Seventy percent of the people 65 years old and over lived in urban areas in 1960, 22 percent in rural-nonfarm areas, and 8 percent lived on farms. Midwestern

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2/ T. Lynn Smith. "Changes in the Number and Distribution of the Aged Population of the United States." In Aging in a Changing Society. Report on the Eleventh Annual Southern Conference on Gerontology, University of Florida Institute of Gerontology. Gainesville, 1962.

3/ Some noticeable age "heaping" is evident in chart 1. Heaping means overstatement in the censuses of ages ending in certain digits, such as 0, 5, even numbers, age 65, etc. Some reduction in age heaping has occurred over the decades as more persons have birth certificates or other exact records of their birth date, but some heaping is still apparent in the 1960 Census data. Some changes in heaping have resulted from the self-enumeration and from the use of a question on date of birth rather than on completed year of age. The preference apparent in 1960 for years ending in 4 and 9 is a result in part of the overreporting of years of birth ending in 0 and 5. The seemingly large increase of persons aged 59 represents overreporting of birth date as 1900. (See 1960 Census of Population, Detailed Characteristics, U. S. Summary, PC (1) 1D.)

and Southern States had higher percentages of older people in the rural areas than did the Northeastern and Western States. Changes in the number of older persons in the urban and rural populations from one period to another are difficult to determine precisely because of the differences in residence-class definitions and reclassification of areas from rural to urban or vice versa in the various censuses, but it is evident that there have been great increases in the number of older persons in the rural-nonfarm and urban populations and a decline in the number of farms. The numbers in the nonfarm populations are swelled by the older farm people who have migrated from their farm homes. Taking the residence data as enumerated in each of the last three censuses, it appears that the proportion of persons 65 and over in the total farm population increased from 6.6 to 9.3 percent, giving the farm population the highest percentage of older persons among the residence classes in 1960. Chart 2 shows the age structure among older people in each residence class.

Unlike the nonfarm population, the farm population had more males than females among the older group, as chart 3 indicates. The sex ratio, that is, the number of males per 100 females, for the farm population is over 100 for most age groups 55 and over, while the nonfarm population has ratios of less than 100. Women migrate from farms at higher rates than do males. Older women whose spouses die are likely to move away from their farm homes, whereas widowed men may remain as long as they continue to carry on farming activities. Thus, the farm ratio rises to 123 at ages 70-74 before dropping off to less than 100 at very old ages.

In 1960, the rural nonfarm population 65 years old and over had a somewhat higher proportion of nonwhites than did the elderly urban population, 8.3 percent compared with 7.5 percent, while in the farm population nonwhites comprised 7.9 percent of the total in these ages. Chart 3 shows the percentage nonwhites comprised of each age-residence group among older persons in 1960.

Important changes in distribution among States occurred. (Refer to table 2 and charts 4 and 5.)

New York had the largest number of people 65 and over in both 1950 and 1960, followed by California, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas, as might be expected since these States had the largest populations of all ages. Next in 1960 were Michigan, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Florida and Missouri. All of these States had more than half a million people 65 and over in 1960, with the first three having more than a million. Iowa had the highest percent of its population 65 and over, nearly 12 percent, followed by Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Vermont, Florida, Massachusetts, Maine, and Kansas. States with lowest proportions of the aged were Alaska and Hawaii. All States showed numerical increases in the elderly population between 1950 and 1960, and all but Delaware, Nevada, and Alaska had increases in the proportion that the 65 and over comprised of the total population of the State.

Over 40 percent of the total U.S. increase in persons 65 and over between 1950 and 1960 was accounted for by California, New York, Florida, Pennsylvania, Texas and Illinois. These States were among those with the largest numbers in 1960. On a percentage basis, Florida was highest, with an increase of 133 percent, and Arizona's elderly also more than doubled. Two other States, Nevada and New Mexico ranked above California on relative increase, while Texas, Hawaii, Wyoming, New Jersey and Utah were lower, but all had increases of more than 40 percent in the decade. At the other end of the scale, Vermont, Alaska, Maine and New Hampshire had increases below 20 percent.

The demographic processes causing the differences in growth in the elderly among the States are: (1) varying numbers of births during the periods the persons in the 1950 and 1960 populations 65 years old and over were born, thus producing differences in the size of the age cohorts advancing into the elderly group; (2) differential volume and direction of internal migration and foreign immigration; and (3) differences in the mortality rates in various time periods and parts of the country. It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine the degree to which each of these factors may have operated to produce the changes illustrated above. Nevertheless, since internal migration is such an important factor in the redistribution of the older population, as well as of the population of other ages, I shall comment briefly on some preliminary data we have compiled on the migration of older people during the 1950-60 decade. 4/

Even though all States had numerical increases in persons 65 and over between 1950 and 1960, 33 States and the District of Columbia experienced net losses through migration of people who were 65 or older in 1950 or who reached age 65 some time during the decade. Greatest net losses through migration occurred in New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Massachusetts and Michigan, States among those which had the largest numerical increases in elderly population during the decade. The increases in elderly population of these States would have been even greater had not large numbers of persons migrated from these States.

Florida and California received by far the greatest number of older persons through migration during the decade, nets of 256,000 and 171,000, respectively, absorbing nearly four-fifths of the net loss from the sending States. Texas, Arizona, and Colorado were next in order with a total inmigration of 73,000; gains in the rest of the receiving States were minor.

In addition to the migration of older persons which is shown by these data, many others moved between States who died before the 1960 Census of Population. Others moved from one residence to another within the same States. Our study of net migration, to be published in 1964, will include estimates of net migration for each county and other areas of the United States by age, and sex, and by color (in those areas where nonwhites are a sizeable proportion of the total population). Preliminary results show a pattern of movement of the older population from the rural or nonmetropolitan areas to the areas of larger population concentration, as is generally true of the population of younger ages.

Although there have been large differences in numerical and relative increases in the elderly population among the States, T. Lynn Smith has pointed out that:

> "Perhaps the most significant feature of this changing distribution is the tendency toward a more equitable distribution of the elderly among the States. This is to say that as one decade succeeds another, the proportions of those of 65 and over in the various States are tending to move toward that in the Nation as a whole." 5/

On the basis of indexes showing the extent to which each State had more or

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4/ Data are from a project carried on cooperatively by the Economic Research Service and Oklahoma State University, and are subject to revision.

5/ T. Lynn Smith, op. cit.

less than its pro rata share of the population 65 and over for 1930, 1940 and 1950, Smith has indicated a strong tendency toward a more equitable distribution with ranges on the index diminishing from 102 to 83 to 72, respectively. Between 1950 and 1960, 25 States and the District of Columbia moved toward the national average, 19 moved away from the national average, and 4 made no changes. The range in the index had diminished only slightly from 72 to 70 in 1960. If the 1950-60 migration patterns continue, it appears that we will move toward a more inequitable distribution in 1970 than in 1960.

The concentration of older persons within States has never been uniform, of course, and the migration patterns of the 1950-60 decade, along with other factors, have produced many counties in which the percentages of older people are considerably above the national average. In States receiving large numbers of older people, certain areas are becoming known as retirement communities. Areas with warm climate, many days of sunshine a year, or other amenities, are particularly attractive. "Sun" cities, or their equivalents, have been developed specifically for retired people--with innovations in housing and equipment, shopping and recreational facilities, and other things, to meet the needs of an aging couple or the elderly person who is alone. Many of the residents of these retirement communities are inmigrants from distant counties or States. In other counties there are disproportionate numbers of older people due to the outmigration of large numbers of the young.

The map on the board (not duplicated in this paper) shows counties in each State in which the percentage of persons 65 years old and over is considerably above the national average. The concentration of elderly people in certain counties in Florida because of inmigration is apparent, whereas counties of the Midwest and Southwest are those typifying the aging of population through outmigration of the young.

1970 elderly population likely to number around 20 million. (Refer to chart 4).

According to recent projections of the Bureau of the Census 6/, the population 65 years and over may number around 20 million in 1970, with all States having increases over 1960, but with some changes occurring in the rank order of States having the largest numbers. The top six at the beginning of the previous 2 decades (New York, California, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio and Texas) are likely to retain their leadership in numbers of elderly people. Florida, which moved from 15 th to 10th largest between 1950 and 1960, may move to seventh place by 1970, and be followed by Michigan and New Jersey. Arkansas rather than Iowa may have the largest proportion of its population in the elderly category, but New Mexico which has had the lowest proportion for several decades (among the 48 States) is likely to retain this position.

The projections utilized here, which are subject to revision, would portend a widening of the range on the index measuring States' pro rata shares of the population 65 years old and over, from 70 in 1960 to around 90 in 1970 (for 48 States and the District of Columbia). Nineteen States would move toward and 27 States

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6/ Data from the Bureau of the Census, consistent with projections for the population 55 years old and over, published in the Manpower Report of the President. The White House, Washington, D. C., 1963.

and D. C. would move away from the national percentage. Two States would make no changes.

We do not have projections of the distribution among residence groups of the population 65 and over by 1970, but it is likely, if present trends continue, that both the rural and urban populations will have higher proprotions of older people at the end of this decade than at the beginning and that their proportion in the farm population will continue to be higher than in nonfarm areas. Women will continue to outnumber men in 1970, and elderly nonwhites will increase proportionately more than whites.

Conclusions:

The growth in numbers and changing relative position of elderly people have already had marked social and economic impacts, and new impacts will be felt if the anticipated growth and redistribution occurs. All States will have more older people in the future, but some States and areas within them will have a disproportionate share of the growth. These older people will require goods and services for an increasing number of years after they reach age 65 because they will live longer. In a recent article, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company pointed out that women who had reached age 65 in 1960 might on the average expect to live an additional 16 years, while men might expect to live an additional 13 years. 7/ Estimates prepared by the Department of Labor further indicate that men who reached age 65 in 1960 may average 6.5 years in retirement 8/, about double the average retirement years men reaching this age could have expected at the beginning of this century. The improvement of education for retirement and of retirement activity programs, as well as provisions for the assurance of adequate income and for housing, health, medical care and other needs are of paramount importance to those interested in the welfare of the Nation's elderly, collectively and as individuals with separate and different wants and desires.

7/ Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, Statistical Bulletin. "Progress in Longevity Since 1850." Volume 44, July 1963.

8/ U. S. Department of Labor. Manpower Report No. 2 : "The Length of Working Life for Males, 1900-60."

Table 1.--Selected characteristics of persons 65 years old and over, 1960, and those 65 years old and over as a percent of total 1960, 1950, and 1940

Sex, color, and residence of age group 65 years old and over	Number of persons, 1960	Percentage change		Percentage of group that was 65 years old and over		
		1950-60	1940-50	1960	1950	1940
	Thou.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.
Total	16,560	34.7	36.1	9.2	8.1	6.8
Male	7,503	29.1	31.6	8.5	7.7	6.7
Female	9,056	39.7	40.3	10.0	8.5	7.0
White	15,304	34.5	35.7	9.6	8.4	7.1
Male	6,908	28.8	31.3	8.8	8.0	6.9
Female	8,396	39.6	39.9	10.4	8.9	7.3
Nonwhite	1,256	37.5	40.3	6.1	5.6	4.7
Male	595	32.9	35.0	6.0	5.6	4.9
Female	661	41.9	45.8	6.3	5.6	4.6
Urban	11,339	44.6	1/	9.1	8.1	6.8 2/
Rural	4,869	9.3	1/	9.0	8.2	6.9 2/
Rural-nonfarm	3,612	1/	1/	8.9 2/	8.6 2/	7.3 2/
Rural-farm	1,256	1/	1/	9.3 2/	7.6 2/	6.6 2/

Marital status, 1960

Sex and age	Total	Percentage	
		Married, with spouse present	Never married, widowed, divorced or separated
	Thou.	Pct.	Pct.
Males	7,309	67.0	33.0
65-69 years	2,883	75.6	24.4
70-74	2,139	69.4	30.6
75-79	1,318	60.8	39.2
80-84	635	49.4	50.6
85 and over	333	34.2	65.8
Females	8,898	34.7	65.3
65-69 years	3,303	48.5	51.5
70-74	2,522	36.4	63.6
75-79	1,659	24.9	75.1
80-84	883	13.9	86.1
85 and over	530	6.3	93.7

1/ Not computed due to definition changes. 2/ Excludes Alaska and Hawaii.

Note: Percentages for residence classes are based on data from the decennial censuses without adjustment for definition changes.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1960 figures for residence and marital status are based on a 25 percent sample of the population. Total population 65 years old and over, from the sample count is 16,207,237 compared with 16,559,580 from the complete count.

Table 2.--Population 65 years old and over, by States, percentage increase, proportion of State total, and net migration 1950-60

Area	Population 65 years old and over		Increase 1950-60		Percent 65 years olds are of total population		Net migration 1950-60 1/
	1950	1960	Number	Percent	1950	1960	
	Thou.	Thou.	Thou.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Thou.
United States	12,295	16,560	4,265	34.7	8.1	9.2	---
New England							
Maine	94	107	13	13.9	10.2	11.0	- 4
New Hampshire	58	68	10	17.2	10.8	11.2	- 2
Vermont	40	44	4	10.6	10.5	11.2	- 2
Massachusetts	468	572	103	22.0	10.0	11.1	-40
Rhode Island	70	90	19	27.2	8.9	10.4	- 6
Connecticut	177	243	66	37.2	8.8	9.6	- 4
Middle Atlantic							
New York	1,258	1,688	429	34.1	8.5	10.1	-123
New Jersey	394	560	166	42.2	8.1	9.2	- 9
Pennsylvania	887	1,129	242	27.3	8.4	10.0	-81
East North Central							
Ohio	709	897	188	26.5	8.9	9.2	-46
Indiana	361	446	84	23.4	9.2	9.6	-15
Illinois	754	975	221	29.2	8.7	9.7	-91
Michigan	462	638	177	38.2	7.2	8.2	-38
Wisconsin	310	403	93	29.9	9.0	10.2	-15
West North Central							
Minnesota	269	354	85	31.7	9.0	10.4	-12
Iowa	273	328	55	20.0	10.4	11.9	-15
Missouri	407	503	96	23.6	10.3	11.7	- 6
North Dakota	48	59	10	21.6	7.8	9.3	- 6
South Dakota	55	72	16	29.3	8.5	10.5	- 4
Nebraska	130	164	34	25.9	9.8	11.6	- 7
Kansas	194	240	46	23.7	10.2	11.0	- 2
South Atlantic							
Delaware	26	36	9	35.8	8.3	8.0	1
Dist. of Columbia	57	69	12	22.0	7.1	9.1	-15
Maryland	164	227	63	38.5	7.0	7.3	1
Virginia	215	289	74	34.7	6.5	7.3	3
West Virginia	139	173	34	24.5	6.9	9.3	-10
North Carolina	225	312	87	38.6	5.5	6.9	- 2
South Carolina	115	151	36	30.9	5.4	6.3	- 6
Georgia	220	291	71	32.3	6.4	7.4	2
Florida	237	553	316	132.9	8.6	11.2	256

Continued

Table 2.--Population 65 years old and over, by States, percentage increase, proportion of State total, and net migration 1950-60 - Continued

Area	Population 65 years old and over		Increase 1950-60		Percent 65 years olds are of total population		Net migration 1950-60 1/
	1950	1960	Number	Percent	1950	1960	
	Thou.	Thou.	Thou.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Thou.
East South Central							
Kentucky	235	292	57	24.3	8.0	9.6	- 3
Tennessee	235	309	74	31.5	7.1	8.7	4
Alabama	199	261	62	31.5	6.5	8.0	2/
Mississippi	153	190	37	24.2	7.0	8.7	- 4
West South Central							
Arkansas	149	194	45	30.5	7.8	10.9	- 4
Louisiana	177	242	65	36.6	6.6	7.4	4
Oklahoma	194	249	55	28.3	8.7	10.7	4
Texas	513	745	232	45.2	6.7	7.8	35
Mountain							
Montana	50	65	15	28.6	8.6	9.7	- 4
Idaho	44	58	15	33.8	7.4	8.7	- 1
Wyoming	18	26	8	42.6	6.3	7.8	- 2
Colorado	116	158	43	36.8	8.7	9.0	10
New Mexico	33	51	18	55.1	4.9	5.4	3
Arizona	44	90	46	103.9	5.9	6.9	28
Utah	42	60	18	41.3	6.2	6.7	1
Nevada	11	18	7	65.4	6.9	6.4	3
Pacific							
Washington	211	279	68	32.0	8.9	9.3	2
Oregon	133	184	51	38.1	8.7	10.4	2
California	895	1,376	481	53.8	8.5	8.8	171
Alaska	5	5	1	13.6	3.7	2.4	- 2
Hawaii	20	29	9	42.8	4.1	4.6	- 5

1/ Net change in total population, 65 years old and over in 1960 due to migration of persons alive at both beginning and end of the 1950 decade. Minus sign denotes net loss.

2/ Gain of less than 500.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and unpublished data from ERS-Oklahoma migration project.

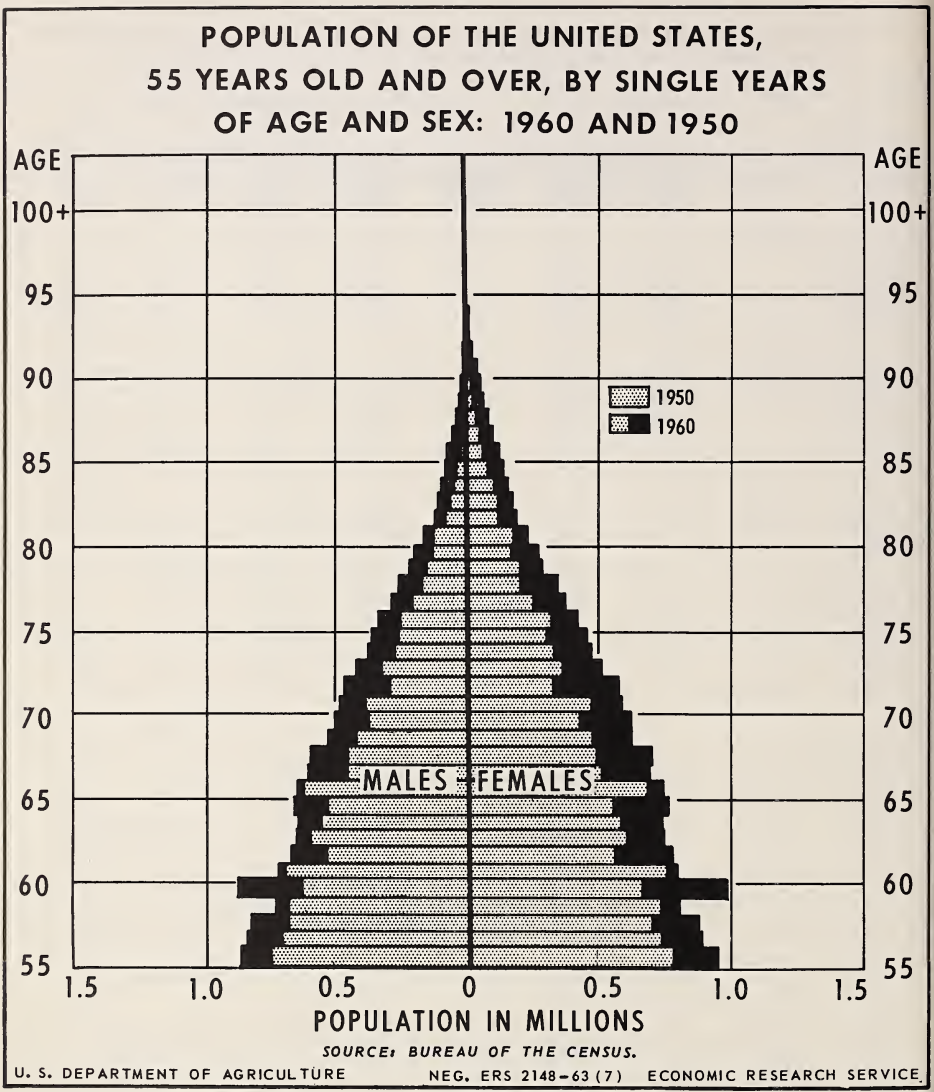
POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES,
55 YEARS OLD AND OVER, BY SINGLE YEARS
OF AGE AND SEX: 1960 AND 1950
AGE
100+
95
90
85
80
75
70
65
60
55
1950
1960
MALES
FEMALES
1.5
1.0
0.5
0
0.5
1.0
1.5
POPULATION IN MILLIONS
SOURCE: BUREAU OF THE CENSUS.
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NEG. ERS 2148-63 (7)
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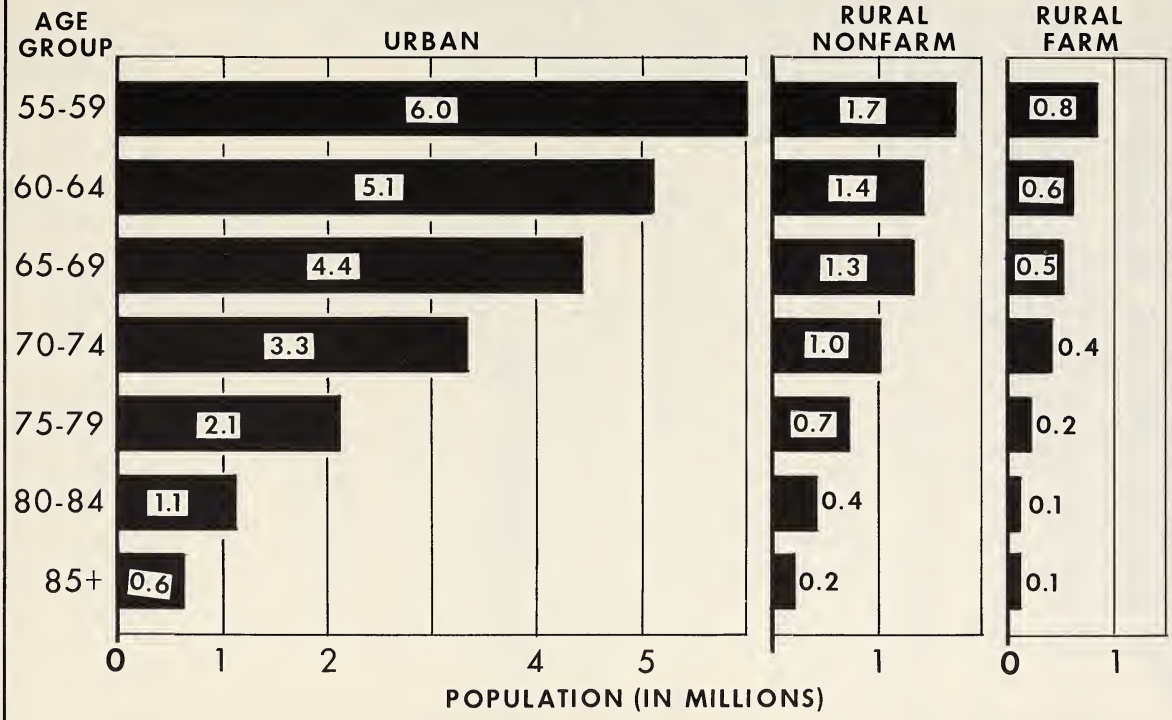
Chart 1

POPULATION 55 YEARS OLD AND OVER, BY RESIDENCE, 1960

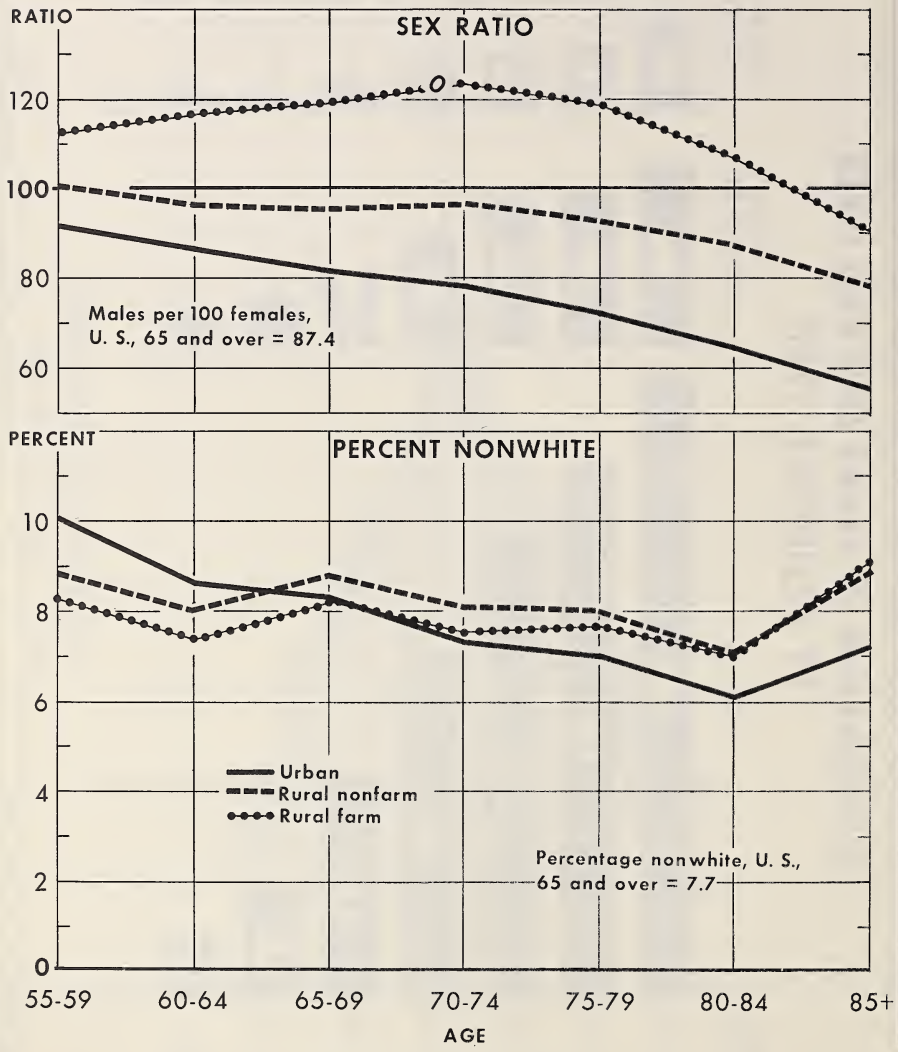


SOURCE: U. S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE NEG. ERS 2395-63 (10) ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE

CHART 2

SEX RATIO AND COLOR COMPOSITION, POPULATION 65 YEARS OLD AND OVER, BY RESIDENCE, 1960

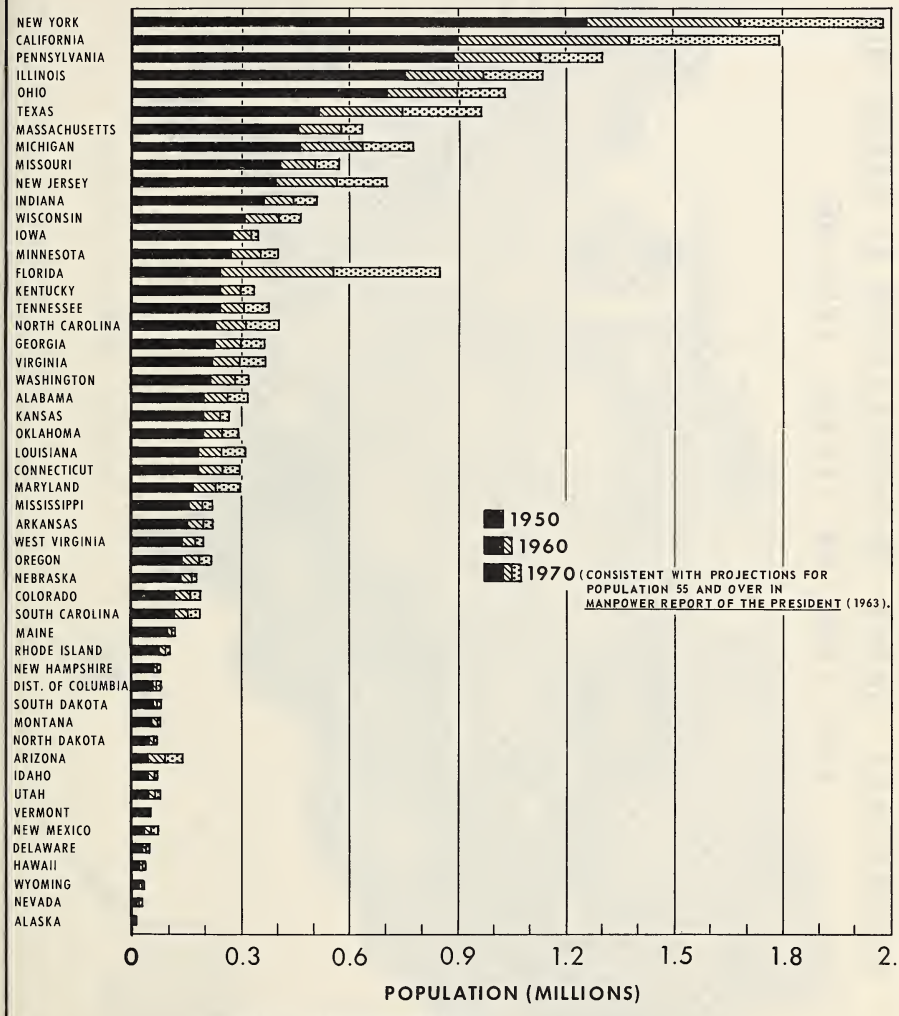


SOURCE: U. S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE NEG. ERS 2396-63 (10) ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE

CHART 3

POPULATION 65 YEARS OLD AND OVER BY STATES,* 1950, 1960 AND PROJECTIONS FOR 1970



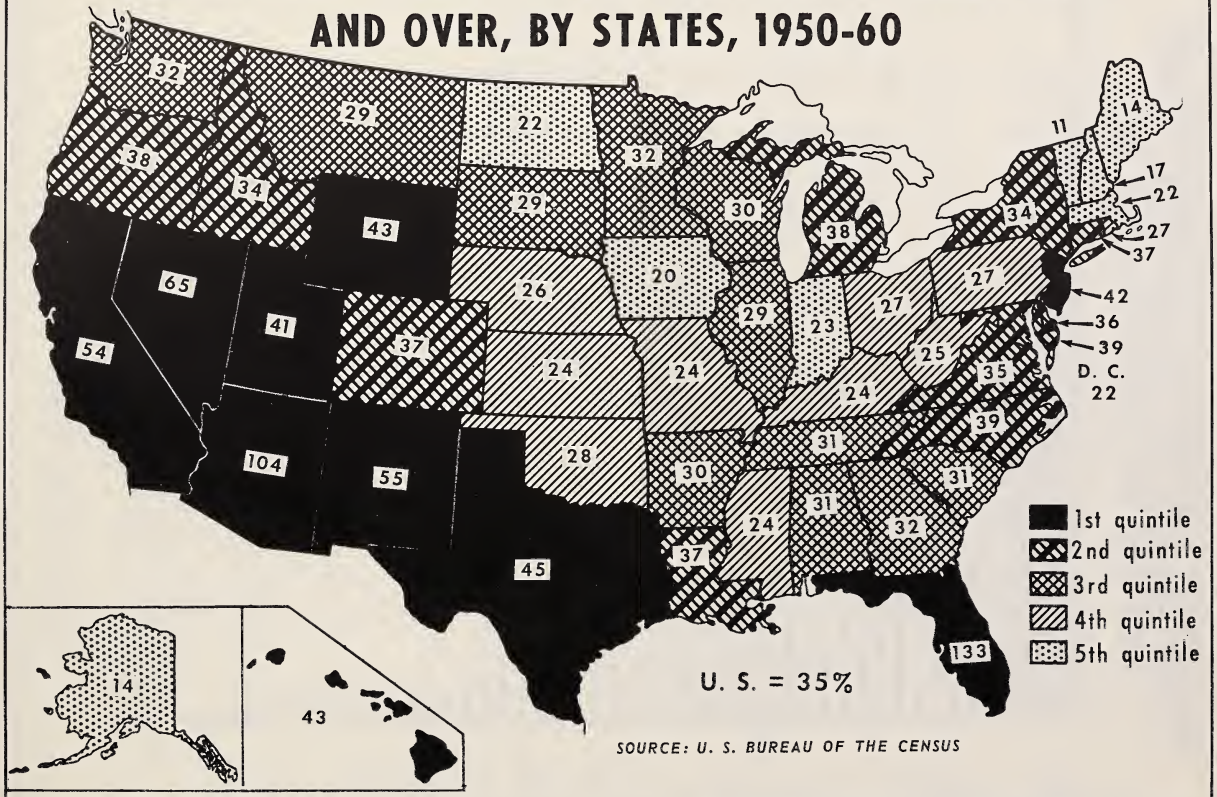
SOURCE: U. S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

**STATES RANKED ACCORDING TO 1950 POPULATION 65 YEARS OLD AND OVER*

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE NEG. ERS 2397-63 (10) ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE

CHART 4

PERCENTAGE GAINS IN POPULATION 65 YEARS OLD AND OVER, BY STATES, 1950-60



SOURCE: U. S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

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CHART 5