# POPULATION TRENDS IN THE NORTHEAST

Calvin L. Beale

It was an unexpected pleasure to be invited to speak before the opening session of the Northeast Agricultural Economics Council. I assume that I am not here on the strength of my earlier writings on "American Triracial Isolates" or "The Increase in Divorce Among Separated Persons as a Factor in Divorce Since 1940". Clearly it is the perceived significance of shifts in the distribution of population in this decade that brings a demographer — and a noneconomic one at that — to occupy this place on your program.

I view the regional and residential shift in population now occurring as being as significant a demographic event as the rise in the birth rate in the 1940's and 1950's and its subsequent fall. All of us have grown up and have been educated in a period in which metropolitan scale urbanization has been the dominant reality in both developed and developing countries. Rural exodus has been a nearly universal phenomenon. In the process, economies of scale and the advantages of agglomeration became articles of faith that seemed to assign rural areas and small towns forever to a limbo of decline or stagnation. The imagery was unambiguous. In the 1960's I wondered if I would ever read the term "small town" without it being prefixed by the word "dying". Yet, we are now having in the United States a substantially higher rate of population growth in nonmetropolitan territory than in metropolitan areas (8.0 percent nonmetro, 4.7 percent metro from 1970-76). See Table 1. This has not happened before at the national level, although it has on occasion in individual States. Some 2,255,000 more people moved into nonmetro counties than out of them from 1970-76, compared with a net outmovement of 2,997,000 from the same counties in the decade of the 1960's. Even if counties that are adjacent to metro areas and that are partly linked to them by commuting are put with the metro group, the metro growth rate is still well below the nonmetro rate.

Why has the shift in population toward open country and small towns occurred? I would offer four basic reasons: 1. There is less displacement of people from employment in rural extractive industries than in the past. In particular the Northeast has seen an end to loss of coal mining jobs. 2. There has been a rapid growth of other sources of work in small communities, especially in trade, services, and other nongoods-producing activity. 3. Retirement of people with good income had been directed more into nonmetro areas — including Northern areas — than had been anticipated. 4. Migration is now determined more by noneconomic considerations than used to be the case. People are not as motivated to move in a manner intended to maximize income. Many of them are both positively attracted to the conditions and satisfactions of rural or small town life, and negatively oriented toward the major metro areas. Indeed, if there is one point that I would like to stress to an audience composed principally of economists, it is the degree of noneconomic content in today's migration pattern. The pattern of nonmetro growth is certainly facilitated by economic trends, but it cannot be understood except as a social movement. Surveys in the Northeast by Ploch in Maine and Steahr and associates in Connecticut confirm this (Ploch, 1976, Steahr *et al,* 1978).

There are two other points that I regard as important to understanding the nature of the changes taking place. First is the fact that the degree of change from the past is greatest in the open country and unincorporated areas. Although newspaper stories may herald a revival of small towns, open country and unincorporated areas are, in general, growing the most rapidly. This is particularly true in the Northeast where in most States municipal boundaries are rather rigidly fixed. Even where growth takes on an urban configuration, it is difficult to recapture it within the formal limits of the nearest urban place. Except where their boundaries happen to be rather generous to begin with, Northeastern villages and cities more than any others in the United States are now confronted with smaller or stationary populations often unrepresentative of the larger area. It is not a condition likely to be corrected where town and township units are powerful and antagonistic to annexation.

I also think it noteworthy that the topping out of urbanization and the renewed growth in more rural areas is not confined to the United States. It is also showing up in a number of other more advanced nations (Vining and Kontuly, 1977, and Wardwell, 1978). Thus it is not a parochially American phenomenon. It seems to have broad probability of occuring wherever massive past urbanization has taken place in nations in which major gaps in urban and rural living conditions have now been eliminated, and where a reappraisal of residential preferences based on nonpecuniary objectives has set in. I think the international character of the trend — transcending political, cultural, and economic systems as it does — suggests very powerful underlying forces as fundamental as the previous trend of urbanization and rural exodus.

The 12 Northeastern States that comprise the U.S. part of the Northeast as defined by this organization show nonmetro growth just as the United States as a whole does. Rural and small town outmigration has been replaced by inmovement; metro influx has been replaced by outflow. But the metro outmovement is much the larger in volume and directed primarily toward other regions. Thus despite the continued inflow of immigrants from abroad, the region as a whole has shifted from net gain of people through inmigration in the 1960's to net outmigration in the 1970's. With natural increase depressed by the low birth rate, Northeastern metro areas have been demographically dead in the water since 1970, experiencing only .03 percent growth of population by 1976. The entire region, including its nonmetro areas, increased by just 1.3 percent. It in not unusual for the Northeast's population to grow at a lower rate than the United States as a whole. It has done so through most of the last 200 years, but never before at a pace that is just a minor fraction of the national rate.

In Table 2, I show some of the basic data relating to recent population changes in the Northeast, with comparisons for the

Calvin L. Beale is the leader of the Population Studies Program. Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

**TABLE 1.**
**Population Change and Net Migration in the Northeast by Metropolitan Residence, 1970-76 and 1960-70**

| Item | United States | Northeast | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Total | Maine | N. H. | Vt. | Mass. | R. I. | Conn. | N. Y. | N. J. | Pa. | Del. | Md. | W. Va. | D.C. |
| **Population** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1976 | 214,658 | 56,752 | 1,070 | 822 | 476 | 5,809 | 927 | 3,117 | 18,084 | 7,336 | 11,862 | 582 | 4,144 | 1,821 | 702 |
| 1970 | 203,304 | 56,034 | 994 | 738 | 445 | 5,689 | 950 | 3,032 | 18,242 | 7,171 | 11,801 | 548 | 3,924 | 1,744 | 757 |
| Pct. chg. 1970-76 | 5.6 | 1.3 | 7.7 | 11.5 | 7.1 | 2.1 | −2.4 | 2.8 | −.9 | 2.3 | .5 | 6.2 | 5.6 | 4.4 | −7.3 |
| Metropolitan[1] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1976 | 155,901 | 47,658 | 324 | 412 | — | 5,595 | 847 | 2,869 | 16,006 | 6,771 | 9,547 | 401 | 3,524 | 661 | 702 |
| 1970 | 148,881 | 47,644 | 307 | 363 | — | 5,523 | 855 | 2,804 | 16,291 | 6,756 | 9,582 | 386 | 3,357 | 664 | 757 |
| Pct. chg. 1970-76 | 4.7 | [2] | 5.5 | 13.6 | — | 1.3 | −1.0 | 2.3 | −1.7 | .2 | −.4 | 4.0 | 5.0 | −.4 | −7.3 |
| Nonmetropolitan | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1976 | 58,757 | 9,094 | 746 | 410 | 476 | 214 | 80 | 248 | 2,078 | 565 | 2,315 | 181 | 620 | 1,160 | — |
| 1970 | 54,424 | 8,390 | 686 | 375 | 445 | 166 | 94 | 229 | 1,951 | 415 | 2,219 | 162 | 567 | 1,080 | — |
| Pct. chg. 1970-76 | 8.0 | 8.4 | 8.7 | 9.4 | 7.1 | 29.2 | −14.8 | 8.5 | 6.5 | 36.1 | 4.3 | 11.4 | 9.3 | 7.4 | — |
| **Net Migration** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1970-76 | 2,800 | −791 | 42 | 56 | 14 | −8 | −45 | −3 | −644 | −42 | −176 | 9 | 63 | 20 | −77 |
| 1960-70 | 3,001 | −377 | −71 | 69 | 14 | 74 | 10 | 214 | −101 | 488 | −378 | 38 | 385 | −265 | −100 |
| Metropolitan[1] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1970-76 | 545 | −1,252 | 6 | 31 | — | −56 | −26 | −17 | −715 | −181 | −218 | −1 | 25 | −23 | −77 |
| 1960-70 | 5,997 | −549 | −12 | 49 | — | 50 | 9 | 190 | −84 | 359 | −255 | 36 | 384 | −77 | −100 |
| Nonmetropolitan | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1970-76 | 2,255 | 461 | 36 | 25 | 14 | 48 | −19 | 14 | 71 | 139 | 42 | 10 | 38 | 43 | — |
| 1960-1970 | −2,996 | −173 | −59 | 19 | 14 | 25 | [3] | 23 | −17 | 129 | −124 | 2 | 1 | −188 | — |

**Note:** Population and net migration figures are rounded to the nearest thousand without adjustment to group totals. [1]Metropolitan status as of 1974. New England areas generalized to county boundaries. [2]Less than .05 percent. [3]Less than 500 persons.

**Source:** Current Population Reports, Federal-State Cooperatives Program for Population Estimates, Series P-26 (a few States were published in series P-25), U.S. Bureau of the Census.

1960's. Note that the core counties of the largest metro areas (those of one million people or more) which contain a third of the Region's total population have declined by 4.8 percent since 1970 and have had over 1.3 million net outmovement. The fringe counties of these areas have continued to have some net inmigration, as have the smallest metro areas (those of less than 250,000 people), but the amounts are minor.

Among the nonmetro counties, those adjacent to metro areas have grown somewhat more rapidly than those not adjacent, but the change from the 1960's is far greater among the non-adjacent group. There is a negative association between the size of the largest place within nonmetro counties and county growth. The completely rural counties (without any place of 2,500 people) are the most rapidly growing, and those with cities of 25,000 or more residents are increasing the least — although both classes are having inmigration, indicating the pervasiveness of the nonmetro growth pattern. The counties with interstate highways have grown more than those without such roads, but, as with adjacency, the differences are not great and the degree of change from the 1960's is greater in the counties that lack the highways.

The rapid growth in retirement counties is notable. The grouping of counties by degree of dependence on manufacturing in 1970 shows that the established industrial counties have—like other nonmetro counties—reverted from outmigration to in-migration, but that the main location of recent growth is the counties with only limited dependence on manufacturing.

The top income class of counties has grown a good bit more rapidly than any other income class, and in that respect the Northeast pattern differs from that of the rest of the country. However, in the remainder of the income distribution, the earlier strong positive association between income and population change—evident in the 1960's—has vanished. Finally, one can note that the nonmetro counties that have the highest worker commuting linkage with the metro areas (20 percent commuting or more) are having very rapid growth, as they did in he 1960's. Nevertheless, it is those with negligible commuting that have broken out of their past pattern of outmigration. With almost each variable then, it is the areas that would earlier have been deemed least likely to grow that have had the greatest degree of demographic revival, although their absolute growth rates may not be the highest.

As a final note on the statistics of the trend, I have (in data not shown here) looked at population change in the Region separately for 1970-73 and 1973-76. The narrower the time period, the less confidence one can have in interpretations of change. With this caveat, the data show that all of the total growth in the region came from 1970-73. The population level was stationary from 1973-76. The metro areas had absolute decline of .5 percent in the latter period, as outmigration rose and the birth rate fell. Population growth in the nonmetro areas slowed, but inmigration did continue. Thus within the region the comparative pattern of metro-nonmetro change was about the same in the two periods, but the region as a whole had diminished population retention that saw its metro areas as a class experience absolute decline. Only the growth of the minority nonmetro population prevented the region from outright decline in 1973-76.

One clear and instructive aspect of the recent population trend is that it was not foreseen, even in the early years of this decade. For example, one can read the projection chapters of the reports of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, published in 1972, without a real hint of what has taken place. Indeed the projections and comments often give a picture of further concentration of population into the larger metro areas. As Brian Berry put it in his chapter, " . . . the greater the size of the D(aily) U(rban) S(ystem) the more likely is growth to be determined by internal economics whose effects mirror the growth characteristics of the nation." He continued " . . . we conclude that the size-growth-stability relationship should be built into any population forecasting procedure" (Berry, p. 237, 1972). Berry then predicted that BEA areas of less than 500,000 population would decline substantially in both relative and absolute population from 1970 to 2000 and that areas of more than 2,250,000 would markedly increase their share of the national total (Berry, p. 238. 1972). There are a good many years to go yet between 1970 and 2000, but thus far the opposite is true.

The prominent urban economist Wilbur Thompson stated in 1969, " . . . I would argue that the national rate of [population] increase clearly will be applicable to Chicago, to Detroit, to Cincinnati, and to Cleveland. It would argue that all the multimillion population places in the United States, with the possible exception of New York, will increase at the national rate of increase at least over the next 30 years. I think they have built in them a powerful growth dynamic" (Thompson, 1969). He went on to say that " . . . once an urban area gets up to about a quarter of a million, it seems to grow forever."

Even as late as 1974, the Bureau of Economic Analysis in its well-known OBERS projections was making regional and metro-nonmetro projections based on traditional premises of growth although the turnaround was already evident. In that year BEA projected the population of the million class metro areas of the Northeast to increase by 2.0 million from 1970 to 1980. Instead the areas decline by .5 million by 1976. They projected the nonmetropolitan population of Northern New England to decline fractionally by 1980. Instead, by 1976 that population had already increased by 11 percent, having substantial inmigration instead of outmigration. Science marches onward! Population forecasters did not lack for confidence and certitude, but suffered the common fate of those who assay to predict human behavior from the patterns of the past.

Simultaneous with the trend toward residential down-scaling in location of population, we have had the now-famous "Sun Belt" movement. I complain about the term because it misses the point that the entire West is growing regardless of latitude and that the nonmetro areas of the North are keeping pace with national growth. But I am sure the phrase is here to stay. The center of national population has been moving south and west since 1920, so the present direction of shift is not new but the margin of change is.

Is the difference in population growth between the Northeast and the other major regions produced primarily by the concentration of Northeasterners in large metro areas and the current failure of this class of areas to grow, or is it more fundamental? To approach this issue I standardized regional growth rates for the distribution of people by metro status and area population size within regions. In other words, what would be the growth in the Northeast if the region had the same distribution of people by metro-non-metro status and metro area size as the Nation as the whole. This work was done only for the more traditional 9-State version of the region (Table 3). It shows that from 1970-75 the standardized population growth rate would have been 2.3 percent in the Northeast compared with an actual .8 percent. So there is an effect. Indeed the Northeast's standardized growth was higher than that of the North Central

**TABLE 2.**
**Population Change in the Northeast by Metropolitan Status and Selected County Characteristics**

| Item | Population | | | | | Net Migration | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | | | Percent Change | | 1970-76 | | 1960-70 | |
| | 1976 | 1970 | 1960 | 1970-76 | 1960-70 | Number | Rate[2] | Number | Rate[2] |
| | | Thou. | | | Pct. | Thou. | Pct. | Thou. | Pct. |
| Total Northeast[1] | 56,752 | 56,033 | 50,849 | 1.3 | 10.2 | −792 | −1.4 | 377 | .7 |
| Metropolitan[3] | 47,657 | 47,643 | 42,945 | .0 | 10.9 | −1,252 | −2.6 | 549 | 1.3 |
| 1,000,000 plus-core | 18,807 | 19,747 | 19,289 | −4.8 | 2.4 | −1,364 | −6.9 | −1,202 | −6.2 |
| 1,000,000 plus-fringe | 12,586 | 12,025 | 9,460 | 4.7 | 27.1 | 167 | 1.4 | 1,398 | 14.8 |
| 250,000-999,999 | 14,135 | 13,829 | 12,351 | 2.2 | 12.0 | −78 | −.6 | 331 | 2.7 |
| Less than 250,000 | 2,129 | 2,042 | 1,845 | 4.2 | 10.7 | 23 | 1.1 | 22 | 1.2 |
| Nonmetropolitan | 9,095 | 8,390 | 7,904 | 8.4 | 6.1 | 460 | 5.5 | −173 | −2.2 |
| Adjacent[4] | 5,958 | 5,455 | 4,989 | 9.2 | 9.3 | 347 | 6.4 | 59 | 1.2 |
| Nonadjacent | 3,137 | 2,935 | 2,915 | 6.9 | .7 | 113 | 3.8 | −232 | −8.0 |
| Characteristics of nonmetro counties[5] | | | | | | | | | |
| Size of largest city | | | | | | | | | |
| 25,000 or more persons | 2,017 | 1,916 | 1,723 | 5.3 | 11.2 | 42 | 2.2 | 29 | 1.7 |
| 10,000-24,999 | 3,767 | 3,461 | 3,252 | 8.8 | 6.4 | 208 | 6.0 | −56 | −1.7 |
| 2,500-9,999 | 2,758 | 2,518 | 2,434 | 9.5 | 3.5 | 166 | 6.6 | −109 | −4.5 |
| Less than 2,500 | 553 | 494 | 494 | 11.8 | .0 | 44 | 8.9 | −37 | −7.4 |
| Interstate highway | | | | | | | | | |
| Counties with | 5,542 | 5,085 | 4,675 | 9.0 | 8.8 | 318 | 6.3 | 24 | .5 |
| Counties without | 3,552 | 3,305 | 3,229 | 7.5 | 2.4 | 142 | 4.3 | −196 | −6.1 |
| Net inmigration at retirement age[6] | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 percent or more | 935 | 716 | 516 | 30.7 | 38.7 | 202 | 28.2 | 149 | 40.6 |
| Less than 10 percent | 8,160 | 7,674 | 7,388 | 6.3 | 3.9 | 258 | 3.4 | −321 | −4.3 |
| Manufacturing employment | | | | | | | | | |
| 40 percent or more | 1,408 | 1,351 | 1,314 | 4.3 | 2.8 | 27 | 2.0 | −51 | −3.9 |
| 30-39 percent | 2,557 | 2,423 | 2,293 | 5.5 | 5.7 | 66 | 2.7 | −54 | −2.3 |
| 20-29 percent | 2,961 | 2,731 | 2,562 | 8.4 | 6.6 | 145 | 5.3 | −57 | −2.2 |
| Less than 20 percent | 2,169 | 1,886 | 1,735 | 15.0 | 8.8 | 222 | 11.8 | −10 | −.6 |
| Median family income in 1969 | | | | | | | | | |
| $9,000 or more | 2,930 | 2,611 | 2,181 | 12.2 | 19.7 | 236 | 9.1 | 220 | 10.1 |
| $8,000-$8,999 | 3,350 | 3,133 | 2,933 | 6.9 | 6.8 | 122 | 3.9 | −61 | −2.1 |
| $7,000-$7,999 | 1,906 | 1,804 | 1,845 | 5.6 | −2.2 | 62 | 3.4 | −150 | −8.1 |
| $6,000-$6,999 | 541 | 496 | 544 | 9.1 | −8.8 | 27 | 5.4 | −96 | −17.7 |
| Less than $6,000 | 368 | 346 | 401 | 6.4 | −13.8 | 13 | 3.6 | −85 | −21.3 |
| Commuting status | | | | | | | | | |
| 20 percent or more | 1,364 | 1,166 | 968 | 16.9 | 20.4 | 165 | 14.1 | 11.6 | 12.0 |
| 10-19 percent | 2,213 | 2,071 | 1,932 | 6.9 | 7.2 | 90 | 4.4 | −4 | −.2 |
| 3-9 percent | 2,122 | 1,971 | 1,845 | 7.6 | 6.9 | 93 | 4.7 | −22 | −1.2 |
| Less than 3 percent | 3,396 | 3,181 | 3,159 | 6.8 | .7 | 112 | 3.5 | −262 | −8.3 |

**Note:** Population and net migration figures are rounded to the nearest thousand without adjustment to group totals. All computations are on unrounded figures.

[1] As defined here the Northeast region consists of the New England States, the Middle-Atlantic States, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.
[2] Net migration expressed as a percentage of the population at the beginning of the specified period.
[3] Metropolitan status as of 1974.
[4] Nonmetropolitan counties adjacent to Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas.
[5] Characteristic as of 1970 unless otherwise stated.
[6] Counties with specified 1960-70 net migration rate for which persons 60 years old and over, 1970.

## TABLE 3.
## Regional population growth, 1970-75

| Residence and size of SMSA in 1970 | Northeast | | North Central | | South | | West | | United States | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1975 | 1970 | 1975 | 1970 | 1975 | 1970 | 1975 | 1970 | 1975 | 1970 |
| Total | 49,455.3 | 49,060.7 | 57,665.1 | 56,593.4 | 68,102.0 | 62,812.2 | 37,831.2 | 34,838.3 | 213,053.6 | 203,304.6 |
| Metropolitan[1] | 42,412.3 | 42,480.7 | 39,593.7 | 39,110.3 | 43,023.5 | 39,349.9 | 30,009.0 | 27,939.3 | 155,038.5 | 148,880.3 |
| 2,000,000 & over | 26,453.3 | 26,852.8 | 16,938.0 | 17,011.3 | 7,705.8 | 7,359.5 | 12,222.0 | 11,949.1 | 63,319.1 | 63,172.6 |
| 1,000,000-1,999,999 | 2,387.0 | 2,384.4 | 8,341.5 | 8,134.9 | 8,254.4 | 7,248.6 | 7,882.2 | 7,235.7 | 26,865.1 | 25,003.6 |
| 500,000-999,999 | 7,327.8 | 7,205.7 | 4,634.7 | 4,553.6 | 9,764.6 | 8,976.8 | 3,585.9 | 3,111.0 | 25,313.0 | 23,847.1 |
| 250,000-499,999 | 4,381.2 | 4,257.7 | 4,644.8 | 4,535.8 | 9,072.0 | 8,237.9 | 3,522.0 | 3,208.1 | 21,620.0 | 20,239.5 |
| Less than 250,000 | 1,863.0 | 1,780.2 | 5,034.7 | 4,874.8 | 8,226.7 | 7,527.1 | 2,796.1 | 2,435.4 | 17,921.3 | 16,617.5 |
| Nonmetropolitan | 7,043.0 | 6,580.0 | 18,071.4 | 17,483.1 | 25,078.5 | 23,462.3 | 7,822.2 | 6,899.0 | 58,015.0 | 54,424.3 |

| | Percentage change, 1970-75 | | | | | Percentage distribution, 1970 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Northeast | North Central | South | West | United States | Northeast | North Central | South | West | United States |
| Total | .8 | 1.9 | 8.4 | 8.6 | 4.8 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Standardized[2] | 2.3 | 1.8 | 7.8 | 9.4 | 4.8 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Metropolitan | −.2 | 1.2 | 9.3 | 7.4 | 4.1 | 86.6 | 69.1 | 62.6 | 80.2 | 73.2 |
| 2,000,000 & over | −1.5 | −.4 | 4.7 | 2.3 | .2 | 54.7 | 30.1 | 11.7 | 34.3 | 31.1 |
| 1,000,000-1,999,999 | .1 | 2.5 | 13.9 | 8.9 | 7.4 | 4.9 | 14.4 | 11.5 | 20.8 | 12.3 |
| 500,000-999,999 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 8.8 | 15.3 | 6.1 | 14.7 | 8.0 | 14.3 | 8.9 | 11.7 |
| 250,000-499,999 | 2.9 | 2.4 | 10.1 | 9.8 | 6.8 | 8.7 | 8.0 | 13.1 | 9.2 | 10.0 |
| Less than 250,000 | 4.7 | 3.3 | 9.3 | 14.8 | 7.8 | 3.6 | 8.6 | 12.0 | 7.0 | 8.2 |
| Nonmetropolitan | 7.0 | 3.4 | 6.9 | 13.4 | 6.6 | 13.4 | 30.9 | 37.4 | 19.8 | 26.8 |

Population numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth of a thousand without adjustment to group totals. All computations are on unrounded numbers.

[1] Metropolitan status of 1974.

[2] Standardized to the 1970 U.S. distribution of population by size of area.

**Source:** U. S. Census of Population: 1970 and Current Population Reports, Bureau of the Census.

Region (1.8). However, it did not compare with standardized rates in either the South or the West (7.8 and 9.4 percent). The major part of the current difference in population increase between the Northeast and the South and West is not explained by the region's high concentration of people in very large metro areas. But the difference is solely due to metro trends as a whole. The growth rate of nonmetro population in the Northeast is greater than that of the South (including Florida), a fact that I doubt is widely known. In national perspective it is probably the outmovement of people from the region that is of most importance. However, internally, the ability of the nonmetro areas to grow in the face of metro loss gives a greater contrast and significance to metro-versus-nonmetro trends than is true of most other regions.

Let me refer more directly to the decline in birth rate that I alluded to earlier. The drop in birth rate in the 1970's has been heaviest in the most metro States. The decline in the Northeast has been particularly heavy. In 1976, the absolute number of births in the Northeast was 25 percent lower than it had been just six years earlier. By contrast, births in the rest of the United States dropped only 12 percent. In 1977, when the number of births began to rise somewhat, the rebound was lower in the Northeast (3.4 percent) than elsewhere (5.2). Northeasterners as a whole are not bearing children in the 1970's at a pace anywhere near sufficient to replace the parental generation. The current level, if continued, would fall at least one fourth short of replacement. When only an average of little more than two children per couple is required for replacement, couples have the ability to defer childbearing to a later part of their fecund years without forfeiting the possibility of ultimately having families of replacement size. But with each passing year, the likelihood that couples now in their late 20's or early 30's will do so becomes less. Even if they do eventually replace themselves, the mean length of a generation is being so strung out as to have a dampening effect on the annualized growth rate.

Beyond doubt the recent pattern of outmigration from Northeastern metropolises would not be attracting so much attention if the birth rate were at the level of the 1960's. A more normal birth rate would easily offset outmigration in most metro areas and prevent outright population loss. In 1976, the three lower New England States had a combined birth rate of 11.5 births per 1,000 population. Even in France, Austria, and Sweden in the 1930's this would have been an astonishingly low level.

As the recent small birth cohorts advance in age they will in due course further lower the school age population, the young labor force, the young crimimal offender population, etc. The degree of change in the size of successive cohorts is substantial. One of the curious features of the demographic profession today is that eminent specialists in fertility hold diametrically contrary views about the probable level of fertility in the coming decade. One view holds that current levels of childbearing are low precisely because the parental cohort is so huge, faces so much peer competition, and is less optimistic about the future. The smaller cohorts now in their pre-teens will, it is claimed, be in a seller's market for employment and advancement when they come of age and will have an ebullient fertility much like that of the 1930's generation when it came of age. The contrary view believes that the ability of women to avoid unwanted births today, coupled with the radical change in female labor force participation and in the perceived role of women in society, precludes in all likelihood any return to former childbearing levels. I tend to agree with this viewpoint. More importantly though, I am impressed with the utter dilemma of planners in knowing which view to accept when demographers of equal credentials working from the same information reach opposite conclusions. Prediction of human behavior remains elusive, even while the demand for forecasting is insatiable.

One of the strongest current demographic forces is a trend quite removed from the redistribution issue. I refer to the decline in average size of households. In census terms, a household is the population that occupies a housing unit. As such it may consist of one person or, say, a dozen or more, if there is a large family. The average size of households has been dropping all through our history as family size has become smaller, as the longevity of the population has risen, and as older couples or surviving spouses have become less likely to move in with their children. However, the decline has become more rapid since 1970. From 1970 to 1977 the average household size dropped by 10 percent (3.14 persons to 2.86 persons), which is more than it had changed in the previous 20 years. The acceleration of decline has come primarily from the unprecedented low level of the birth rate and the practice of young adults leaving the parental home to establish their own households at an earlier age than formerly.

The result of this rapid change is that the United States has had to increase its housing supply by about 10 percent from 1970-1977 just to accomodate the same amount of people who were here in 1970. Thus even counties or towns that have experienced population declines since 1970 have in most cases had visible increases in number of occupied housing units. It has been a positive trend in its effect on businesses engaged in construction or the supply of housing equipment, but has certainly increased energy use beyond what would be required under earlier patterns of family housing. There is no immediate foreseeable let up in the trend, but it should moderate in the 1980's as fewer young people come of age, and as the rise in average age of marriage pushes against its practical limits.

In one sense the movement of people into rural areas in the Northeast represents less change and shock than is true in other parts of the country. For example, farming had ceased to be a dominant industry in the nonmetro Northeast well before the trend began. Thus, there is not as radical a shift in basic economic dependence and relationships as there is in many areas elsewhere. The new nonmetro residents are primarily natives of the region, and although some social conflict invariably arises between the older residents and the newcomers, it is not aggravated by the clash of regional cultures as in States where many of the newcomers have come from other regions. Further, the Northeast has few examples of runaway nonmetro growth, as yet. The local governments are fortunate to have one percent growth per year to deal with rather than two or three percent as is so common in Florida, the Ozarks, northern Michigan, or much of the West.

I have no confidence in predicting how long either of the trends we now see will continue, i.e., the regional shift or the metro-nonmetro redistribution. Both of them inevitably represent transitions that in time will be self exhausting. The potential for further impact on this region's nonmetro areas is very large, if one considers the massive size of the regional metro population in relation to the nonmetro (47 million versus 9 million). Outmovement of comparatively minor volume in relation to metro areas of origin has a relatively substantial impact on the receiving areas. But most of the outflow from

the metro areas is leaving the region altogether for metro areas elsewhere, judging from the Continuous Work History Sample of the Social Security Administration. For example, unpublished tabulations from this source show that of workers who left the metro areas of the megalopolitan belt from Portland, Maine, to Washington, D.C. from 1970-75, three-tenths moved to jobs in nonmetro areas, mostly in the Northeast, but seven-tenths moved to other metro areas, especially in California and the Southwest, Florida, and Lower Great Lake States Industrial Belt, and the Southern Piedmont. It is this movement to other regions — and the reduction of former inflow — that is the major mechanism of metro population decline for the region.

Migration patterns of this nature can continue for long periods—witness the half century from World War I to about 1970 that it took to take the excess labor force out of agriculture. I think there is potential for a prolonged gradual net outflow from the metro Northeast. Perceptible improvement in metro economic conditions could moderate this, but the judgments that go into the millions of individual decisions about where people choose to live involve social images as well as economic — to repeat a point made earlier. And today for many people those images are as assuredly negative for much of the metro Northeast as they were for farm life a generation ago.

I hasten to stress that I am not predicting that either the United States or the Northeast is about to become Arcadia. We will continue to be a predominantly metropolitan Nation. Indeed, the decentralization may help create more small metro areas. And I know there are those who would argue that the present trend is basically a metropolitanization of the context of life in the rest of America. But the cessation of growth in the major metro areas, and the demographic rejuvenation of the rural areas and small towns, are not without meaning, both real and symbolic.

Because I am identified with the demographic work that documented the population turnaround in nonmetro areas, I find (now that people accept the reality of the trend) that I am increasingly asked to assess its impact on many areas of life. There is an unrealistic assumption that knowledge of the demography of the event makes one an authority on its implications. I wish that I did know what it means for residential and automotive energy use, for health services, for municipal and other local financing, for water and sewer needs, for schools, for gross national product, for land use issues, for U.S. economic policy, for rural law enforcement. Most of these are specific topics on which I have twice been asked to provide Congressional testimony this year. I have felt inadequate for the task except to offer common sense generalities. These and other topics such as the political and social implications of the trend, all merit thoughtful research, and rural-oriented economists need to contribute to it.

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