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THE PROSPECTS FOR RURAL SOCIOLOGY

BY

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## ABSTRACT

### The Prospects for Rural Sociology

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Empirical sciences are efforts to explicate phenomena. Sociology's phenomena are activities of persons (social psychology), states and transformations of human organizations (social organizations), and the distribution of people (demography). Rural sociology is identical to sociology except in its focus on rural people. The world's rural people are varied and their life experiences are not identical to those of others. If done well, rural sociology's explicative task is important theoretically and practically. Theoretically, from its studies of rural people it would provide new concepts by which to enrich sociology. Practically, it would provide sociological expertise needed to cope with problems more or less unique to rural peoples. The field, though fully institutionalized, is dwarfed by the size of its task. In the United States where it is concentrated, it is also diverted from its task by a budgeted commitment to an institutionalized style of problem-solving ("extension") which neither uses nor contributes much to the body of sociological knowledge. There is a slight possibility that the field might be restructured so as to fulfill its promise, at least partially. This will require the establishment, with adequate funding, of at least one model department, staffed by a large number of unusually productive researcher-teachers wholly dedicated to the scientific task of explication of the sociology of rural peoples. Given such an example to follow, those committed to the field might transform it in two or three decades. Failure to carry out such a transformation will deprive both rural people and sociology.

Surely all of us here present believe that rural sociology is potentially one of the most important areas of sociology. And we know first hand that by all the usual signs, our field is healthy and growing. Yet I have come to the conclusion that its promise is not likely to be fulfilled. I fear that it may now be about at its peak in the United States and that the roots of its demise are already evident. To explain the basis of this dismal view is the purpose of this paper. We shall start with observations which are familiar to us all, and we shall confront questions which trouble many of us.

What is rural sociology? How does its subject matter relate to that of the general discipline? What are the signs of its apparent health? How does its strength compare with that of sociology? What are the sources of its possible decline?

These are the questions we shall discuss. I hope you understand that I speak as neither a prophet of doom nor as a detractor of the field, but rather as one who believes deeply in the need for a comprehensive and dependable sociology of rural life and, who, seeing some

structural sources of its malaise, wishes to identify them so that, if possible, steps might be taken to permit its practitioners to devote their energies to its main task as a field of knowledge.

1. The potential of rural sociology. The field of sociology has developed and continues to expand a body of concepts and hypotheses by which to explain several sets of related phenomena: How human beings interact; how human personality is formed and expressed in behavior; how the repetitive behaviors we call social structure emerge, how social structure influences the behavior of persons, and how

human populations are distributing themselves over the globe. For the present the field of sociology tends to be classified into three major specialties

social psychology, social organization, and demography. Social psychology attempts to explain human interaction, the formulation and expression of individual personality in daily behavior, and the individual bases and consequences of social structure, social organization attempts to explain the internal structure and external relationships among enduring human collectivities, large and small, which are emergents of human interaction, demography attempts to explain and predict the distribution and spread of human population.

The overall objective of sociology is, I believe, explication. Explication is the detailed explanation of behavior of phenomena within a given domain. It may take various forms, according to the audiences and problems to which it is addressed. Some sociologists devote themselves to highly abstract theoretical and methodological analysis, as illustrated by the work of Merton and Parsons, on the one hand, and of Duncan and Blalock, on the other. Other sociologists are the main audiences for this work, and sociology journals are perhaps the main outlets for it. Some sociologists dedicate themselves to equally abstract explication, but which, because it is addressed to experts in other disciplines, takes a somewhat different form. This is what sociologists do when they publish in such journals as Academia and The Public Interest. Some devote themselves to training graduate students in the theory and method of various specialties, and some to teaching sociology to undergraduates. This, too, is explication, although the precise intellectual problems (and vocabulary)

differ according to the interests and degree of preparation of the students.

Sociologists are convinced that population density and the occupational structure of communities exert a powerful influence on the other aspects of human life. This being the case, it is reasonable that sociological specializations based upon population density and occupations would come into being. This is exactly what has happened in the case of rural sociology. The field is defined as being the sociology of dispersed and isolated populations, primarily those engaged in agriculture or who are quite immediately dependent upon it. The principle behind this is not unique.

Rural sociology is not the only subdiscipline of sociology defined by population density and/or occupationally-related concerns. This is obviously the case regarding urban sociology. Indeed the 1970 Directory of Members of the American Sociological Association (American Sociological Association, 1970) lists about 800 sociologists who define themselves as urban specialists. And, about 2,700 were listed in the same publication as specialists in such occupationally-related areas as education, law and society, crime and delinquency, medical sociology, and occupations and professions.

The justification for rural sociology as a body of knowledge is simple and convincing. In their residential and occupational aspects, the special characteristics of rural people are sufficiently unique to require the existence of a special body of experts trained to explicate them to whatever groups need to know about them: other social scientists, the rural people themselves, other citizens, personnel of governmental agencies, etc.

This is not very different from the justification for almost all other specialties of sociology. The area of marriage and the family exists as a special subject matter because a great many people need to understand such things as how marriages work out or break up, how children are influenced by different types of families and by their locations in the family, how kinship systems condition individual behavior, etc. Medical sociology is justified by the widespread recognition, first that the social organization of medical delivery systems exerts a substantial effect on health and medical treatment, and second that the onset and course of illness itself is in part a social process.

If it weren't for the enormous complexity of human behavior, we would not need specialties. Maybe we would not even need sociology. But the fact is that most if not all of our more effective concepts must be applied differently to peoples living under different circumstances.

The numbers and the variability of rural people are large enough to demand the attention of a great many sociologists. It has been estimated that in 1950 79 percent of the world's population lived in localities of less than 20,000 persons. As Olaf Larson pointed out in 1966, this represented a net increase in fifty years from about 1.5 to about 1.9 billion people. The total number must be considerably larger today. The estimate for the year 2000 is 3.775 billion (Ford, 1973). The sheer population numbers are enormous.

The variability is also considerable. There is rural variation in the industrialized nations of Western Europe and North America. The life and work of those in communities dependent upon family sized farms differ from those involved in large-scale agriculture. In the United States alone, the communities of small farmers in the Midwest and Northeast are quite different from those of the western ranches and from the

California fruit, vegetable, and dairy operations. Both, in turn, are different from those of the rural South. In South America, the life of the Brazilian parceiro and his patrão are different from those of the Quechua-speaking peoples of the Andean highlands. Consider, too, the varieties of rural life in the African deserts, among highland and low-land tribal people in East Africa and in Japan, China, India, and South Asia.

Taken seriously, it is the task of the sociology of rural life to explicate -- to provide detailed descriptions and explanations of -- the social life of <sup>all</sup> rural peoples, who live under a dazzling variety of circumstances. The practical usefulness of such a body of substantive sociological knowledge regarding rural people would in itself make the enterprise worthwhile.

Even if the body of sociological theory and research methodology were perfected, the task of explicating the social psychology, the social structures, and the demography of this vast and varied sector of the world's population could easily absorb all of the efforts of all of the trained sociologists in the world. But we do not have a set body of general theory and research methodology. You can't apply what doesn't yet exist.

When the sociologist approaches a research problem in his own delimited sector of human phenomena, he frequently finds that the existing body of concepts and methods is insufficient to provide a satisfactory explication of it. If he and his colleagues are innovative, rigorous, and energetic, they may add to the body of theory and/or research. For one example, the work of Merton, Stouffer, Hyman, and others illustrates how the concept of the reference group grew out of a need for new theory. As you know, to a large extent it emerged from research on behavior of soldiers. Another example can be drawn from the methodological work of Duncan on the use of structural equations in sociology. It grew out of

research on status attainment. The main concern was to learn to what degree the occupational statuses of American men were achieved and to what extent they were ascribed. Both innovations have been found to be useful in many other sectors of sociology besides those from which they followed.

Given the state of today's sociology, the necessity and opportunity to make additions to the body of theory and methods arises almost every time the sociologist seriously attempts to formulate an explication for a set of social phenomena. This means that each time research is undertaken in a new domain of human activity, new possibilities arise for generating widely-ramifying concepts and methods. Large-scale efforts to explicate the sociology of rural peoples would doubtless add a great deal to our store of general sociological knowledge.

In a few words, rural sociology is potentially fruitful, first, because it calls upon sociologists to explicate the social psychology, social organization, and demography of most of the people in the world, who live under almost unbelievably varied circumstances; and second, because such explications would beyond doubt force innovations in the general concepts and methods of sociology. This is why I believe it to be potentially one of the most important fields of sociology.

2. The vitality of rural sociology. By all obvious signs, the field of rural sociology is faring well.

Writings. Consider first the facts regarding publications in the field. In the United States, the journal Rural Sociology has published four issues per year since it was founded in 1935. A recent volume, Volume 37 (1972), contained 684 pages. It was devoted almost exclusively to presenting a total of thirty two research articles. Regionally, they



were quite varied: their data concerned the United States, Puerto Rico, India, Israel, Brazil, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Mexico. Topically, they concerned urbanization, caste, status measurement, social change, information-seeking, status aspirations, interpersonal influence, fertility, mobility, achievement, innovativeness, agriculture, community development, crosscultural research, migration, and religion. At least six of these articles are attempts to add to the sociologist's theoretical or methodological tools.

This is by no means the only such outlet. For more than a decade, a rural sociological journal, Sociologia Ruralis, has appeared regularly in Europe. It publishes similar types of articles, mostly in English. In Rio de Janeiro, UNESCO has published America Latina for about 15 years. It is largely dedicated to the sociology of rural life in the southern part of the hemisphere.

Rural sociological writing neither began with these journals nor is currently restricted to them. For the United States alone, Bertrand (1973) and his colleagues have identified and abstracted almost 1900 rural sociological journal articles which have been published since 1895. In addition they have published citations (without abstracts) for almost 4,500 monographs, reports, and bulletins concerning rural sociology. These are not the only facts about publications which could be adduced.-- we have not even touched upon the commercial books in the field -- but they are sufficient to show that the field is viable in this regard.

Voluntary associations. What, then, of the voluntary societies? Our organization, The Rural Sociological Society, is the oldest association of rural sociologists. In 1956 its membership was 538. As I recall it was on the way down at that point in history and it fell off to about 425 the next year. At any rate, according to our secretary-

treasurer, Dr. Dunkelberger (personal communication), by 1972 it had 1,024 members, 226 of whom had addresses outside the United States. Of those in the United States 50 percent had the Ph.D. degree. In 1970, incidentally, only 20 percent of the American rural sociologists were employed outside the universities (Field, Fredrickson, and Fugitt, 1970). About 60 percent were professors and the rest were students.

Not only is this society growing, but the European Society for Rural Sociology has been active for about 15 years and must now have 400 to 500 members. The latest addition to such groups is the Latin American Association for Rural Sociology. It is now about five years old. In December 1972 it had just over 100 members. The possibility of setting up similar societies in India and the Philippines is now under discussion. Furthermore, the three existing rural sociology societies, together with the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization, have drawn up a tentative constitution for an international rural sociological association.

In short, the point of view of voluntary associations in support of the field rural sociology is getting stronger all the time.

Graduate students. Graduate training in rural sociology also seems to be on the increase. The three associations mentioned above have put together a Directory of Universities Offering Graduate Training in Rural Sociology (Capener, 1973). In the United States, 28 indicate a concentration in the field. Four Canadian universities make the same claim. Though the following numbers are to some extent inflated by hopes not matched by realities, 16 are so listed in Latin America, and 32 are in Europe. There are a few more in other parts of the world.

In summary, in terms of the existence of graduate training programs there can be no doubt that the field is growing. This parallels

the information presented above: from the standpoint of secure publication outlets, it is far from weak and appears to be strengthening itself, and the same may be said of its voluntary associations.

It is no wonder that at the periodical meetings of each rural sociological association everyone appears to be optimistic.

3.. The institutional base of rural sociology. From the sociologists' perspective, no scholarly or scientific discipline -- or any other social phenomenon -- is intelligible apart from the social situation within which it is embedded. The context influences a discipline in a variety of ways. For example, despite its roots in Western Europe during the 19th and early 20th century, no one would seriously deny that present-day sociology bears an unmistakable American stamp. American faith in knowledge has been translated into funds for science and education. Money and a popular demand for higher education were translated into new and expanding colleges. All through this century, new disciplines have been welcomed and nurtured, sociology among them. Borrowing from and expanding upon other fields -- notably psychometrics, econometrics, and social anthropology -- American sociology has developed a social research technology which was simply nonexistent in Europe or anywhere else. It is neither more nor less valid because it grew up here. Indeed, it is now being diffused throughout the world. But the social and economic conditions which fostered this development were American. Naturally this was not unique to sociology. Something corresponding to this happened in field after field.

Rural sociology, like sociology, is today primarily a North American phenomenon. I do not say this with pride, patriotism, or chauvinism. It is a simple sociological fact. Though I think it most unfortunate, it is a fact that right now almost all of the viable rural

sociological work in the world turns on North America in one way or another. With some important exceptions, the key rural sociologists of the world regularly visit the United States to learn what is happening in the field, to learn the latest research concepts and techniques. And they volunteer that they are years behind the Americans and Canadians in most respects.

If North America is the center of rural sociology, the United States land-grant college of agriculture is its most influential institutional base. It above all determines the main sources of rural sociology's strengths and weaknesses. It is to that base which we must look if we are to have more than a superficial understanding of the field.

The fact is that in the early days rural sociology was more an outgrowth of agriculture than of sociology. The first rural sociologists were not even trained in sociology. Galpin, for example, seems to have obtained rather broad education at Colgate University in the mid-1880s, but it did not include sociology (Galpin, 1937a, 1937b, 1937c). After graduating he first taught mathematics at an academy in New York state, then taught history at Kalamazoo College in Michigan. After graduate study in philosophy at Harvard and in psychology and anthropology at Clark University, he spent some time as a farmer, a milk processor, and a campus pastor. At Madison, Wisconsin he came under the sponsorship of an agricultural economist named H. C. Taylor. Under Taylor's guidance, Galpin founded the country's first program in rural sociology at the University of Wisconsin in 1911. So far as I can determine he did this before he had any systematic knowledge of sociology. His earliest contacts with sociological knowledge seem to have been in discussions with L. A. Ross of his research on the human ecology of

Walworth County, Wisconsin. These were evidently held after Galpin had written it. His experience seems to be<sup>no</sup> different from that of other early rural sociologists.

In any case all of the American rural sociology departments which have been most influential over the years were founded in colleges of agriculture. Most of these remain there, although a few such as Michigan State, have moved from the agricultural college while maintaining a tie to it. The main rural sociology program in Europe is also in the agricultural university (at Wageningen in the Netherlands).

Colleges of agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture, exert considerable influence on their programs, including rural sociology departments. The main mission of the USDA is to improve American agriculture. This is also the main task of the colleges of agriculture. In the early part of the century, improvements in farming also improved rural life, and the colleges and the USDA both contributed to this end. In the last generation, improvements in production and marketing have made American agriculture extremely fruitful. The farmers who survived have benefitted. But the same forces which made a strong agricultural plant also produced rural cast-offs who could not and seemingly cannot compete in modern agriculture. True, to some extent the colleges of agriculture helped smooth a path out of farming for many. They provided educational opportunities for those leaving farming as such. They supported a small but consistent trickle of research on non-farm adaptations of farm-reared people. They encouraged action programs, such as in home economics extension work, which had the effect of socializing rural people to urban life-styles. Yet despite a few such emphases, the overwhelming concern of the colleges and the USDA has been on im-

proving farm production and marketing. Even in their sociology programs the main single concern of the colleges of agriculture has been with diffusion of farm technology.

All agricultural colleges in the United States are state institutions and all have important links to the federal government. Federal and state legislation does not merely define the general areas in which colleges of agriculture are to work. It also specifies within limits, how the work is to be carried out. Since the early days of rural sociology the colleges have had three administrative subdivisions which cut into each department. Though their form has changed a bit over the years, each of these exists today. These are teaching, research, and extension. In recent years many of the colleges have added a fourth such administrative division. It deals with international programs. Each of these has a budget line. Any given department of rural sociology probably has all the first three, and a number have the fourth as well. I make a point of this, because each budgeted responsibility sets its own type of obligations upon the faculty of the department and some of these are sharply contradictory.

The first of these is teaching undergraduates and graduate students, as well as a few "farm short-course" (non-degree) students. The monies for this are provided by the state. Ordinarily an associate dean administers this under the dean of the college. The organization of teaching in colleges of agriculture is much the same as it is in other colleges, and requires no special elaboration.

The second of these sets of activities is research on agricultural and other aspects of rural life. This is funded primarily by monies provided by the state and by the Cooperative States Research Service of the USDA. State and federal contributions are based on a formula

which requires both to pay. This area, too, is administered in the college by a "director" or an associate dean. This arm of the college is usually called the Agricultural Experiment Station (sometimes Research Station). The "experiment station" is not a place. It is an administrative division of the college of agriculture which provides funds for agricultural research on topics set, within limits, by state and federal legislation. Practically all of the research work is carried on at the main campus of the college. This partly because the projects are conducted by professors and research assistants. Both must stay close to the campus -- the professors because they teach, the assistants because they are graduate students. There is another reason why they stay on campus. As researchers they are more and more dependent upon complex laboratory equipment, computers, library facilities, and the expertise of other professors. On campus, these are available. Off campus, they are not.

As agricultural scientists, rural sociological researchers theoretically have access to the "in-house" monies mentioned above, which are disbursed by the College. This is useful, although it is not as impressive as it may seem. In 1970, for example, only 0.7% of all USDA and state AES funds were spent on sociological research, and these supported less than 100 person-years of research time (NAS Rural Sociology Panel, 1972). They may also compete at the state or national level for other research monies. In some Departments of Rural Sociology, the research monies from federal agencies other than agriculture and from the big foundations may total far more than the "in-house" funds. This is encouraged in those colleges of agriculture which have a history of conducting basic scientific research. In others, it is not.

Teaching and research usually are thus the first two budgeted divisions within each department in an agricultural college. Their respective sets of activities are quite compatible. Both are conducted at the same location. The graduates of the department form the pool from which the professor's research assistants are drawn. A professor's research colleagues are also his colleagues in teaching. His research and his courses require much the same theoretical and methodological knowledge.

Extension -- the third of the subdivisions which cut across the departments -- is a very different matter, especially in sociology. It is not compatible with either teaching or research. The agricultural extension service is the action arm of the USDA and of the colleges of agriculture. Typically, every county in the state will have an extension office, funded partly by county or state money and partly by federal money. Each county office may have from one to a dozen or more agents in such areas as agriculture, economic development, home economics, and youth programs. These agents have nominal positions in the university, although they are not members of departmental faculties. Formerly, the dean of each college of agriculture was the administrator over the "county agents" of his state, usually through a so-called "director" of agricultural extension. Nowadays, these programs are sometimes administered outside of the college. Even so the college is always deeply involved with them.

Practically all departments in a college of agriculture have budgeted extension responsibilities. These are carried out by people called "extension subject matter specialists." They are usually Ph.D.s in an academic field relevant to agriculture or to home economics, and they have regular positions as professors in the various departments. In most fields academic subject matters and extension responsibilities coincide with each other. Marketing specialists in agricultural economics give advice on marketing problems



regarding various commodities. Plant pathologists work on crop diseases. Poultry researchers provide help to poultry producers. But no one knows quite what to do with the extension sociologists except that -- analogously to poultry or dairy specialists -- they are supposed to work on "people problems."

Any given state may have one or more extension rural sociologists, 50 percent or more of whose salaries are usually paid from federal funds. These people are full fledged members of the department of rural sociology. Their primary responsibility is to the extension administration. If such a sociologist carries out his extension responsibilities, he is frequently on the move around the state, organizing meetings, giving speeches on population change and leadership, consulting with "resource development" agents or groups of pastors, etc. Few have been able to carry on much systematic research while acting as extension specialists. Sometimes they even get in trouble with their administrators if they teach too much: teaching regular courses on campus competes with attendance at meetings out in the state. Based upon many years of observation, it seems certain to me that most of the more capable sociologists simply refuse to consider such positions. This is because they believe that a few years of extension work will leave them so far behind their field that they may never again catch up. In my experience, they are right: with a few exceptions, the diligent extension rural sociologist soon loses his sociological expertise because he fails to practice it. He loses touch with the literature. As a result he falls hopelessly behind in his field.

The fourth, newest, and probably most ephemeral of the formal activities of the colleges of agriculture is "international programs". All over the so-called "third world" the United States, through the Agency for International Development as well as the Ford Foundation,

the Rockefeller Foundation and the Agricultural Development Council, have been assisting in the upgrading of colleges of agriculture as centers of teaching, research, and -- through extension -- the dissemination of the results of agricultural research. There is frequently a place for rural sociology in these programs. Indeed, under the auspices of the USDA several eminent rural sociologists have written books in various Latin American countries. This was initiated during the 1940s, several years before the Point 4 plan (AID's precursor) was established. These included books by Nathan Whetten (1948) on rural Mexico, Lowry Nelson (1950) on rural Cuba, T. Lynn Smith (1972) on Brazil, C. C. Taylor (1948) on Argentina, Charles P. Loomis et al. (1953) on Costa Rica. The work of these men set a pattern which others have followed. Since then, quite a few rural sociology professors have spent considerable periods of time with AID and other contract programs abroad. This work -- like teaching, research, and extension -- is institutionalized within the agricultural college. Typically, each college which has such an "institution-building" contract will have one or two administrators on campus and one or two at the contract site. The former are responsible for recruiting personnel to work abroad, and for taking care of the documents regarding the foreign university's graduate students who are studying on the campus. The administrators at the contract site are responsible for the teaching, research, and extension activities of the American professors who are stationed there. Because there is usually no state money in these programs -- only federal or foundation funds -- there may not be much institutional pressure on the departments to participate, although the sociologists are usually interested.

These four emphases have consequences for internal and external relationships of the rural sociology programs of the community.

First, teaching responsibilities are not inconsistent

with the ordinary activities of other colleges. This is not a light matter. Many departments in colleges of agriculture have disciplinary counterparts elsewhere on the campus with which they must cooperate. The campus liberal arts college usually has a department of economics, another of sociology, usually botany and zoology, often genetics, the college of medicine may have a department of biochemistry, perhaps microbiology, etc. The college of agriculture may have a department of agricultural economics, another of rural sociology, others of plant pathology, animal husbandry, agronomy, plant and animal genetics, biochemistry, etc. The teaching activities of the rural sociologists are usually quite compatible with those of their colleagues in the department of sociology, although occasionally the latter are unaware of the multiple responsibilities of the rural sociologists, and they look askance at them because they think that their teaching loads are too light. The research activities are usually compatible. But here too tensions arise between the two departments, especially if the liberal arts sociologists on campus do not do research and writing, or if the rural sociologists' research is viewed by the others as lacking in sociological sophistication.

The compatibility of international activities and normal teaching and research is problematical. If the professor draws on his overseas experience in his teaching, or if he conducts and publishes research coming from his international work, the chances are that he will keep up with his field and perhaps even be a bit ahead of it in some ways. If he spends his time in administration or in liaison with various agencies in the overseas site, he may well fall behind. My impression is that overseas experience usually enhances a sociologist's expertise.

Extension is another matter. The extension administration demands that one be out in the field advising non-sociologists on a wide range of matters. The academic side demands that he teach courses on campus and that he conduct and write up the results of original research. The one requires that he circulate among the countries; the other that he remain on campus. Extension demands that he try to solve people's practical problems whether or not they involve sociological expertise. The academic unit requires that he teach and add to the abstract body of sociological knowledge and is uninterested in his attempts to resolve practical problems. One result is that the more faithfully the extension rural sociologist tries to fulfill his obligations to extension, the more out of date his sociological knowledge becomes, and the more tension this generates both between departments and within the rural sociology department itself.

The strains caused by the rift between extension and the other more academic activities are extremely serious in departments dedicated to both. These tensions are not merely felt by individual faculty members in proportion to their budgets. A department which has extension budgeted in it tends to attract some other rural sociologists who are interested in extension even though they themselves are not so budgeted, just as a department with international responsibilities attracts other faculty members who are internationally oriented. Concretely, a department having extension responsibilities will try to be an effective extension action agency, in addition to carrying

out its teaching and research responsibilities. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to carry on effective academic work and effective extension work in the same small administrative unit. The more seriously one applies his sociological expertise, the less his work is understood by the extension administration. The more seriously he takes his extension obligations, the less he exercises and extends his sociological competency. Perhaps the most important net result is that under such internal pressure the departments of rural sociology usually tend to turn away from their true mission--explicating rural life.

4. The prospects for rural sociology. The academic arm of rural sociology is oriented toward careful explication. The job it has set for itself describing the sociology of the world's rural peoples is staggering. The numbers of trained rural sociologists available to do the job is small--there are probably no more than 700-800 Ph.D.s in rural sociology in all the world. Despite the number of graduate programs which exist on paper, there are not more than 16 viable doctoral programs in rural sociology in the United States and not all of these are provided by formal rural sociology programs.

Indeed, the American Sociological Association (1972) lists only 10 United States and one Canadian university emphasizing graduate work in the field. There appears to be only one strong doctoral training program in rural sociology outside North America. Contrast this with the case for sociology. There are about 180 graduate training programs in sociology in the United States alone, about half of them offering Ph.D. degrees (American Sociological Association, 1972). An examination of the Roosa and Anderson report (1970) and of the Glenn-Villenz (1970) data shows that there are perhaps six programs in the United States which could be reasonably labeled "elite departments of sociology" on the basis of their publications and their prestige. Bigness is a necessary condition of their excellence. The largest single rural sociology program, Cornell's, is smaller than the smallest of the elite sociology programs, and the largest of the latter is three times the size of Cornell's rural sociology department. A look at the programs shared by elite departments is informative. In 1972-1973, all six stressed political sociology, socioeconomic change, and social stratification. Five stressed race relations, social psychology, sociological theory, and urban sociology. Four stressed demography, formal organization, methodology and statistics, and occupations and professions (taken from American Sociological Association, 1972). These are the areas which by their actions the elite departments define as most worthy of explication at this point in history. Most of them are appropriate subject matters for a rural sociology program to treat. Yet there is not a rural sociology program anywhere in the world which has the personnel numbers sufficient to support research and graduate training in more than a few of these.

It takes large numbers of extremely well-trained and dedicated sociologists to perform the academic tasks excellently in even one theoretical area of sociology. It takes many times that number to explicate carefully the important social phenomena in all. The explicative task of rural sociology is as broad as that of the rest of sociology. Done right, it must focus upon more people and perhaps a greater variety of sociocultural systems. The task is large and the resources to do it are small.

Yet a few outstanding sociologists in the right spot might do wonders for rural sociology. The rural sociology system is well institutionalized. It is not going to collapse suddenly. Moreover, rural sociologists (like other people) use each other as models. Perhaps if even one absolutely outstanding rural sociology faculty could be brought together for a decade or more it could induce multiplier affects through its own work and its influence on others. That is, if its members were carefully selected and if they were to be free from competing obligations so that they could conduct research, write, and teach a well-selected set of graduate students, its example could serve as a guide for the others. Its new Ph.D.s could fill positions in the other programs, thus strengthening them. Also, those trained elsewhere would tend to emulate the work of a creative group. Conceivably, in a generation or so we could have enough well-selected and well-trained personnel so that much of the bright promise of rural sociology might be fulfilled--enough to describe and clarify the human social problems unique to the various types of the vast rural population of the world and enough scientific brainpower to transform the life experiences of rural peoples into new contributions to sociological theory and research technology.

through at least one well equipped center of rural sociology.

I do not believe that the promise can be fulfilled. Unfortunately, I am not optimistic about its possibilities. To accomplish this, it would be necessary for at least one big rural sociology program to dedicate itself wholly to sociological explication. Interdisciplinary work would divert it. Weak sociology would doom it to failure. Faculty commitment to short-term application of sociological (or other) knowledge would divert it. Only brilliant, dedicated, single-minded concentration on sociological explication, firmly based upon research, could suffice.

Unfortunately, such a concentration is probably not possible. The research capability of all present rural sociology programs is debilitated by the action emphasis of the departments, as we have seen, this is ordained by the budgetary requirement to do "extension" work. In addition, the most capable sociologists are not usually attracted to extension. This means that the research-action split within the departments is aggravated by a competency split. The result is that it will be quite difficult to form the kind of hard, active, and intellectually productive group that would be required to galvanize other programs of rural sociology.

5. Conclusion. As I said in the beginning, rural sociology is a field of great potential. Yet it is not at all certain that its promise can become a reality. What of the future of the rural sociology departments? My guess is that most of them will improve a bit, raising themselves or at least keeping up with the average quality of other sociology departments. Their members will gradually increase, too. But the elite departments of sociology are likely to sweep ahead, adding conceptual clarity, methodological rigor, and substantive knowledge -- mostly about the non-rural sector of the world. These will, I think, improve far faster than the best of the rural sociology programs, gradually leaving



the latter--and most of the rest of sociology--farther and farther behind. Thus rural people would be deprived of the benefits of the best of sociological knowledge, and the scientific community will miss the benefits of the life experiences of rural people. I do not think the rural sociology programs will die easily, though in a decade or two they could become tradition-ridden backwater departments, adding little of importance to the body of sociological knowledge. Of course, this dreary picture might change. One can imagine a set of events which could make at least one strong department possible. Obviously, one would have to be the elimination or neutralization of the present form of extension rural sociology. Another would have to be a rigorous and effective personnel policy, which would collect and hold on a set of outstanding sociologists wholly dedicated to explicating the sociology of rural life. This would require substantial funds, and probably dropping the departmental extension function.

If such a department is not in the cards, what will happen to the task of explicating rural life? Who will do it? Unfortunately, for the most part I fear it will be relatively neglected. With first one, and later several, dynamic centers especially devoted to the study of rural life, I believe that there may not be much incentive for individual sociologists to devote attention to it. Of course, general sociologists do not neglect rural life quite as much today as they did 15 years ago. The war in Vietnam, the world food crisis, the sociologists' discovery of rural poverty--among rural southern blacks, the Appalachian whites, the reservation Indians, and the rural Chicanos--has made the majority of the sociological community a bit less insensitive to the social circumstances of rural people than formerly. Perhaps the future of the best of sociology

of rural life lies outside the rural sociology programs. Still, a more likely, if more pessimistic, forecast is that most sociologists will continue to ignore the rural population as they have done in the past.

Yet when all such things are said and done one can't be too gloomy. Rural sociologists have done remarkable things in the past. Maybe some who are here in Montreal might just pull together the kind of program that, defying the reasoning put forth here, will make it possible to do our common task well.

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