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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF RURAL DEPOPULATION IN A SINGLE TOWNSHIP: 1900-1930¹

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ABSTRACT

Population movements in a rural township in South Carolina were studied by comparing the years 1900 and 1930. Classification of the population into upper, middle, and lower classes indicates that the township has sustained a severe depletion in its upper class, largely due to migration to cities. There has been a 15 per cent increase in the middle class. The heaviest losses have been incurred by the lower class, which has been attracted mainly to employment in adjacent textile mills. The middle class, in largest proportions, has remained on the farm. From a vigorous middle class, under conditions of a profitable agriculture, depletions in the ranks of the upper class may be partly repaired.

It is a matter of vital social significance whether or not the marked cityward migration of recent decades is impoverishing in quality the residual rural population. In order to answer this question it is necessary to develop new techniques in population studies as they affect country people. This is the purpose of the investigation reported in the following pages.

An intensive study was made of a single township in the Piedmont Plateau of Southeastern United States, a section in which a marked industrial development has occurred during the last three decades and more. Santuc Township, approximately 81 square miles in area, is territorially the largest of the eight townships in Union County, South Carolina. The area is entirely rural, with Santuc, an unincorporated crossroads hamlet of scarcely a dozen houses, constituting the nucleus. The economic interests are mainly those of a predominantly cotton-growing agricultural community of the South. The only significant industrial plant within its boundaries is the electric power plant developed a number of years ago at Neal's Shoals on Broad River. Within a radius of twenty-five miles of the village of Santuc, however, eleven textile (cotton mills and knitting mills) plants have sprung up in recent years, influencing population change to a considerable degree.

¹ A paper read before Section K of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Atlantic City, N.J., December 27, 1932. The study was made possible through the co-operation of the South Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station.

The population in 1900 was 2,844, while in 1930 there were only 1,893, a decrease of 33.4 per cent. The whites in the area in 1900 totaled 695, and had declined to 571 in 1930, a diminution of approximately 18 per cent. Negroes preponderate in the township, consisting of 2,149, or 75.6 per cent in 1900; and 1,322, or 69.8 per cent in 1930. Thus, during the last three census decades, a sharp decline of 38.5 per cent has been incurred among the Negroes, due to migration toward urban centers in the North and elsewhere, as well as doubtless to a decreased birth-rate and other related factors.

A succinct picture of the culture pattern of the area may be secured from the following words of one of the closest students of the Santuc section of Union County to the effect that

the Quakers, who came early in the eighteenth century, were the first settlers of Santuc. About 1750, the Virginians came in considerable numbers, and following Braddock's defeat in 1755 there was a large number of Pennsylvanians who settled here. The Quakers all left between 1800 and 1820, due to their opposition to slavery, and settled in southern Ohio and Indiana. The Pennsylvanians, though they were never slaveholders to any extent, nor to any great degree large landowners, remained, and today their descendants form some of our most reliable and substantial citizens. The Virginians owned slaves, became prosperous, and were large plantation owners. Our Santuc people of today are largely descendants of these pioneers, and fully half of the families here can trace their lineage back to the Revolution.

It is clear from these remarks that the composition and characteristics of the population of Santuc Township reflect the influence of the culture pattern of large plantations and many slaves characterizing its ante-bellum civilization.

Whatever may or may not be the case elsewhere, in many sections of the South it is possible, with a marked degree of exactitude, to sort the population of a community into an upper, a middle, and a lower class. The difficulty of such a task is much reduced in an area with the cultural background characterizing Santuc Township. In the process of classification, the writer did not rely solely upon his own knowledge of a community to which he was native, but leaned heavily upon the estimate of an older citizen, possessed of a scientifically trained mind and whose profession through the last forty years has brought him to know intimately every white family in the township.

It is difficult to define the basis on which such a separation into classes is made. It is the sort of matter which one "senses" rather than brings to exact statement. The process involves both social and economic considerations, with family tradition and community worth as essential elements. An accurate list of the white population in the township in 1900 was sorted into classes, and the same thing was done for a similar list of those there in 1930. In addition, it was determined through interviews what has happened to each of the individuals there in 1900; and the origin of all those in the township in 1930 who were not there at the earlier census period.

After the classification had been made in this manner, its accuracy was checked as it related to certain measurable economic characteristics available from the taxbooks of the county. The upper class was revealed as preponderantly a landowning class with farms averaging about 500 acres in 1900. The middle class, to the extent of nearly half of them, own farms averaging around one-half the size of those belonging to the upper class, and property assessed at considerably less than one-half the value. The lower class consisted very largely of a non-landowning group, and the great bulk of them, even under normal conditions for agriculture, undoubtedly would be correctly designated as "submarginal" farmers.

The objection may be raised that the sample is a small one, but this is met by the statement that it is complete for the universe which it represents—a township approximately eighty-one square miles in extent. It would have been valuable to have secured for the Negroes data similar to those for the whites, but neither time nor facilities made this possible. Besides, the attempt to assort them according to classes would have been well-nigh impossible.

In 1900 the upper class in Santuc Township numbered 250, 36 per cent of the total white population. By 1930 the number in this class had decreased to 160, or 28 per cent of the total. Clearly, there has been a significant depletion of the upper class over the thirty-year period, consisting of 90 persons, or 36 per cent of the 1900 total in this group.

On the contrary, the middle class shows a gain of 15 per cent during the same period. In 1900 those in this class numbered 314, or

45.2 per cent of the total white population; in 1930 the figure had increased to 361, or 63.2 per cent.

The most extensive decrease has taken place in the lower class. In 1900 they numbered 131, or 18.8 per cent of the total white population. Thirty years later this figure had declined to 50, or 8.8 per cent of the entire white population of the township, a 61.8 percentage decrease.

When the matter is approached from the standpoint of the depletion of the original stock in the township in 1900, a decrease is noted

TABLE I
THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE WHITE POPULATION OF SANTUC
TOWNSHIP BY CLASSES, 1900 AND 1930

CLASS	1900		1930		PERCENTAGE INCREASE OR DECREASE*
	Number	Per Cent of Total	Number	Per Cent of Total	
Upper.....	250	36.0	160	28.0	-36.0
Middle.....	314	45.2	361	63.2	+15.0
Lower.....	131	18.8	50	8.8	-61.8
Total....	695	100.0	571	100.0	-17.8

* The + sign denotes an increase; the - sign, a decrease.

in every one of the classes. The upper class, through continued residence and natural increase, in 1930 totaled 123, as compared with 250 in 1900. This is a depletion of 50.8 per cent, somewhat more than half. The corresponding picture for the middle class was a 49.4 per cent decrease; and for the lower class it amounted to 80.9 per cent of the 1900 total. The entire white population revealed a 55.8 per cent depletion of the original stock within the township during the thirty-year period.

The figures in Table II indicate that of the original 250 in the upper class in 1900, the aggregate number still living for whom data could be secured was 153. There were 191 who are known to be living of the 1900 total of 314 in the middle class. And of the 131 total in the lower class at the earlier period, 80 of them are yet living.

It is possible to assort the white population of 1930 by classes into

those who were in the township in 1900, continuing until 1930, plus their offspring residing in the township, and those who have moved into the community since 1900. When this is done, it is observed that only 23.1 per cent of the upper class were to be accounted for by immigration, and a considerable number of these were the husbands and wives who came into the community as a result of marriage to the original stock in this classification in 1900. The proportion of the middle class which is to be explained by immigration is 55.9 per cent, or 202 individuals. A significant number of these, 68 in all, moved

TABLE II

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE WHITE POPULATION OF 1900 BY CLASSES
AND SEX AS TO WHETHER LIVING OR DECEASED

CLASS	ENTIRE WHITE POPULATION OF 1900			DECEASED			AGGREGATE NUMBER STILL LIVING AND FOR WHOM DATA ARE AVAILABLE			NO DATA CONCERNING		
	Total	Males	Fe- males	Total	Males	Fe- males	Total	Males	Fe- males	Total	Males	Fe- males
Upper. . .	250	135	115	94	44	50	153	89	64	3	2	1
Middle. . .	314	169	145	101	56	45	191	101	90	22	12	10
Lower. . .	131	73	58	49	21	28	80	50	30	2	2	0
Total. .	695	377	318	244	121	123	424	240	184	27	16	11

into the community because of sawmill work, electrical work in the power plant, and road-construction work in progress at the time the last census on population was taken. A considerable part of those engaged in the preparation of the cement highway from the county seat, Union, to Carlisle in the same county, via Santuc, left the township after the completion of the road the following year. Those who did so numbered 18. Among those constituting the lower class in 1930, 25, or 50 per cent of them, represented an accretion from immigration into the township.

To what extent has the drawing power of the cities been a factor in the situation just described? Of the 153 among the upper class in the township in 1900 who are still living and for whom data are available, 59, or 38.6 per cent, are to be found in urban centers of

2,500 population and above. Among the upper group, 43.8 per cent of the females are residing in cities, and 34.8 per cent of the males.

TABLE III
THE ORIGIN OF THE 1930 WHITE POPULATION BY CLASSES

CLASS	TOTAL IN 1930 CENSUS	NUMBER WHO WERE IN THE TOWNSHIP IN 1900 AND WERE STILL LIVING THERE IN 1930 PLUS THEIR OFF- SPRING RESIDING IN THE TOWNSHIP	NUMBER WHO HAVE MOVED INTO THE COMMUNITY SINCE 1900			PERCENTAGE ACCOUNTED FOR BY IMMIGRA- TION INTO THE COMMUNITY
			Farming*	Other Work †	Total	
Upper.....	160	123	34	3	37	23.1
Middle.....	361	159	134	68	202	55.9
Lower.....	50	25	14	11	25	50.0
Total....	571	307	182	82	264	46.2

* Includes wives of men living there in 1900 and who were also there in 1930, but their wives came from outside the township; and the husbands of women who were native to the community but their husbands came from outside of the township.

† Mainly road-construction work, electrical work in power plant, sawmill work, and merchandising.

TABLE IV
THE NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF THE WHITES IN THE TOWNSHIP IN 1900
WHO ARE LIVING IN URBAN CENTERS

CLASS	AGGREGATE NUMBER STILL LIVING AND FOR WHOM DATA ARE AVAILABLE			NUMBER NOW LOCATED IN URBAN CENTERS			PERCENTAGE OF THOSE NOW LIVING WHO HAVE MIGRATED TO CITIES		
	Total	Males	Fe- males	Total	Males	Fe- males	Total	Males	Fe- males
Upper.....	153	89	64	59	31	28	38.6	34.8	43.8
Middle.....	191	101	90	46	26	20	24.1	25.7	22.2
Lower.....	80	50	30	49	32	17	61.3	64.0	56.7
Total.....	424	240	184	154	89	65	36.3	37.1	35.3

The middle class shows both the smallest numerical and the proportionate losses of the three classes to the cities. There were 46, or 24.1 per cent, of a total of 191 living who reside in urban centers.

The males to the extent of 25.7 per cent have moved cityward, and the females to the less extent of 22.2 per cent.

The largest proportionate loss to the cities is in the lower class. Of these, 49, or 61.3 per cent of a total of 80 still living, are to be found in cities, largely adjacent to the township, where textile mill work is available. Of these, 64 per cent are males and 56.7 per cent females.

Among an aggregate number of 424 of the original 1900 white population who are still living and for whom data are available, 154, or 36.3 per cent, are to be found in cities, far and near. Of these, there are 89 males, or 37.1 per cent of a total of 240, and 65 females, or 35.3 per cent of a total of 154.

These facts indicate that numerically the largest loss to the city is among the upper class. There are 59 of these as over against 49 of the lower class and 46 of the middle class. The proportionate loss is heaviest with the lower class, 61.3 per cent, with the next most severe drain of 38.6 per cent upon the upper class. The middle class, revealing a 24.1 per cent loss to the cities, is less affected by the pulling power of the cities. Thus, the urban trend from this township during the last thirty years has been primarily among the extremes, with less impingement upon the middle group. In actual numbers lost, there is clearly indicated a serious qualitative depletion of the upper class.

In the upper class, of the 59 migrating to cities, 22 per cent are in cities in Union County, South Carolina; 35.6 per cent are in South Carolina cities outside of Union County; and 42.4 per cent are to be found in cities far and near outside of the state. The migrants to cities in the county are about equally balanced as to sex; but in cities in the state outside of Union County, the women outnumber the men 2 to 1. When the migration is outside of the state, the men preponderate in a ratio somewhat more than 2 to 1.

By far the larger proportion of the urban migrants in the middle class have remained within the state of South Carolina. Of these, 45 per cent have migrated to cities in Union County. There are 37 per cent who have moved to urban centers in the state outside of the county in which Santuc Township is located. Cities outside of the state have attracted only 17.4 per cent of the total urban migrants in the middle class. The males in this class preponderate over

the females in the migration to cities in the county and outside of the state. The females, in larger numbers than the males, have gone to cities in South Carolina outside of the county in which they were residing in 1900.

The lower class shows only 4.1 per cent who have moved to cities outside of the state. There are 69.4 per cent who are to be found in the city of Union; and 26.5 per cent largely in the mills of Whitmire and Chester, South Carolina, in immediately adjacent counties. Except in the even balance of the sexes in the migration out of the bor-

TABLE V
OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF URBAN MIGRANTS BY CLASSES

OCCUPATIONAL CLASS	NUMBER OF URBAN MIGRANTS			PERCENTAGE OF URBAN MIGRANT		
	Upper	Middle	Lower	Upper	Middle	Lower
Professional class...	17	2	0	28.8	4.4	0.0
Business class.....	26	11	1	44.1	23.9	2.0
Clerical class.....	10	4	2	16.9	8.7	4.1
Domestic service....	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Skilled and semi-skilled labor.....	4	24	46	6.8	52.2	93.9
Occupation unknown	2	5	0	3.4	10.8	0.0
Total.....	59	46	49	100.0	100.0	100.0

ders of the state, the males in this class moving to nearby cities mainly for employment in textile manufacturing establishments exceed the females in numbers.

To what sort of opportunities are the individuals of these several classes attracted in the cities to which they move? The accompanying Table V provides a good answer to this question. A considerable but undetermined percentage of the upper class have had the advantages of a college or business-school training. It is, consequently, not surprising that the professional class claims around 29 per cent of them; that 44 per cent of them are mainly in the independent business class; that around 17 per cent of them are in the clerical class—approximately 90 per cent of them in these upper brackets of the occupational scale.

In contrast, the middle class records 4.4 per cent of its urban mi-

grants in the professional class, around 24 per cent in the business class, and 9 per cent in the clerical class—a total of 37 per cent in the three higher levels of occupations. There are 52.2 per cent in the ranks of the skilled and semiskilled labor.

The lower class, consisting mainly of the non-property-owning individuals and largely of submarginal farming status, are, approximately 94 per cent of them, in the skilled and semiskilled occupational classification. Almost without exception, the work of these is that of the cotton-mill or knitting-mill laborer in the adjacent textile centers principally within a radius of 15–25 miles. One of them in the business class runs a small store in a mill village, and two others clerk in stores in the county-seat town.

The middle class in largest proportions has continued on the farm. Of the 191 of the whites in this classification in the township in 1900 who are still living and for whom data are available, 127, or 66.5 per cent, are to be found on farms in various locations, inside and out of the county. Among these there are 65 males and 62 females.

The next highest proportion of those now living on farms is to be found in the case of the upper class. Of 153 of those yet alive, 78, or 51 per cent, are in the farming occupation as husbands, wives, sons, or daughters. With the upper group, the males are almost twice as frequently represented as the females among their contingent who are farming (51:27).

The lower class has remained on the farm to the extent of only 36.3 per cent. In a total of 80 of this class who are still living and their whereabouts known, only 29—16 males and 13 females—are at present on farms. The pull of the opportunity the lower class see or imagine they see in the textile industry developing around them has attracted nearly two-thirds of them away from their poorly managed tenant farms. Perhaps they have been bettered in the process. Some are decidedly of the opinion that such is the case; others, that it is not.

Nearly 50 per cent of the middle class of 1900 who are still living on farms are located in Santuc Township. There are 32.3 per cent on farms in other townships in the same county; 15.7 per cent farm-

ing in South Carolina outside of Union County; and 2.4 per cent who are located on farms in other states.

In the upper class, 52.6 per cent of the individuals living on farms are in Santuc Township. Farms in other townships of Union County claim 20.5 per cent of them, while 24.4 per cent are farming in other counties of South Carolina and 2.5 per cent are located on farms outside of the state.

The distribution of the 29 in the lower class who are farming is as follows: 58.6 per cent, on farms in Santuc Township; 34.5 per cent,

TABLE VI

THE NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF THE NON-FARMING WHITES IN THE TOWNSHIP IN 1900 WHO ARE LIVING IN TOWNS AND VILLAGES OF LESS THAN 2,500 POPULATION

CLASS	AGGREGATE NUMBER STILL LIVING AND FOR WHOM DATA ARE AVAILABLE			NUMBER NOW LOCATED IN TOWNS AND VILLAGES OF LESS THAN 2,500 POPULATION			PERCENTAGE OF THOSE NOW LIVING WHO ARE IN VILLAGES		
	Total	Males	Fe-males	Total	Males	Fe-males	Total	Males	Fe-males
Upper.....	153	89	64	16	7	9	10.5	7.9	14.1
Middle.....	191	101	90	18	10	8	9.4	9.9	8.9
Lower.....	80	50	30	2	1	1	2.5	2.0	3.3
Total.....	424	240	184	36	18	18	8.5	7.5	9.8

farming in other parts of Union County; and 6.9 per cent in South Carolina outside of the county where they were living in 1900. None of them is on a farm in other states.

The small towns and villages of less than 2,500 population have drawn to non-farming occupations 8.5 per cent of the aggregate number of the whites in the township in 1900 who are still living and their whereabouts are known. The proportionate attraction in this direction has been strongest (10.5 per cent) in the upper class, next greatest (9.4 per cent) in the middle class, and least (2.5 per cent) with the lower class. It is at once apparent that much of this loss partakes of an urban nature, since employment such as banking, merchandising, telegraphy, mail-riding, electrical work, and skilled

and semiskilled labor in the smaller cotton-mill centers is what affords the basis of living for these non-farming village migrants.

Of those in the upper class who have migrated to villages, 50 per cent are in such centers within Union County; 37.5 per cent are in other parts of South Carolina; and 12.5 per cent, in towns and villages of less than 2,500 in other states. Approximately 61 per cent of the village migrants reside within the county; 16.7 per cent in South Carolina outside of Union County; and 22.2 per cent in towns and villages outside of the state. The lower class shows only two migrants to towns and villages of less than urban classification, all of whom are located within the county.

SUMMARY

The area considered in this study was chosen because of the author's familiarity with it, and because its culture patterns lent themselves to the class approach which has been used. A further commending characteristic is that the township is entirely rural in character, and a severe depopulation, among white and Negro, has been taking place in it during the last thirty years. Moreover, the township is located in the Piedmont Plateau, where during the last three decades a marked industrialization has been the order of the day. Then, too, its agriculture has been upon a good average level until the depression of recent years, when it has suffered with the rest of the nation. Because of the typicality of the area, it is felt that what has been discovered to be the situation as to population change may be inferred as taking place in sections similarly situated over a wide territory. But for fear of valid criticism of the soundness of such generalization, it is understood that the phenomena herein described are claimed to apply only to the township specifically studied.

The data presented in the preceding pages clearly show that this rural township during the thirty-year period from 1900 to 1930 has sustained a severe depletion in its upper class, a considerable proportion of this being occasioned by migration to cities, adjacent and distant. This large loss of the leading stock of the community, unless corrective forces, economic, social, or otherwise, are brought about to

check it, must, as is already beginning to be indicated, undesirably lower the levels of life in the rural section affected.

The fact that the middle class, through immigration into the area, has increased 15 per cent is the most encouraging of all the facts determined. From a vigorous middle class, under conditions of a profitable agriculture, the depletions in the ranks of the upper class may be partly repaired. It is believed that owing to the unusually high quality of the old original families of the township, even at the present stage of their depletion, the damage done is irreparable as measured by former levels of cultural development. However, the upper classes have always been recruited from the middle classes, and there is much for which to be thankful in the fact that in the township under observation the middle group persists in farming.

The situation is a striking one with regard to the lower class in this area. Here the heaviest losses have been incurred, without a doubt to the general improvement of the community. The industrial development has offered a haven to the struggling submarginal farmers, the more backward element of the citizenship. And they have availed themselves of it perhaps decidedly to their own economic and social development. As they have stepped out, their farms either have gone out of cultivation or have been taken over for more efficient management by the accretions to the middle class.

Any community which has as much as a half or more of its population, in this instance approximately 76 per cent, composed of Negroes is unfortunately situated. Therefore, the fact that cityward migration, together with other factors, has decreased the Negro population around one-third, and relatively by approximately 6 per cent, is a salutary tendency which will operate to the best long-time interests of the community.

Thus, while the conclusion is inescapable that the township has suffered severely in the absolute and proportionate losses of its best people, there are partially compensating tendencies accompanying the process which, though they cannot be expected to restore the former level of the population composition of the community, will preserve it to a continued wholesome functioning.