

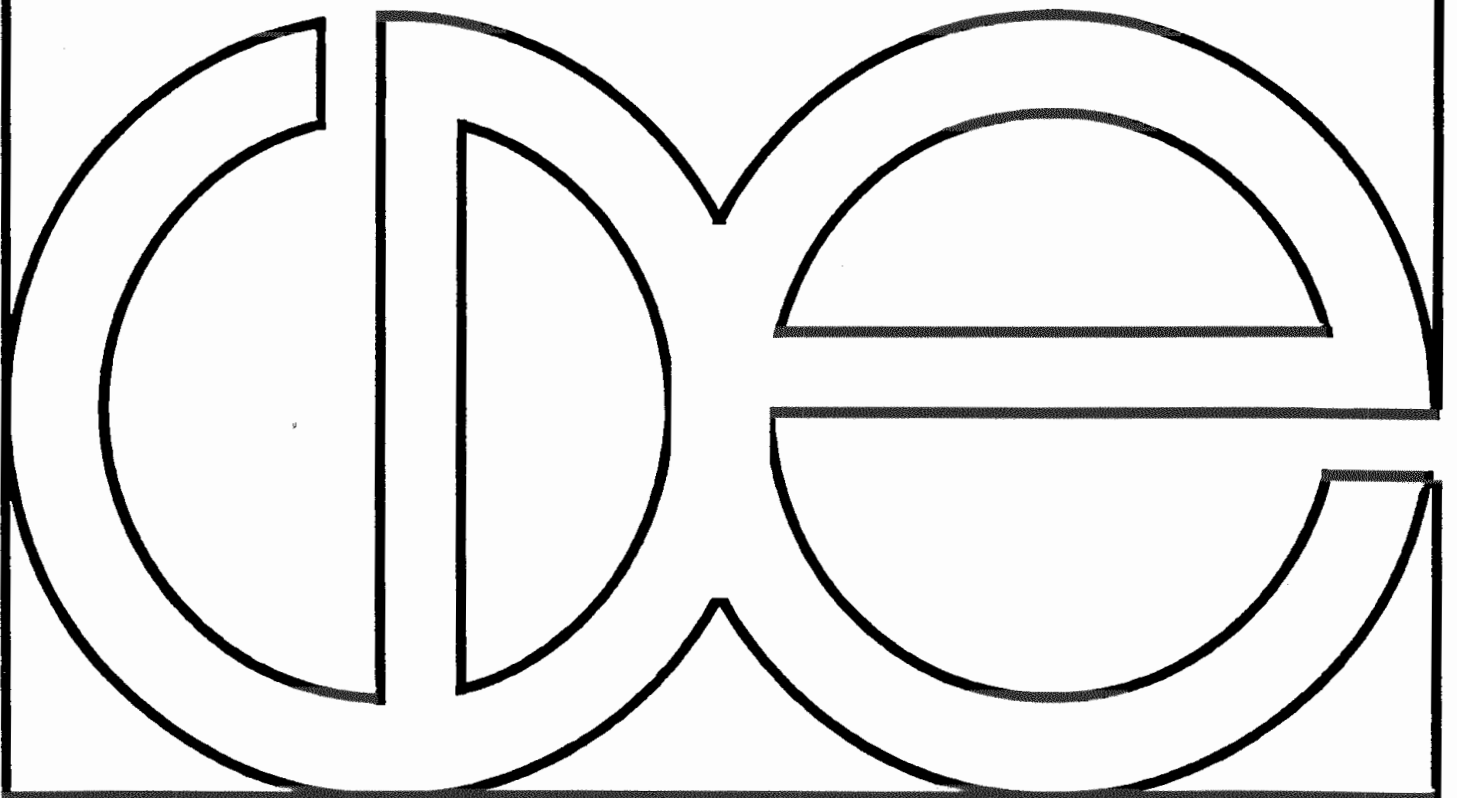
Center for Demography and Ecology

University of Wisconsin-Madison

POPULATION TRENDS IN RURAL AMERICA 1960-1990 (1)

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ABSTRACT

The 1970-80 population turnaround was a unique experience for nonmetropolitan America. This paper seeks to reappraise the turnaround decade in the light of population trends of the preceding and succeeding decades, through an overview of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan population trends. Analysis is for the U.S. as a whole as well as for regions, for counties classified by functional type and for place/nonplace distinctions. Explanations for the turnaround, such as the ascendance of non-economic residential preference factors and the emergence of the "information society" are tempered by the return in the early 1980s to a pattern of metropolitan population gain at a higher level than in nonmetropolitan areas. Period explanations of economic trends are important for both the turnaround and its reversal, particularly relating to extractive and manufacturing industries. Preferences for the quality of life provided by nonmetropolitan areas continue to be important but cannot be sufficient to solve the serious problems now facing rural America.

POPULATION TRENDS IN RURAL AMERICA 1960-1990

The last 30 years have seen two dramatic shifts in the pattern of rural and nonmetropolitan population change. In contrast to previous decades, the "nonmetropolitan turnaround" of the 1970s was a period of renewed and widespread nonmetropolitan growth which overall was at a higher level than metropolitan growth. Much of this differential was due to migration, with the number of metro-to-nonmetro migrants exceeding the number going in the opposite direction. This unanticipated trend generated a great deal of interest and research activity, but most observers were unprepared for yet another change, the "turnaround reversal" of the 1980s, during which nonmetro growth slowed considerably and was again outpaced by the growth of metropolitan areas. Now that new 1990 census data are becoming available, it is important to give more attention to these recent changes, and to reappraise the unprecedented 1970-80 turnaround period in the light of both the preceding and the succeeding decade. The present paper contributes to this task, by giving a preliminary overview of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan trends for the nation and specific subareas.

First a word about data and definitions. The basic source of data are the decennial US censuses of population for 1960 through 1990, and the basic distinction is between metropolitan counties, those which either include cities having, with their built-up environs,

at least 50,000 people, along with adjacent counties closely integrated through commuting and other activities; and all other nonmetropolitan counties (2).

As metropolitanization proceeds there has been a major shift of counties and their populations from nonmetropolitan to metropolitan status. For example, the 1963 delineation classed 409 counties as metropolitan, whereas the 1983 delineation included 714 counties in the nation. To make proper comparisons of growth over different decades, I classified the counties by metro status as of the beginning of each decade, since a constant delineation for a 30-year period would necessarily be unrealistic at some time in the interval (Fuguitt, Heaton and Lichter, 1988).

Trends since 1960 in nonmetropolitan and metropolitan population change for the US as a whole are given in Figure 1. The unique population change pattern of the 1970-80 turnaround decade clearly stands out here. Nonmetro growth was one and one-half times that of metro growth, with a strong decrease in metro growth and increase in nonmetro growth in comparison with the 1960-70 decade. Early in the 1980s, using the 1983 and 1984 county population estimates, some of us concluded that although there had been a reversal, we were not going back to the situation in the 1960s. The 1990 census shows that in fact the situation deteriorated after 1983, so that in terms of sheer growth differentials the 1980s is really more like the 1950s than the 1960s, though of course without the overall rapid growth of that earlier decade that was fueled by the baby boom. Nonmetro rates are 35 percent of metro rates in 1980-90, and almost the same, 38 percent in 1950-60 when metro grew 26

percent and nonmetro grew about 10 percent. Nonmetro rates were 68 percent of metro rates in 1960-70, an increase over the 1950s that was a seeming anticipation of the turnaround decade, though generally unnoticed at the time.

Regional differences: These overall percentage changes cover up a great deal of regional and subregional variation in population trends, reflecting differences in economic activities, population composition and socioeconomic structure. There has been considerable interest in broad regional trends, with the shift of population and economic activities to the South, and continuing growth in the West at the expense of the northern sections of the nation. Figure 2 shows that the 1970-80 turnaround was found in all region except the South. There nonmetro percent change was almost twice as great in the 1970-80 decade as in any other decade, but continued to be outpaced by metro growth. The most striking trends in the region tables, however, is the very slow nonmetro and metro growth over the past two decades in the Northeast and Midwest as compared to the South and West. Nonmetro growth in the South, however, had dropped almost to the level in the Northeast by 1980-90, with the growth of the West more than three times as large. Also by 1980-90 all regions had higher levels of metro than nonmetro growth again, except in the Northeast. Most nonmetro people in the Northeast are quite close to metropolitan areas, so this growth differential may be explained largely by metropolitan deconcentration.

County type: Much research has illustrated how heterogeneous nonmetropolitan America is in terms of many social and economic characteristics. Rural or nonmetro clearly

is not synonymous with farming, though there continue to be a number of areas having a high degree of dependence upon agriculture, and these have experienced slow population growth or decline. Rural manufacturing has a long history, and it was an important component in the nonmetro turnaround in providing new jobs, but this activity declined sharply in the 1980s as part of a national trend. Counties near metro centers have shown important growth effects through commuting and the deconcentration of urban employment. A number of nonmetropolitan counties also have shown growth through recreational activity, and an influx of new residents at or near retirement age. These varied specializations have been examined previously in seeking to explain the nonmetro turnaround and its subsequent reversal (Beale, 1988; Beale and Fuguitt, 1986; Fuguitt and Beale 1978). A comparison of nonmetro county types is shown in figure 3, using the new 1990 population figures along with those of previous censuses. The delineation is based on 1980 census commuting data and the USDA county functional classification. (3)

The widespread nature of the turnaround is illustrated by the fact that all county groups had the highest growth in the 1970-80 period, even those counties with no identified specialization. Commuting counties were also high in the 1960s when all other groups were quite low, but the highest rate by a considerable margin in 1970-80 was found in the retirement counties. Agricultural counties showed their only positive decade in 1970-80, and manufacturing counties grew more than twice as rapidly then as at other times. During the 1980s, all groups showed considerably reduced levels of growth. Retirement counties grew

almost twice as rapidly as commuting counties, agriculture reverted to decline again, and manufacturing and other counties had virtually no growth. Among these groups only retirement counties grew faster than all US counties, showing as a group continued population concentration relative to the remainder of the country. This circumstance was found only for commuting counties in 1960-70, but for both commuting and retirement counties in 1970-80.

Place-nonplace comparisons: Within nonmetropolitan areas, part of the new trend in the 1970s was a pattern of local deconcentration, with the population outside incorporated cities and villages generally growing faster than the population in such places, even if located at some distance from metropolitan areas. In other words, the familiar pattern of deconcentration of residences and activities around large cities appeared to have a counterpart even in the hinterlands of smaller remote nonmetro centers, so that the turnaround could be termed a time of regional, metro-nonmetro and local-level deconcentration across the nation (Long, 1981; Lichter and Fuguitt, 1982).

Figure 4 shows the place-nonplace growth differentials for nonmetro areas by location. Since 1960, in counties adjacent to metro centers, the nonplace population has grown more rapidly than the place population. The relative growth differential increased with each successive decade, consistent with the increasingly dispersed settlement around large cities, though absolute growth levels were quite low by 1980-90. For nonadjacent counties cities and villages grew faster than the remainder in the 1960s, but during the

turnaround, the nonplace growth was about twice the place growth at 17.8 percent, a remarkable finding given the low density and history of decline across the remote rural parts of much of the nation. Despite the strong downturn in overall growth in the most recent decade, the population outside cities and villages increased, but overall cities and villages declined slightly in population. This dispersed settlement pattern, then, is a continuation of turnaround era, albeit at much lower growth levels. At the same time, many small villages and cities face difficult economic and political problems related to population decline.

Individual county trends: In examining these nonmetro population trends, it is important to consider not only aggregate growth patterns but also how population change is distributed among individual counties. To make a comparison over the three decades, I followed an approach previously used by Calvin Beale (1988), of classifying counties by whether they declined, grew less than the US as a whole, or grew faster than the US as a whole. The latter cutting point is 13.4 percent for 1960-70 and 11.4 and 9.8 for 1970-80 and 1980-90. This takes into account the fact that overall US population trends have slowed since 1960, primarily due to the decline in fertility. Counties growing faster than the US experienced population concentration, in the sense that they had a higher percentage of the US total at the end of a decade.

Figure 5 shows the remarkable shifts of the turnaround and reversal in terms of the experiences of individual counties. The first three bars reveal that in the 1960s and the 1980s 50 percent of the counties lost population and less than one in five gained more than

the US as a whole. In the 1970s the pattern was reversed, with one half of the counties gaining more than the US as a whole, and 19 percent declining. The three right-hand bars of Figure 5 shift the focus to the individual, and indicate that the proportion of people living in declining counties is less than the proportion of counties declining, because these counties tend to be smaller in population size. The differential is less by 1980, however, indicating that larger counties tended to decline in the most recent decade. As a consequence, more than four out of ten nonmetropolitan residents in 1980 lived in counties that declined over the succeeding decade, whereas this was true of only one in ten of the nonmetro residents in 1970 and one third of the nonmetro residents in 1960.

Detailed county maps (Figures 7, 8 and 9) show the location of nonmetro counties in the three growth groups. These maps illustrate the local variations in growth and decline patterns that tend to be associated with the turnaround and its reversal. The increased number of metropolitan counties (those with no shading) across the three time periods shows the appreciable number of nonmetro counties that have shifted to metro status in succeeding decades. Across the three maps there is a core of declining counties, located primarily in the center of the country in the area known as the Great Plains. This is a region characterized by a high dependence on commercial agriculture and related activities. In the 1960s and the 1980s this contiguous area of decline was considerably larger, encompassing much more of the corn belt to the east in Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois and Missouri. The "farm crisis" of the early 1980s hit particularly hard in this area, affecting farmers and community businesses alike. Other notable areas of decline in the 1960s and 1990s include Southern Appalachia,

which grow in the 1970s in part due to the energy boom. The Mississippi delta, and other parts of the old South showed declining counties in all three periods but the numbers were much smaller in the 1970s.

On the other hand, nonmetropolitan counties around large metro centers as well as those in rapidly growing parts of the South and Southwest tended to grow faster than the US as a whole, many throughout the 30-year period. The extent of high growth counties is much wider in the 1970s, particularly in the Pacific northwest and the Rocky Mountain states where the turndown in energy and timber had a negative effect in the 1980s.

CONCLUSION

This review of recent nonmetropolitan population trends has underscored how remarkable and unique the experience of the 1970-80 turnaround was for nonmetropolitan America. A number of specific reasons have been given for this trend, that are reflected in the patterns shown here, including a relatively more prosperous agriculture during the period, increased employment brought on by the energy crisis, a continuing deconcentration of manufacturing, an increased prominence of recreation and retirement migration for attractive locations, and a continuing buildup of population and economic activities in nonmetro areas around larger metropolitan centers.

The turnaround reversal of the 1980s was a return to the pattern of the 1960s or 1950s with growth once more favoring metro areas. In part due to the decline in fertility,

however, aggregate levels of nonmetro growth were often lower in the 1980s than ever before. With the farm crisis of the early 1980s, areas dependent on agriculture were particularly hard-hit economically, as shown in the county maps. The energy boom of the 1970s was followed by sharp declines in the 1980s, and manufacturing went into a decline nationally that was felt particularly in nonmetro areas. Recreation and retirement counties, however, continued to grow more rapidly than the metropolitan population as a whole, but at a markedly slower pace than previously, and counties with a high degree of commuting to metro areas showed slower, but at least moderate growth in the 1980s.

This brief summary suggests a set of period explanations for both the turnaround and its reversal, particularly as they relate to the ups and downs of extractive industries. Previously, those seeking to explain the turnaround often put much emphasis on noneconomic, quality of life bases, and many were attracted to speculations that we were entering a new era in which work location was less important in an "information society" and people's preferences for desirable places to live were much more important. The subsequent decade has made it clear that locational constraints have not been repealed, and that economic considerations are fundamental, as nonmetro America suffered an economic slump throughout most of the period that corresponded to the downturn in population.

This is not to deny that preferences for the quality of life provided by nonmetro areas is not important--indeed it is no doubt a significant basis for the growth that continues in recreation-retirement areas and nonmetro zones peripheral to large cities. But this positive

factor cannot be sufficient to solve the serious problems now facing rural America. Slow growth and decline is now typical for nonmetropolitan areas throughout most of the nation. There is some degree of deconcentrated growth in nonmetro areas, in a continuation of the turnaround pattern, but the price is that overall villages and many small towns are growing slower than at any time in this century.

Just as it was easy to assume that everything was in place to support a continuation of the turnaround at the beginning of the 1980s, it is difficult to see a basis for any widespread nonmetropolitan economic revival at this time, that could underlie yet another reversal of nonmetro population trends. Two surprises in twenty years do lead to some humility, however, in making firm predictions, particularly for the long term.

In seeking to address current problems, however, the challenges of lessening the dependence of most areas on extractive industries and low-wage manufacturing are daunting, particularly in a time of national recession, and increasing ties with the world economy. Yet the challenges now faced by nonmetro America should not just be written off as intractable. In 1990, nonmetro counties that had experienced decline in the 1980s included 22 million residents, and encompassed most of the territory of the nation. Much of the nation's agricultural and timber production, moreover, is found there. Despite the difficulties, efforts to retain viable communities in these areas must continue.

FOOTNOTES

1. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Chicago, February 10, 1992. Support for this research was provided by the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and the Agriculture and Rural Economy Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture through a cooperative agreement, and by the Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, through a grant for the Center for Population Research of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The contribution of Loren Kylo, who prepared the county maps, is gratefully acknowledged, along with the assistance of Min Li.

2. There have been changes in the metropolitan definition over the years. Since 1960 the most important came prior to 1980 when Central Cities (or twin cities) of metro areas no longer had to include 50,000 people in their incorporated territories, provided there was 50,000 including the thickly settled area around the cities and the metropolitan area as a whole had more than 100,000 people. This liberalization resulted in six million more people being classed as metropolitan in 1980 than if the previous definition had been continued (Fuguitt, Brown and Beale, 1989: chapter 2).

3. Commuting counties are those with 15 percent or more of their population commuting to a central county of a metropolitan area in 1980. Others are classed according to a USDA county classification. Retirement counties are those with a high level of net immigration of persons 65 and over, and agriculture and manufacturing dependent counties are classed by per capita income data (Bender and associates, 1985). To avoid overlaps, noncommuting counties were classed as retirement if they had that classification, otherwise they were classed as agricultural if they had that classification, and otherwise as manufacturing if they had that classification. Those with none of the above were included in the "other" group. Of the 57 million nonmetropolitan residents in 1990, about 7 million were in commuting counties, 12 million in retirement counties, 6 million in agricultural counties, 15 million in manufacturing counties, and 17 million in other counties. Very similar results would have been obtained using nonmetro counties adjacent to metro counties instead of the 1980 commuting variable.

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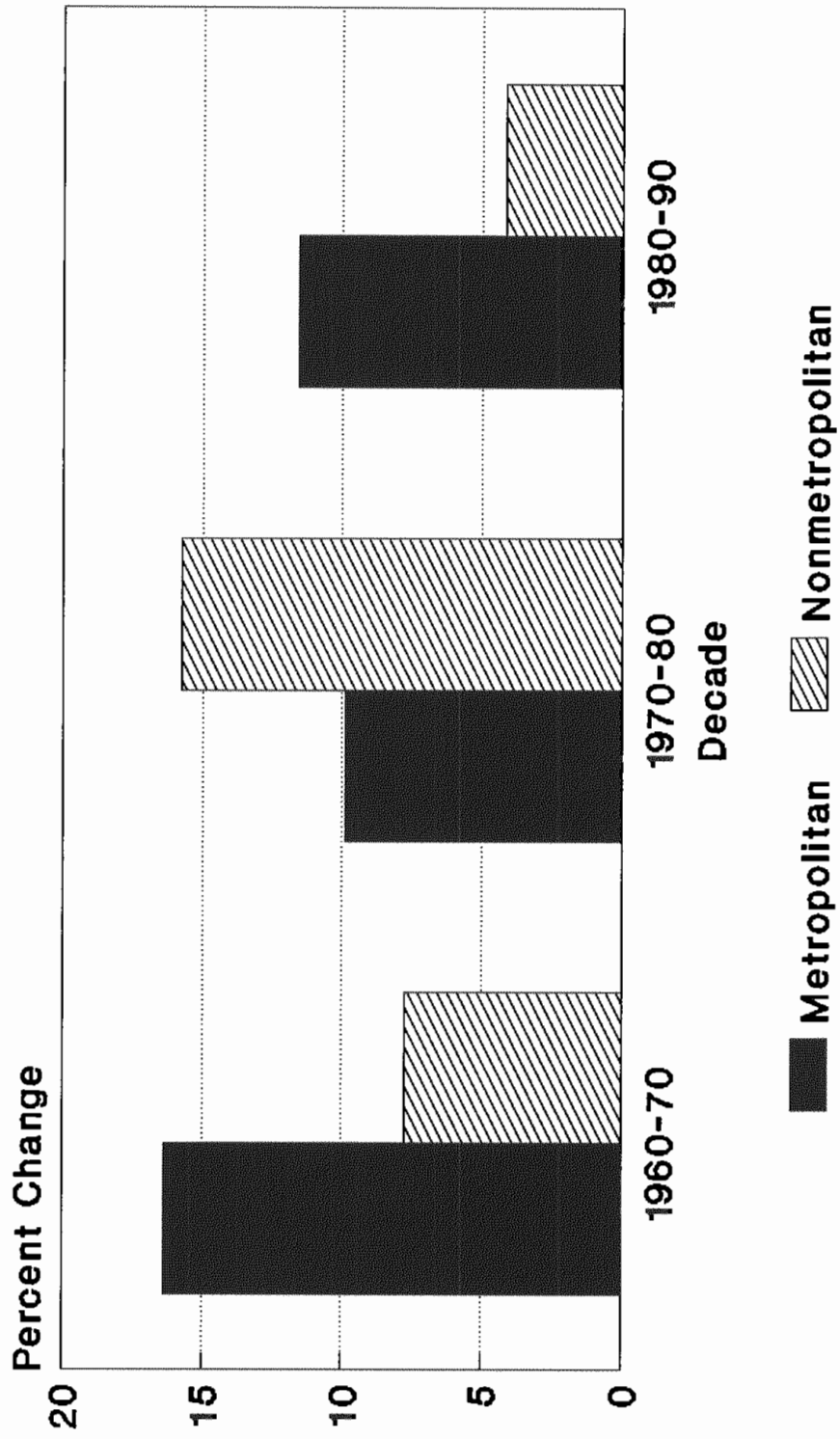
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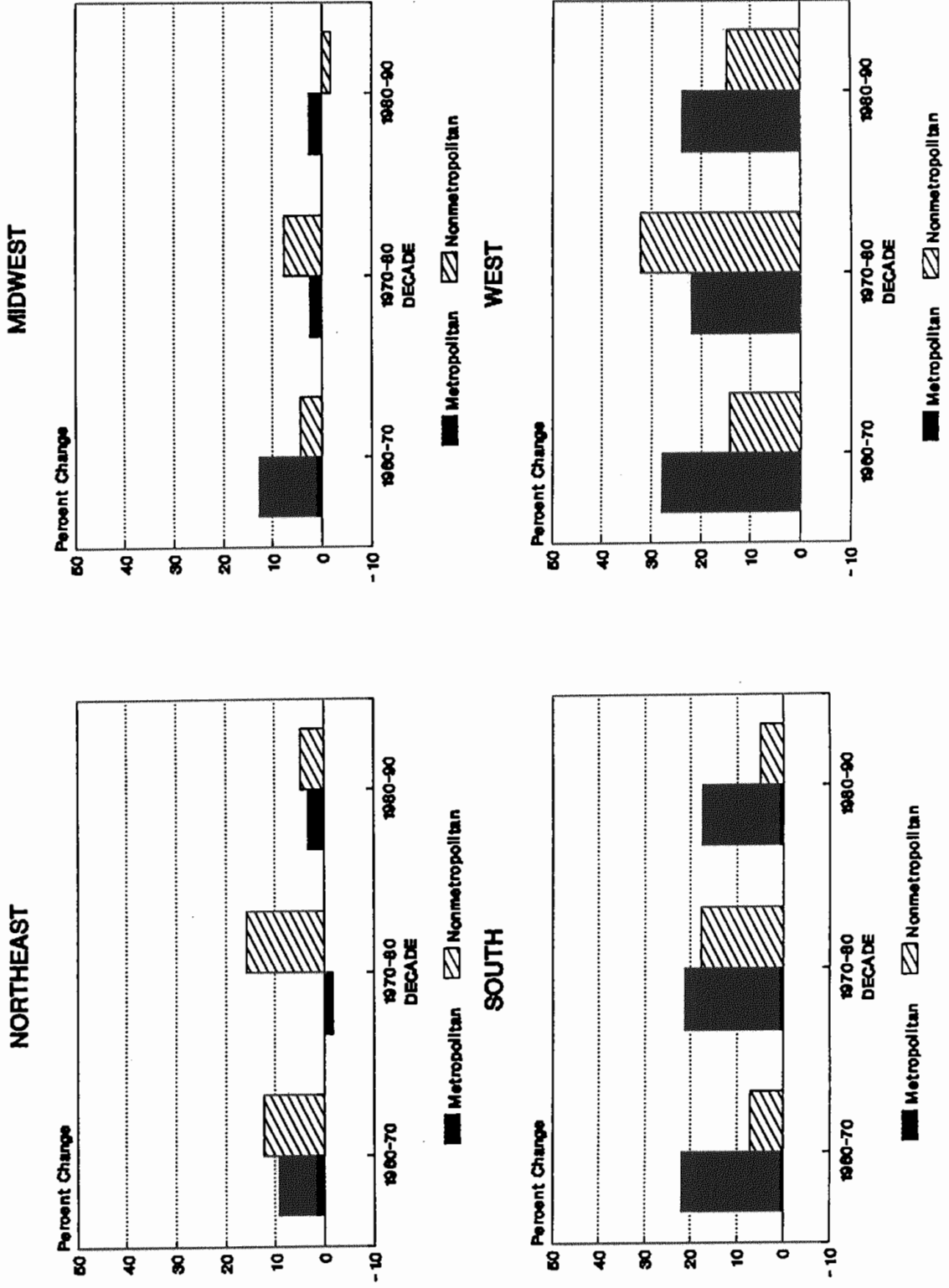
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Figure 1
**POPULATION CHANGE METROPOLITAN
 NONMETROPOLITAN US 1960-1990**



Nonmetropolitan county designation
 as of the beginning of each decade

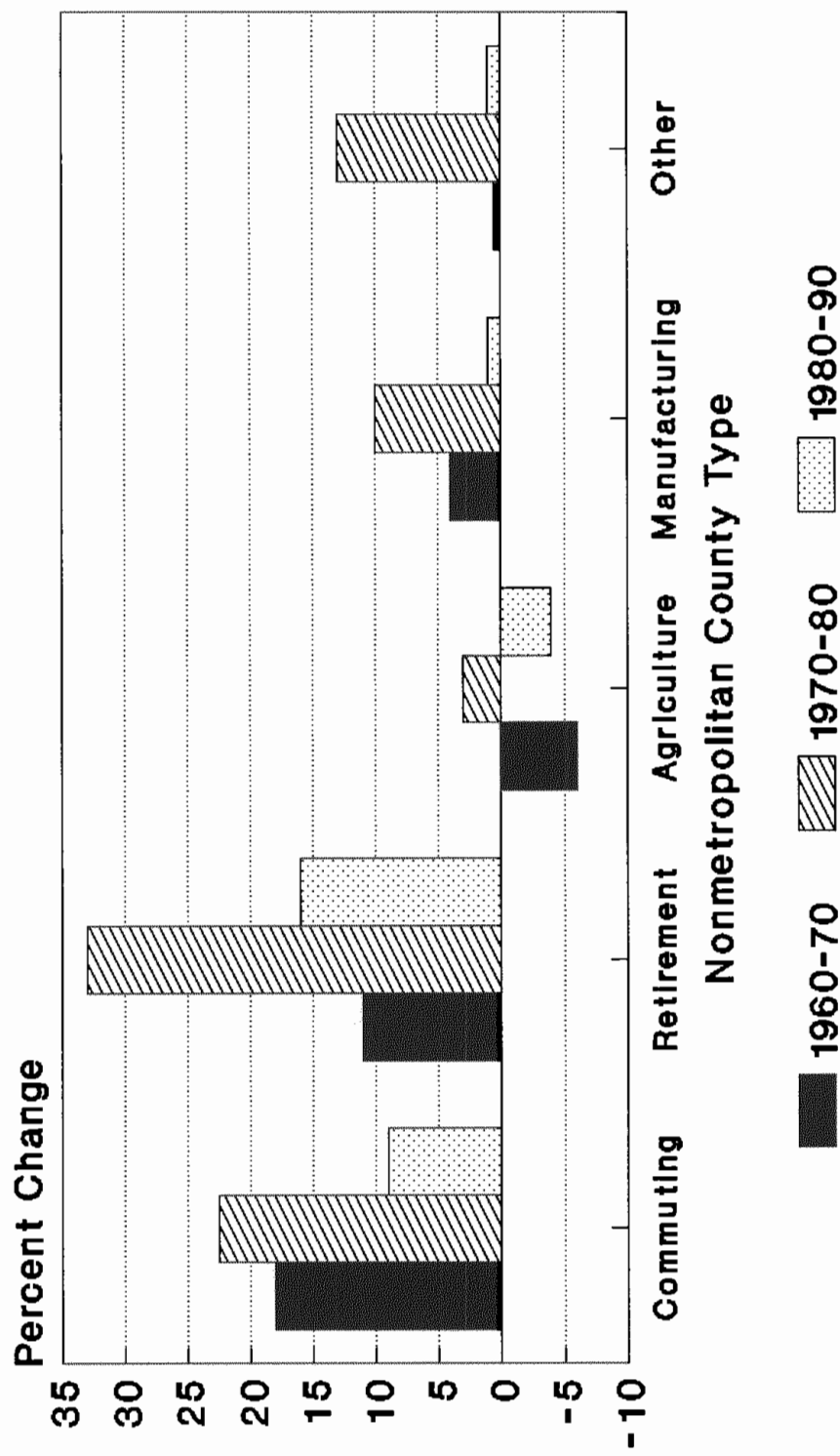
Figure 2
**METROPOLITAN NONMETROPOLITAN
 POPULATION CHANGE BY REGION 1960-90**



Nonmetropolitan county designation as of the beginning of each decade

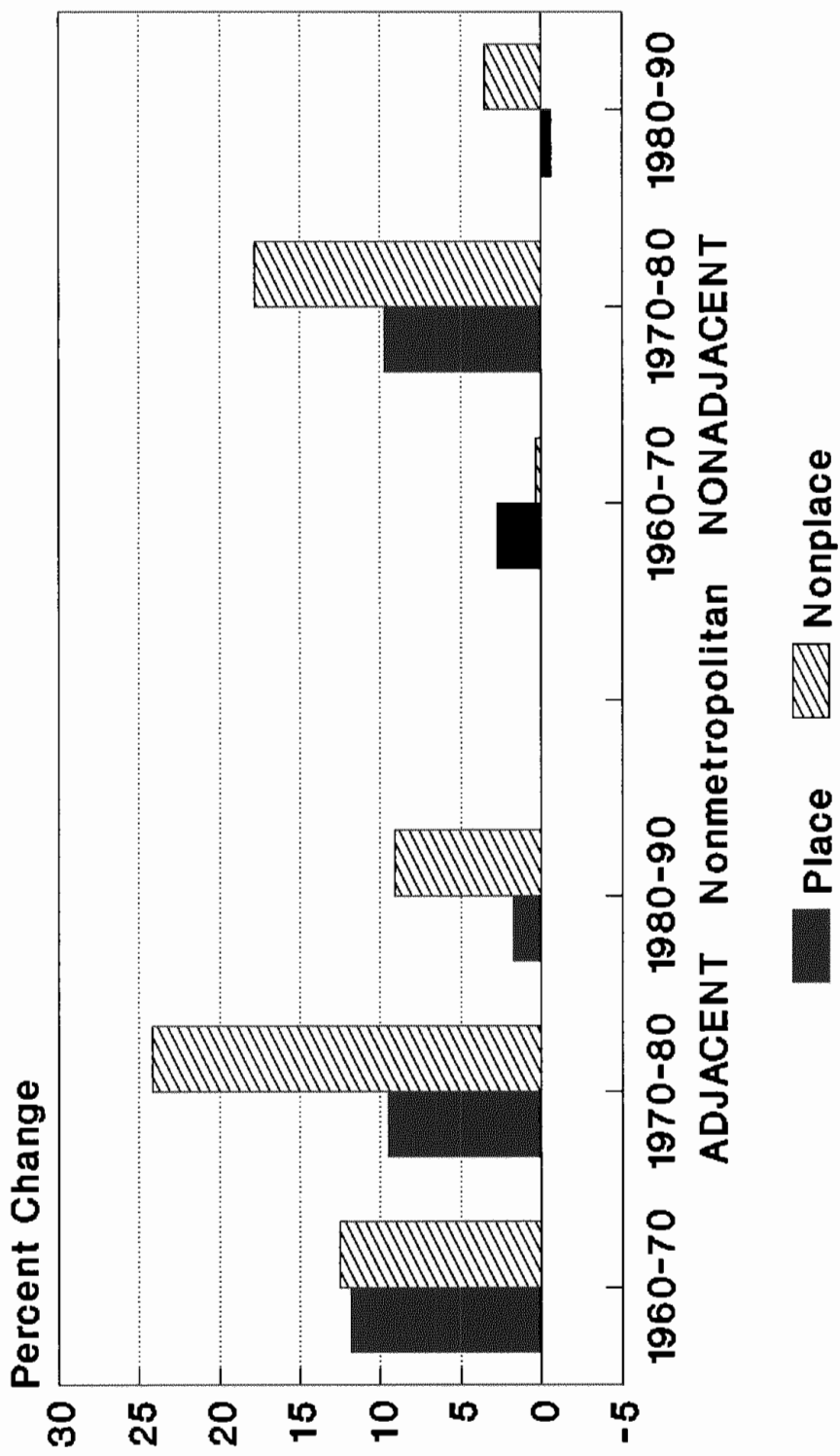
Figure 3

POPULATION PERCENT CHANGE BY COUNTY TYPE 1960-70 - 1980-90



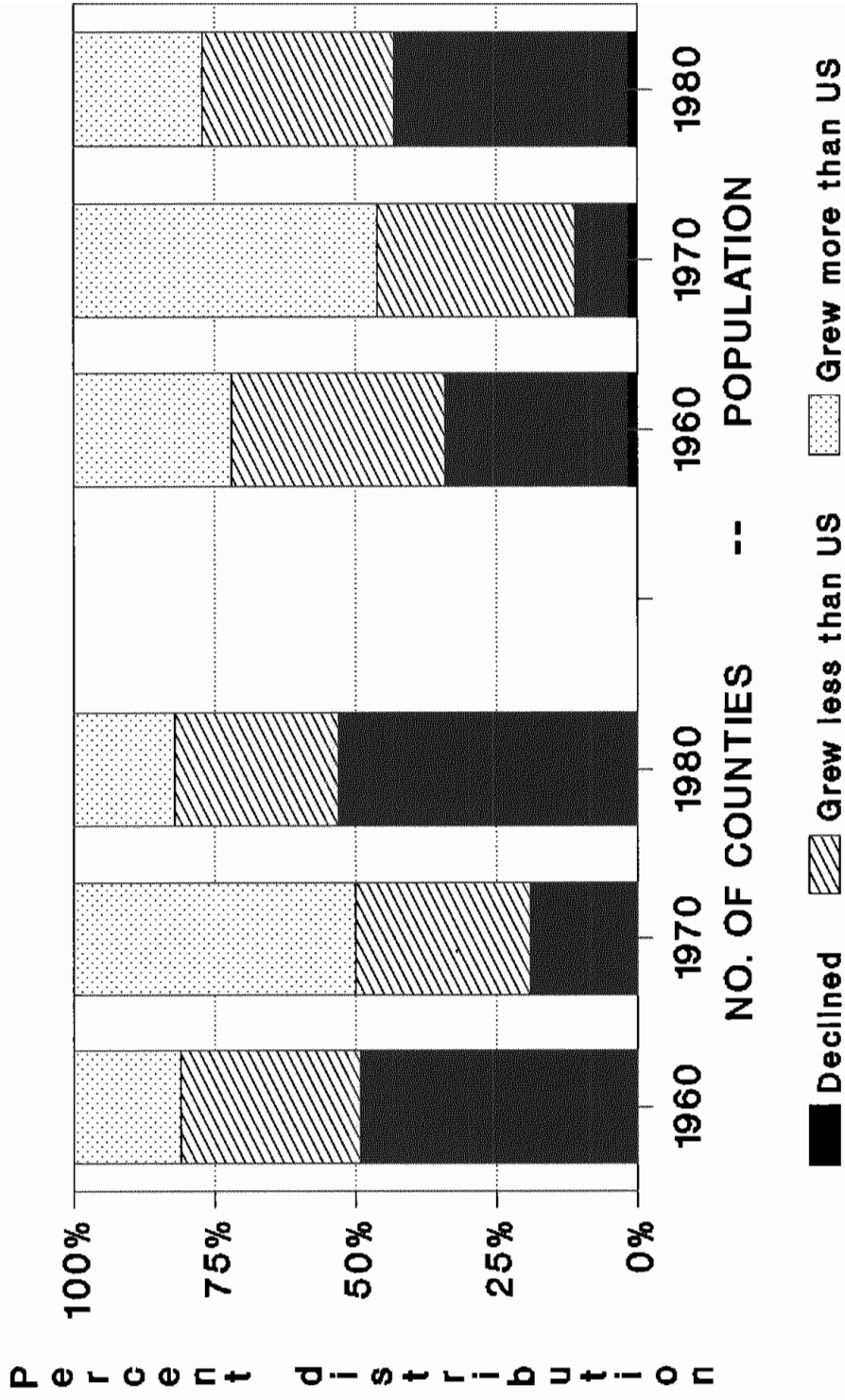
Nonmetropolitan county designation
as of the beginning of each decade

Figure 4
PLACE-NONPLACE POPULATION CHANGE
1960-70 - 1980-90



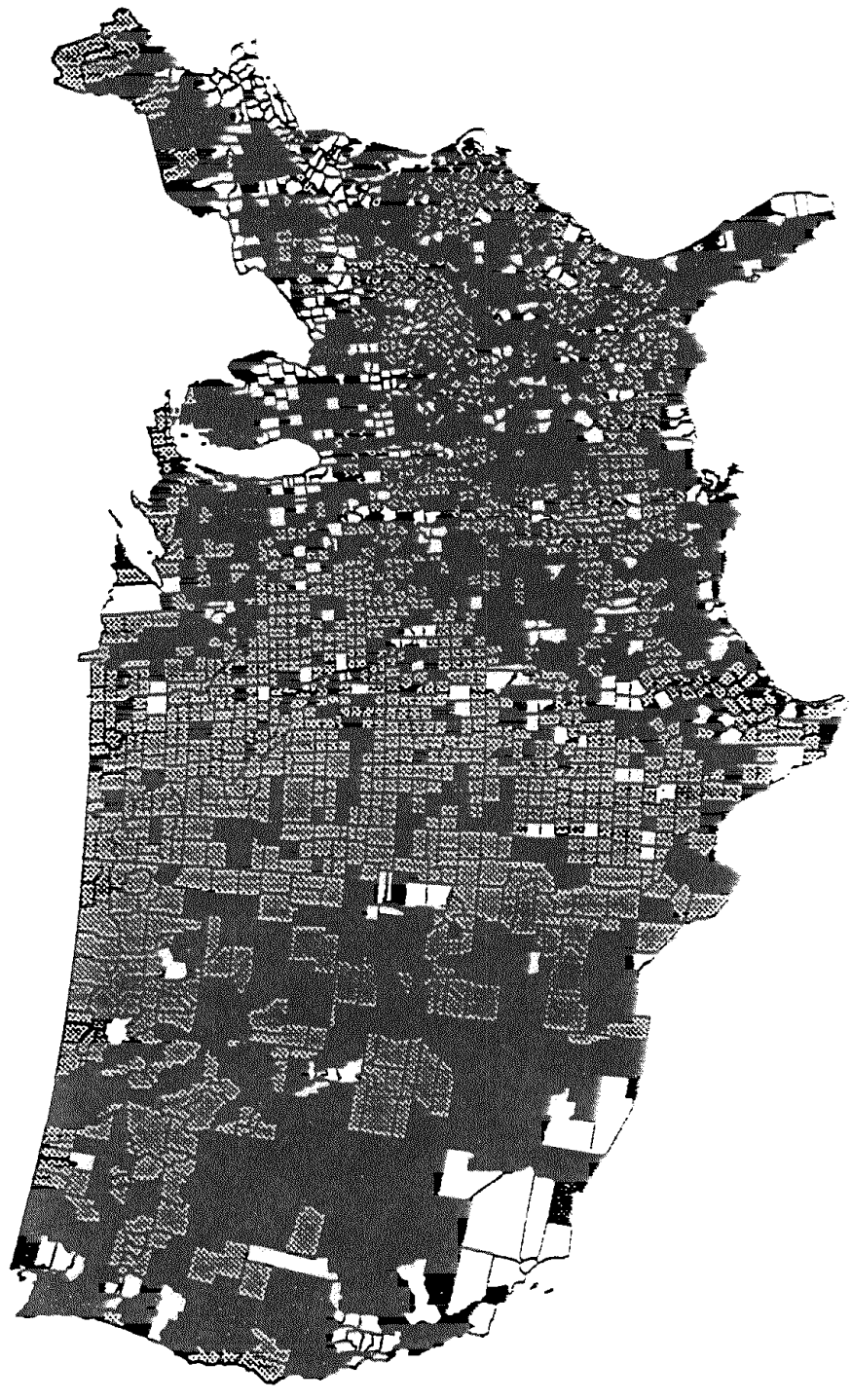
Nonmetropolitan county designation
as of the beginning of each decade

Figure 5
NUMBER OF COUNTIES AND POPULATION BY
SUBSEQUENT COUNTY POPULATION CHANGE



Nonmetropolitan county designation
as of the beginning of each decade.

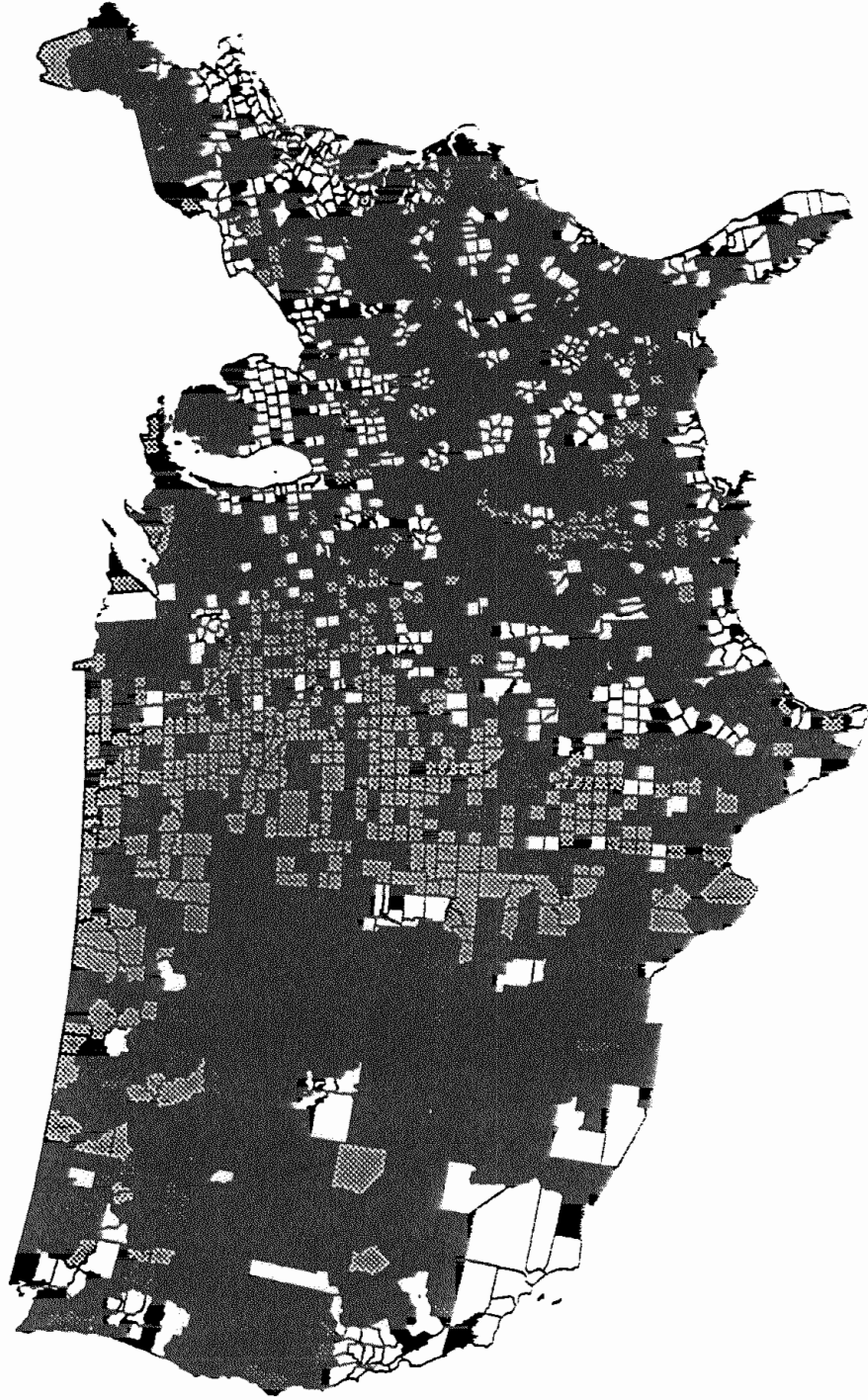
Figure 6
NONMETRO POPULATION CHANGE 1960-70



- Grew Faster than Rest of U.S. (33.1%)
- ▬ Grew but Slower than Rest of U.S.
- ▮ Decreased
- Metropolitan by 1980

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Figure 7
NONMETRO POPULATION CHANGE 1970-80

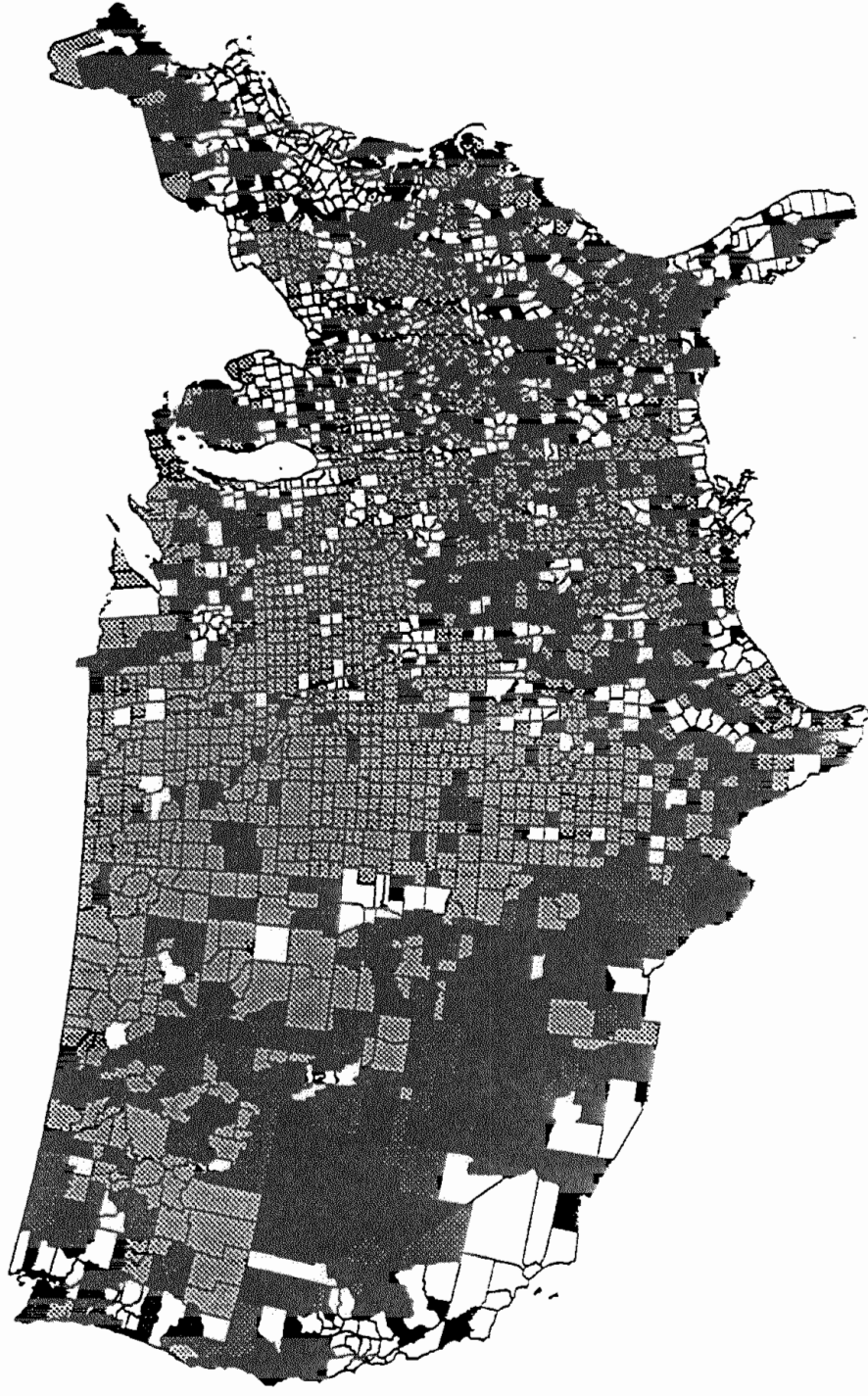


- █ Grew Faster than Rest of U.S. (U.S. 11.4%)
- ▬ Grew but Slower Than Rest of U.S.
- ▨ Decreased
- Metropolitan in 1974

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Figure 8

NONMETRO POPULATION CHANGE 1980-90



- Grew Faster than Rest of U.S. (9.8%)
- ▨ Grew but Slower Than Rest of U.S.
- ▧ Decreased
- Metro

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

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