

Racial/Ethnic Minorities in Rural Areas: Progress and Stagnation, 1980-90.

By Linda L. Swanson (ed.), Rural Economy Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Agricultural Economic Report No. 731.

Abstract

Rural minorities lag behind rural Whites and urban minorities on many crucial economic and social measures. This report examines rural Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islander populations and their economic well-being in the 1980's, an economically difficult decade for rural areas. Results show minimal minority progress as measured by changes in occupation, income, and poverty rates. However, the type and speed of progress was quite different among minority groups and between men and women of the same minority group. Results showed considerable diversity among groups in the characteristics that were associated with poor economic outcomes.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the reviewers—Leslie Whitener, Linda Ghelfi, and Ruy Teixeira—for their comments; Information Division editors Dale Simms, Tom McDonald, and Lindsay Mann for their help in streamlining the chapters; and Alma Young and Dominique Wood for their assistance with figures and tables.

Contents

Summary	iii
Introduction (Linda L. Swanson)	1
Rural Minority Trends and Progress	
Education and Rural Minority Job Opportunities (David A. McGranahan and Kathleen Kassel)	5
The Ethnic Dimension of Persistent Poverty in Rural and Small-Town Areas (Calvin L. Beale)	26
Rural Child Poverty and the Role of Family Structure (Linda L. Swanson and Laarni T. Dacquel)	33
Age and Family Structure, by Race/Ethnicity and Place of Residence, 1980-90 (Carolyn C. Rogers)	42
Blacks	
Increasing Black-White Separation in the Plantation South, 1970-90 (John B. Cromartie and Calvin L. Beale)	54
Trends in Occupational Status among Rural Southern Blacks (Robert M. Gibbs)	65
Education and the Economic Status of Blacks (Margaret A. Butler)	77
Hispanics	
Hispanics in Rural America: The Influence of Immigration and Language on Economic Well-Being (Anne B.W. Effland and Kathleen Kassel)	87
Native Americans	
American Indians: Economic Opportunities and Development (Deborah M. Tootle)	100
Asians and Pacific Islanders	
Asians and Pacific Islanders in Rural and Small-Town America (Calvin L. Beale)	114
Appendix	132

Summary

Rural minorities continue to lag behind rural Whites and urban minorities on many economic and social measures. This report concludes that during 1980-90 (an economically difficult decade for rural areas) Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian and Pacific Islanders in rural areas made minimal progress in lowering poverty rates, raising income, and improving occupation status and education levels. Improvements in the economic and social conditions of minorities in small towns and open country areas is a concern of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in its role as coordinator of Federal rural development activities.

The censuses of 1980 and 1990 reveal that the type and speed of socio-economic progress was quite different not only between rural minorities and both rural Whites and urban minorities, but also between men and women of the same minority group. There was considerable diversity among groups in the characteristics that were associated with poor economic prospects.

Since nearly 90 percent of the nonmetro population is White, the poverty population has a similar racial composition. Although almost three-fourths of the nonmetro poor were White in 1989, the probability of being poor was about three times as great for nonmetro Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans as it was for Whites.

More than 500 rural counties have had poverty levels of 20 percent or more in each census from 1960 through 1990. Rural minorities tend to be geographically clustered in rural counties with the poorest economic outlook. In two-thirds of these counties, the high poverty incidence reflects inadequate income among Black, Hispanic, American Indian, or Alaskan native residents. Poverty rates have dropped substantially in counties where most of the poor are Blacks, but much less progress is found in Hispanic and American Indian areas. Poverty increased over the decade for rural children, particularly minorities. The increase in rural child poverty was largely due to the sharp rise in families headed by women, accompanied by an increasingly high poverty rate for these families. In 1989, half of rural Black children, 43 percent of rural Native American children and 38 percent of rural Hispanic children were poor, compared with 16 percent of rural White children.

Minorities, with the exception of many Asian groups, are disadvantaged in rural labor markets. Compared with Whites, they are more likely to have been jobless in the previous year or, if they worked, to have worked part-time or part-year. Minority earnings are lower than average in rural areas and this gap increased between 1979 and 1989. Native American men have extremely high rates of joblessness (21 percent) and little full-time work. Hispanic men are hampered by poor English ability and a concentration in agriculture—much more so than Hispanic women. Black men appear to face pay discrimination not found for other groups or for Black women. All of these problems tended to be more pronounced at the end of the 1980's than at the beginning.

Neither Black men nor Black women in the rural South, where more than 90 percent of all rural Blacks live, enjoyed significant improvement in occupational status during the 1980's, a marked contrast to earlier periods. Blacks were half as likely to work in white-collar jobs as Whites and twice as likely to work in service occupations. Racial differences in educational attainment and industry type explain only part of the occupational structure.

Despite some increases in education among rural minority groups during the 1980's, they remain over-represented among those lacking a high school diploma. They are less likely than other rural workers to have the education necessary to yield stable or increasing earnings. College completion rose only among Hispanic and Native American women, and then only slightly.

Unemployment rates were higher in 1990 than in 1980 for Blacks, especially those with lower levels of education. Due to limited job opportunities at lower skill levels, young adults who did not graduate from high school had the highest unemployment rates.

Concentrated largely in the Southwest, Hispanics had the greatest numerical growth of all minority groups in rural areas in the last decade. Poverty increased for rural Hispanics, a trend partly related to the combined effect of continuing immigration, lack of English language proficiency, and concentration in agricultural employment.

The geographically isolated rural areas in which many American Indians live offer mainly low-wage manufacturing and consumer services jobs. Rapid but uneven economic development on and near reservations in the 1980's has not always led to improvements in labor market opportunities. American Indians continue to be overrepresented in lower paying jobs and face high unemployment.

People of Asian and Pacific Islands origin are the smallest racial minority group in rural and small town areas, but had the most rapid rate of increase, growing by 42 percent from 1980 to 1990. More than a fourth lived in Hawaii. With the exception of those from Indochina, their status in education, occupation, and income was higher than that of the general population.

These conclusions about minority situations are sufficiently clear and distinctive that they will apply throughout the 1990's. This is the most comprehensive information available on rural minorities until results of the next population census become available, well after 2000.