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The Minnesota Melting Pot

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SOCIOLOGY

The Minnesota Melting Pot

This paper is a brief examination of selected aspects of Minnesota's population through a century of time. Although the concept *melting pot* is usually limited to a consideration of the changing ethnic composition of a population, it is expanded here to include changing size and changing rural-urban, sex, and age composition. After a century of statehood the present Minnesota population is a product of the mixing and blending of a number of characteristics. It is not solely a consequence of the assimilation of diverse ethnic stocks.

The earliest settlements in Minnesota occurred around 1820. In 1849, Minnesota became a territory, in 1858, a state. In 1862, two important developments occurred which influenced the early settlement of the state. These were the notorious uprising of the Sioux Indians, resulting in their banishment from the state, and the Homestead Act encouraging early settlers to move in and stake claims.

The people who came in to settle were, with very few exceptions, a part of one of two main movements. These were the westward movement of the native-born Americans seeking advancement or new opportunities, and the immigration of millions of Europeans. Both of these movements operating in the state of Minnesota created some degree of conflict. For example, Douglas Marshall, a rural sociologist formerly of the University of Minnesota, relates that in an interview in one of his community studies a Norwegian woman stated: "This used to be a good neighborhood before foreigners started coming in." Marshall found that to her foreigners were Yankees from the East (James, 1949: 2).

ETHNIC COMPOSITION

The term *ethnic* is related to but distinguished from *race* or *nationality*. Race is strictly a biological concept or better, its determination is on the basis of biologically inherited qualities only. Nationality is a cultural concept based on such factors as language, geographical area and custom. Ethnic is a term used to include a composite of race and culture.

As late as 1890, one-third of the total population in Minnesota was born outside the United States. This proportion had remained constant since 1860. Between the years 1870-1920, two-thirds of Minnesota's population were foreign born and children of foreign born parents. Since the turn of the century, the proportion of foreign born has been decreasing. In 1920, one-fifth was foreign born, in 1940, one-tenth; and in 1950, one-twelfth (Nelson, *et al.*, 1953: 10). The significant decline came after the United States Immigration Acts in the 1920's. With continuation of the present immigration laws, foreign born in Minnesota (as for all U. S.) will become negligible.

What are the nationality sources and numbers of immigrants that came to settle in Minnesota? Different censuses have different ways of recording areas from which large numbers of immigrants came. Sometimes they distinguish between Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland, or as between Scotland, England, Wales, and Ireland. Sometimes they group all people from Scandinavia or from the British Isles together. The first immigrants to Minnesota from outside the United States were the Scotch, Irish, and Swiss from Canada. By the time of the panic in 1858, Canadian immigration had become relatively unimportant and a large influx of Germans and lesser numbers of Scandinavian, British, French and Swiss settlers directly from Europe began having its effect on Minnesota population. From 1858 to the turn of the century, Germany supplied a larger number of immigrants than any other nation. Norway and Sweden ranked second and third, shifting their positions with the various censuses. In the 1910 census, Sweden ranked highest, Germany second, and Norway third. In 1950, Sweden ranked first, Norway second and Germany third. If we discount Anglo-Canadian stocks, Finland ranks fourth. (James, 1949: 3). There are ethnic groups other than those mentioned above and not ordinarily listed in Minnesota's ethnic stocks

which are nevertheless significant. These with their respective numbers according to the 1880 censuses are: Bohemian (7,750), Swiss (2,800) Native Civilized Indians (2,300), Poles (2,200), Russians (2,200), Colored (1,500), French (1,350) (Blegen, 1938: 235).

One significant consequence of this divergent population which can still be noted after a century of statehood is the existence of "cultural islands." New Ulm is a noted German center; Silver Lake, Bohemian; Clarks Grove, Danish Baptist; Minnesota, Icelandic; Mountain Lake, Russian-German Mennonite; St. Cloud, German Catholic; New York Mills, Finnish; Spring Grove, Norwegian Lutheran; Vasa (and many others), Swedish. Fairmont was settled by English gentlemen. According to Blegen (1938: 234), the Englishmen who settled in Fairmont were "gay and plucky, they organized boat clubs, staged fox hunts, racing, football, and cross-country riding." These were activities, one might add, which drew criticism from other more serious minded groups.

With the advance of each new generation, the identity of each of these "culture islands" was minimized. Furthermore, the identity of each will continue to decline because whenever and wherever two or more unlike peoples come into effective contact they seek means of communication with each other and set off processes which ultimately resolve the differences among them. The counterforces which intervene to slow the process of assimilation are prejudice, either ethnic or racial prejudice, and, ethnocentrism—a strong in-group feeling. But with each succeeding generation these counterforces tend to be overcome and assimilation tends to be more complete.

This diversity of population has both favorable and unfavorable consequences. It results in an enrichment of cultural life but also there are problems in community organization resulting from the interaction of various diverse groups.

RURAL-URBAN COMPOSITION

One should note at the outset that rural and urban have no precise meanings which apply universally. In the United States, since the 1950 census, urban is considered to include all incorporated places of 2500 people or more and the urbanized fringes of metropolitan areas. Rural includes all that is not urban. There is an obvious trend of the rural-urban population in Minnesota shown by comparing the

percentages in the two censuses which most nearly represent the century marks. In 1860, Minnesota was 9.4 percent urban and 90.6 percent rural. The 1950 census revealed that for the first time in the history of census taking more than half the people of Minnesota lived in urban places. The percentages were, urban, 53.9; rural, 46.1 (Nelson, 1953: Table I). In general, Minnesota is moving along well with the trend of the nation as a whole in the process of urbanization.

In the decade 1940-50, 48 of 87 counties decreased in number of people. As one would expect, rural counties lost, urban ones gained. In this same decade, the total state population increased by 190,000, while the rural population decreased by 27,000. Since 1934, which was the peak year of farm population in Minnesota, the farm population has declined steadily from 935,000 to 740,000.

AGE AND SEX COMPOSITION

Some facts pertinent to sex and age composition in the United States which should be recalled here are: 1. Any region in process of development holds more attraction for younger persons than for older persons, 2. in new and developing regions there is likely to be more male than female immigration, as well as more males in the total population, and 3. long migrations tend to be predominately male while short migrations (e.g., rural to urban) are likely to involve more women than men. These principles suggest reasons for sex and age distribution in Minnesota as it has developed during the century and also as it continues to develop.

In 1850, there were many more males in Minnesota than females. The percentages were males 61.2, females 38.8. In the 1950 census, the figures showed females still being outnumbered by the males but very nearly equal. Percentagewise the figures were males 50.3 and females 49.7 (Nelson, et. al. 1953: Table 7). According to a 1956 release males still out-numbered the females in Minnesota (Barr, 1957).

In relating sex composition to rural-urban population it is revealing to contrast the sex ratios in a rural area of twelve counties in northeast Minnesota (Cook, Lake, St. Louis, Koochiching, Lake of the Woods, Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Cass, Itasca, Crow Wing, Aitkin and Carlton) with two counties (Hennepin and Ramsey), almost entirely urban. In 1900, the rural area mentioned above had 147.9 males per 100

females. In 1950, the ratio was 106.6 males per 100 females. In the urban area there were 106.3 males per 100 females in 1900 but in 1950, there were only 93.3 males per 100 females (Nelson, 1953: Table 9). The in-state migration, farms to cities, is upsetting sex ratios. In the total Minnesota population, the trend continues toward equal proportion of male and female. This conforms with but lags behind the national trend. The United States as a whole has "changed its sex" in the 1950 census, moving toward female preponderance. The state of Minnesota at this point is also changing its sex. The fact that it lags behind the nation as a whole suggests also that it is more frontier in nature.

Age distribution tables indicate that in the early part of the century, children in the "0-4" age group were proportionately larger in number than this same group today. Also the "65 and over" group was proportionately considerably less than today. In 1880, 15.0 percent was listed as "0-4". In 1950, 11.1 percent. In the group "65 and over" in 1880, 2.5 percent of the population was included. In 1950, the figure was 9.0 percent (Nelson, et al., 1953: Table 5). In 1950, the percentage of total population over 65 was more than three and a half times that of 1880. Another interesting comparison in age composition is that, in spite of the tremendous increase of aged in Minnesota, the increase of people over 65 is significantly smaller for Minnesota than for the nation as a whole. This indicates that older people tend to migrate from Minnesota.

SIZE OF POPULATION

The State of Minnesota has had a constant increase in population from the beginning of statehood down to the present time. Census figures show that the population of Minnesota in 1850 was 6,077. In 1950, it was 2,982,483. However, the rate of increase for each decade has decreased regularly with exception of 1940. In 1860, the population increase over the previous decade was from 6,077 to 172,023. This is 2,730.7 percent increase in one decade. The decades that followed show the following percentage increases over each previous decade: 1870, 155.6; 1880, 77.6; 1890, 67.8; 1900, 33.7; 1910, 18.5; 1920, 15.0; 1930, 7.4; 1940, 8.9; and 1950, 6.8 (Nelson, et al. 1953: Table 1).

Data of the present decade are not yet complete. However, a few observations can be made. In the years 1956 and 1957, a total of 65

counties increased in population. A majority of the 22 counties decreasing in population were located in the north-west quarter of the state. Of the counties showing a loss in population, most of them did not have a town of 2,500 or over. Approximately 50 percent of the total population increase for the State of Minnesota between 1956 and 1957 occurred in the Twin City metropolitan area.

In the decade 1940-50, Minnesota's natural increase was greater by 175,000 than the total state population increase of 190,000. This reflects the extent of the negative migration change for the decade. In the last two years for which there are records, 1955-57, there has been a positive migration change to the extent of approximately 10,000. The total state increase in the one-year period, 1956-57, was 59,936. The natural increase was 53,566. The additional 5,470 was due to the in-migration excess over the out-migration. Out-migration had exceeded in-migration every year in the first part of the 1950 decade as well as in previous years. The tide turned in 1955; it was at this time that the migration change changed from negative to positive. This suggests greater "pull" than "push" forces in Minnesota migrations, a condition not existing in the years just prior to 1955. By April, 1957, the population of Minnesota had reached a total of 3,307,232. This represents an increase of 59,036 above the 1956 estimate and a total gain of 324,749 above the 1950 Federal Census figure of 2,982,483 (Barr, 1957).

CONCLUSION

1. Settlement in Minnesota began around 1820, but the most rapid growth took place following the Civil War. Several northern counties are still very sparsely populated.
2. The population of Minnesota represents numerous ethnic groups but is predominantly Swedish, Norwegian and German.
3. Minnesota population has shifted from rural to urban.
4. Minnesota population, once predominantly male, now has almost equal sex ratio.
5. Minnesota population is aging and there is a considerable out-migration of elderly people.
6. Minnesota, as well as the nation as a whole, has been thriving on an ever growing population. The amount of increase, however, has been constantly decreasing. Consequently it is important to realize

that instead of taking an "ever bigger" population for granted, it may be more realistic and constructive to adjust an out-look to an "ever better" population.

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