

Rewriting the Rural Narrative

Speak softly and carry statistics

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What is our future?

People keep leaving rural America. According to U.S. Census figures from 2010, just 16% of the country's population lives in rural areas, down from 20% in 2000, and down dramatically from 72% about a hundred years ago. Be stories, both of the people who left their small percentage of Americans who still nation. There are stories, too, of people who left for myriad reasons. We want to know those reasons, and the story of rural life that they tell.

Rural Minnesota is in trouble. Young people are fleeing the farms and forests of the Gopher State, and the residents left there are aging. And they're dying. While populations decline outstate, the Twin Cities area, especially the suburbs, booms.

We became kind of the poster child for the war on poverty, and any time somebody wanted to do a story about poor people, we were the first stop.

Sociologists Patrick Carr and Maria Kefalas spent two years in a small town in Iowa trying to find out why so many young people are leaving rural America. What they found was that many small towns are playing a role in their own demise, by pushing the best and brightest to leave and under-investing in those who stay.

Rural Populations Continue to Shrink

Is Rural America Struggling? provides an excellent summary of the economic and population issues facing rural America. Key quote:

... rural America's job growth is stagnant and the population is in decline. In fact, it's the first time such a population decline has been recorded in the nation's rural counties.



Fighting for an American Countryside

The Decline of Rural Minnesota

THU SEP 20, 2012 AT 09:04 PM PDT

The slow, agonizing death of the small
US town

HOLLOWING OUT THE MIDDLE

*The Rural Brain Drain and
What It Means for America*

When death comes to a small town, the school is usually the last thing to go. A place can lose its bank, its tavern, its grocery store, its shoe shop. But when the school closes, you might as well put a fork in it.

Survival of Rural America

VICTORIES AND BITTER HARVESTS



Richard E. Wood



Deficit Approach

Fixing things that can't or shouldn't be fixed

No More Anecdotal!

anecdotal (noun). *information which is presented as if it is based on serious research but is in fact based on what someone thinks is true*



1900-1950

- Mechanization of agriculture
- Roads and transportation
- Educational achievement and population loss
- Church closings (Delafield)



1950+

- Main street restructuring
- School consolidations
 - MN 432 districts in 1990 to 337 in 2010
- Hospitals closings



The rural idyll



“Agriculture is no longer the mainstay of the rural economy.”

The Media Idyll Persists

Who are you going to find in a small town when you travel to small towns in morning and afternoon?



"It looks like a ghost town," said Bill Gibson, a 74-year-old farmer, whose grandfather broke ground on the family's land with a team of oxen in the middle of the 19th century. "I sure miss the people."

Photo by Denise Peterson

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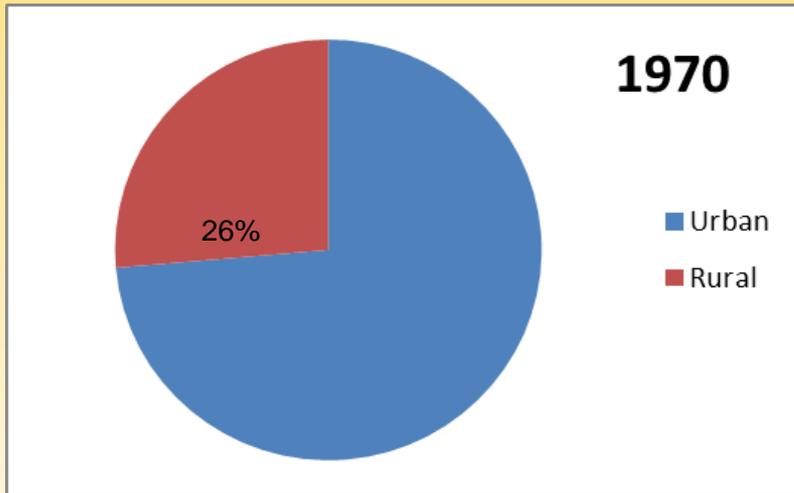
Rural is Changing, not Dying

- Yes, things are changing
- Small towns are microcosms of globalization
 - Many of these changes impact rural and urban areas alike (not distinctly rural)
 - Yet more apparent in rural places
- Survived massive restructuring of social and economic life
- Research base does NOT support notion that if XXXX closes, the town dies
 - In Minnesota only 3 towns have dissolved in past 50 years

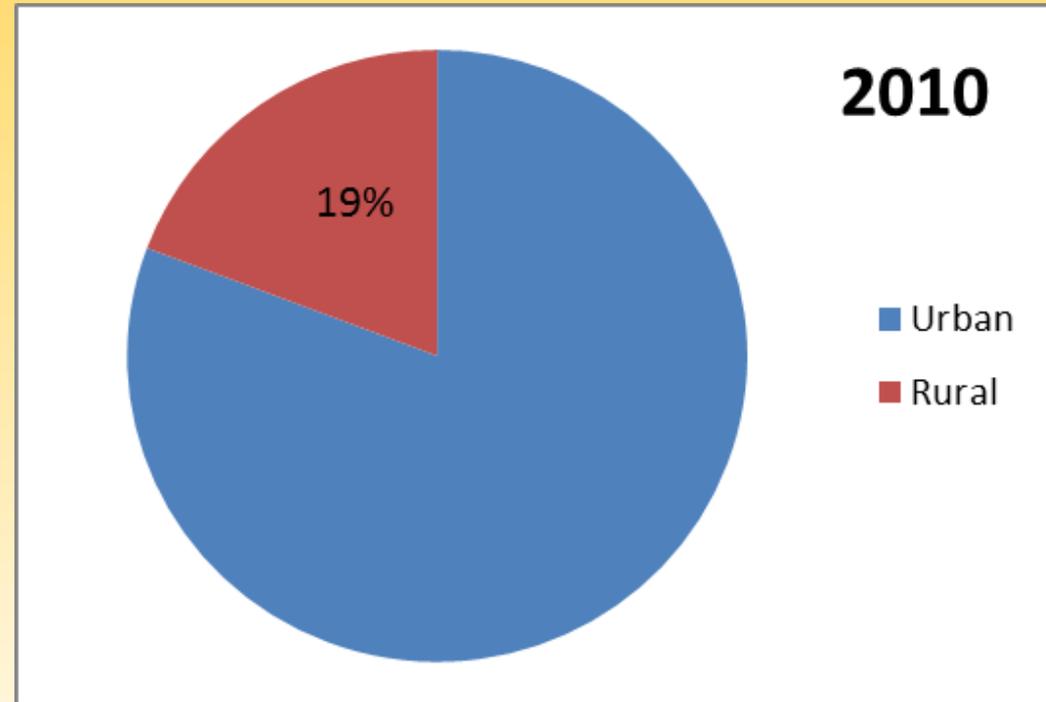


Rural Rebound

- Since 1970, rural population increased by 11%
 - Relative percentage living rural decreased



203,211,926
(53.6m rural)



308,745,538
(59.5m rural)

Rural Data

Rural Populations Continue to Shrink

[Is Rural America Struggling?](#) provides an excellent summary of the economic and population issues facing rural America. Key quote:

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Population figures reduced by formerly rural places now designated as urban (since 1974)

- Minnesota 352,224 rural residents now classified urban
- Montana 120,261
- Nebraska 170,855
- South Dakota 207,790
- Texas 1,339,142

Urban areas have grown WIDER, not TALLER

Mobility



Households Moving Between 1995 and 1999:

44% Iowa

46% Minnesota

North Dakota

Wisconsin

47% Nebraska

48% South Dakota

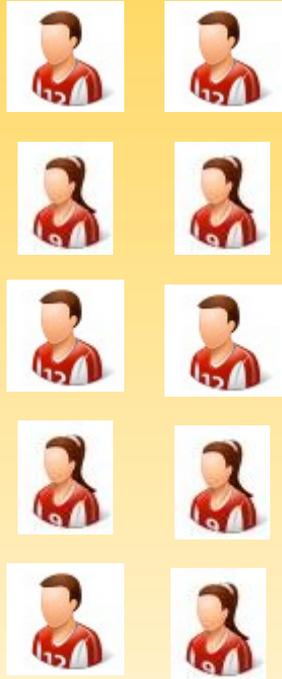
49% United States

If nobody even moved in or out...

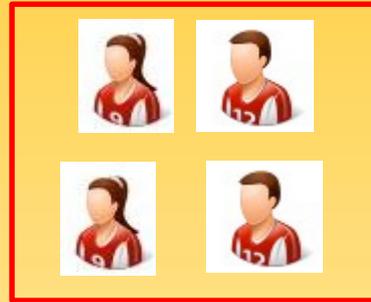


But in reality people do move...

Age 20-24



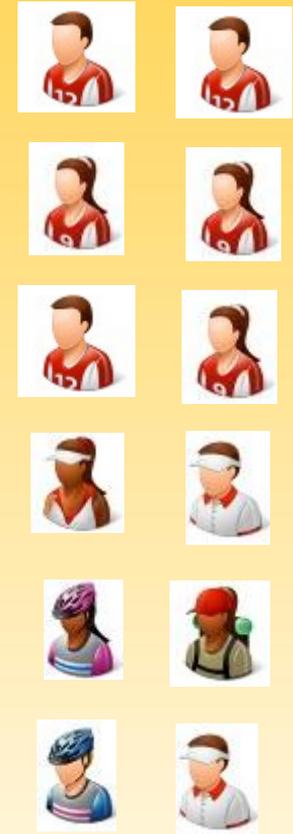
Moving out
- 4



Moving in
+ 6



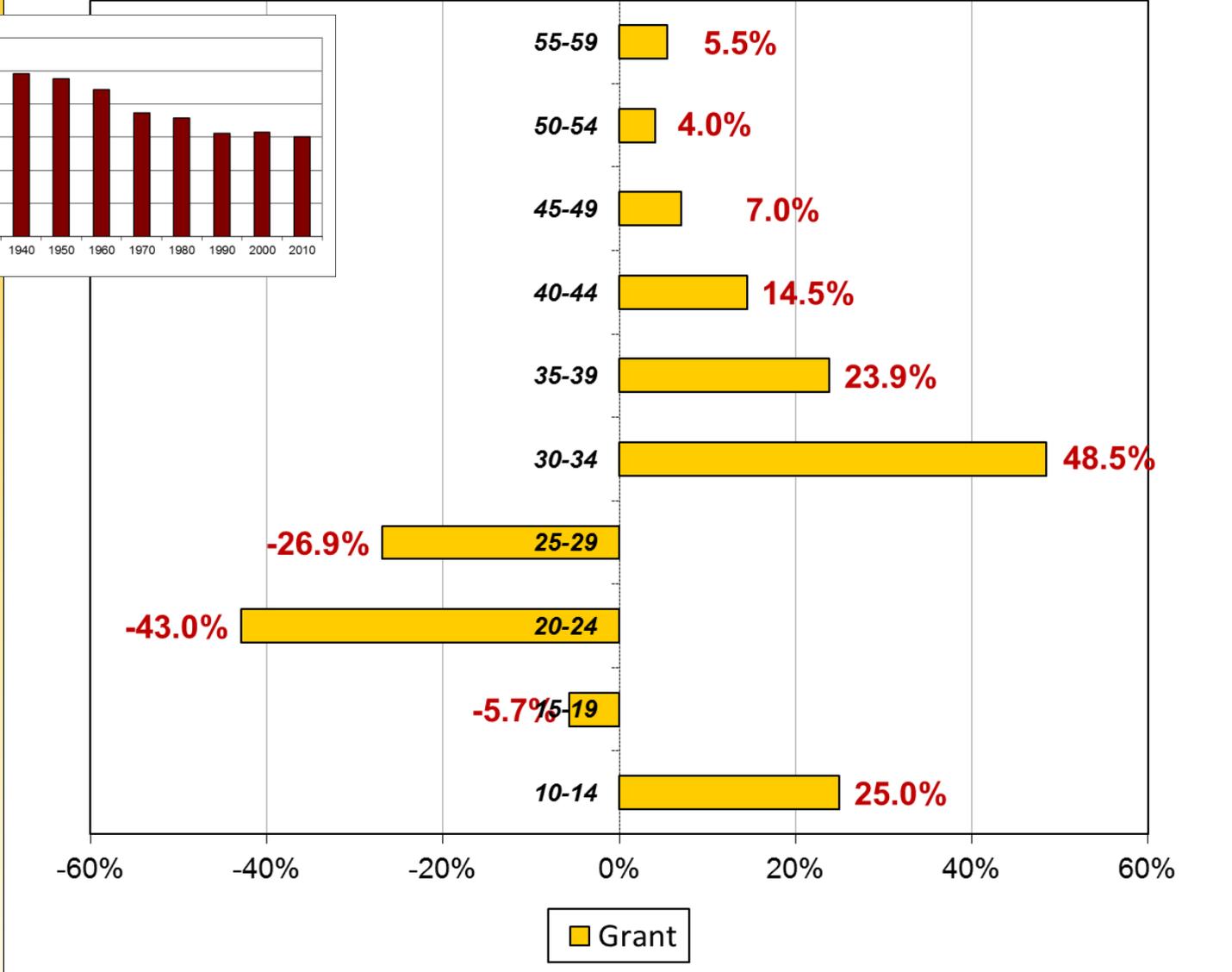
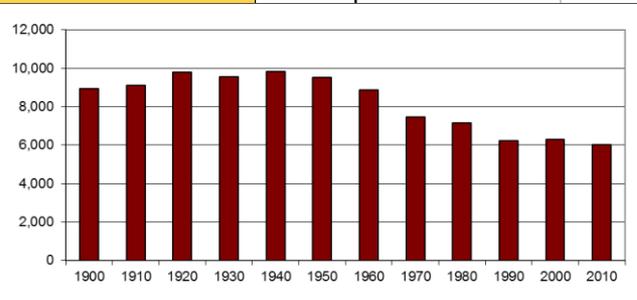
Age 30-34



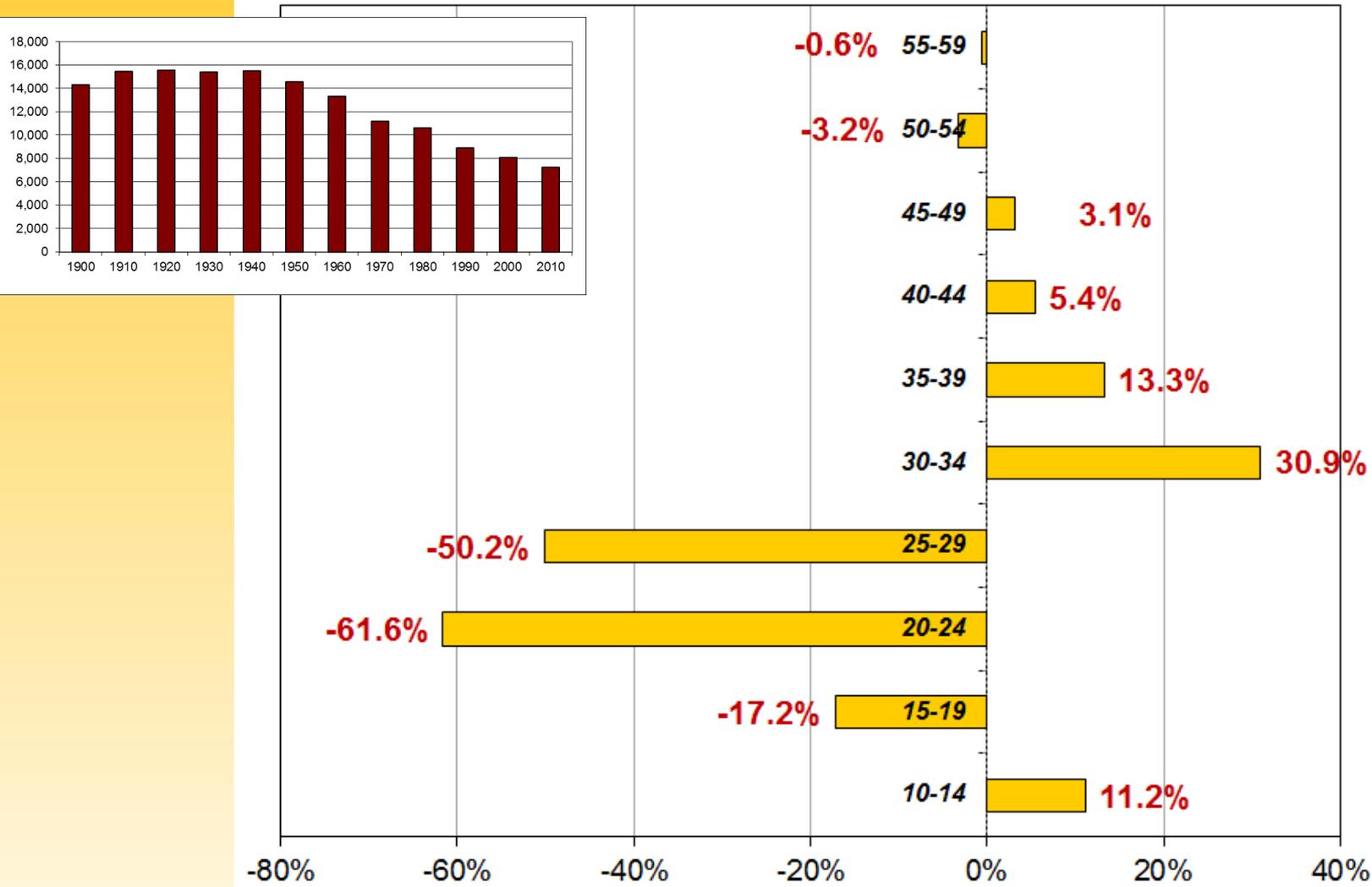
2000

2010

1990-2000, Percent Cohort Change



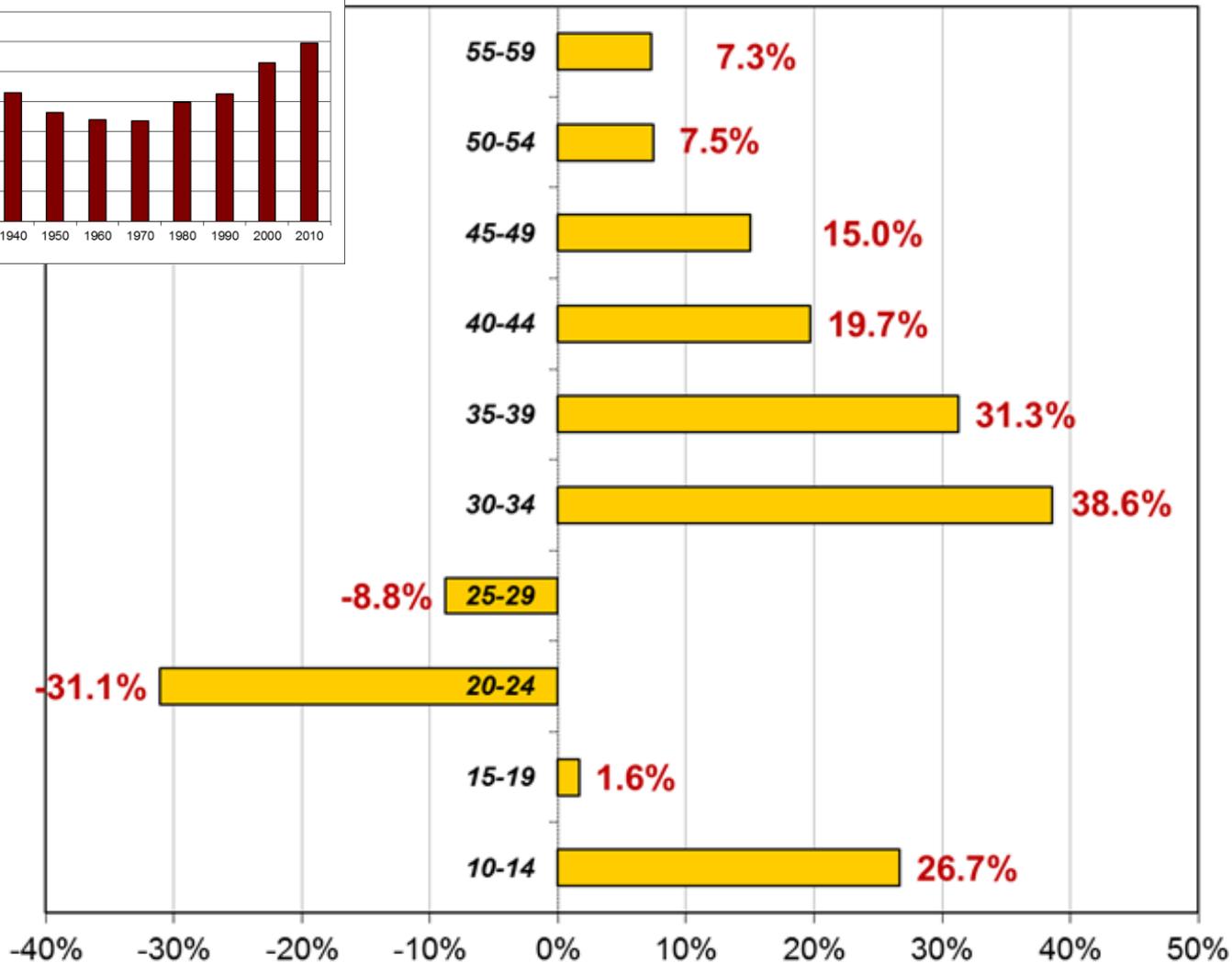
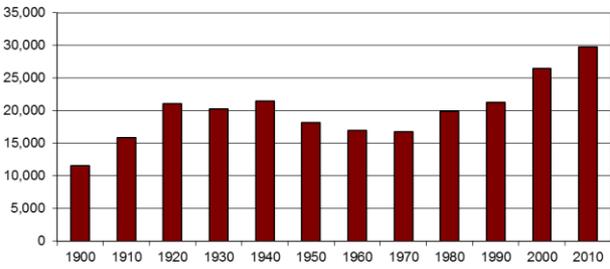
2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



Rural Prairie County



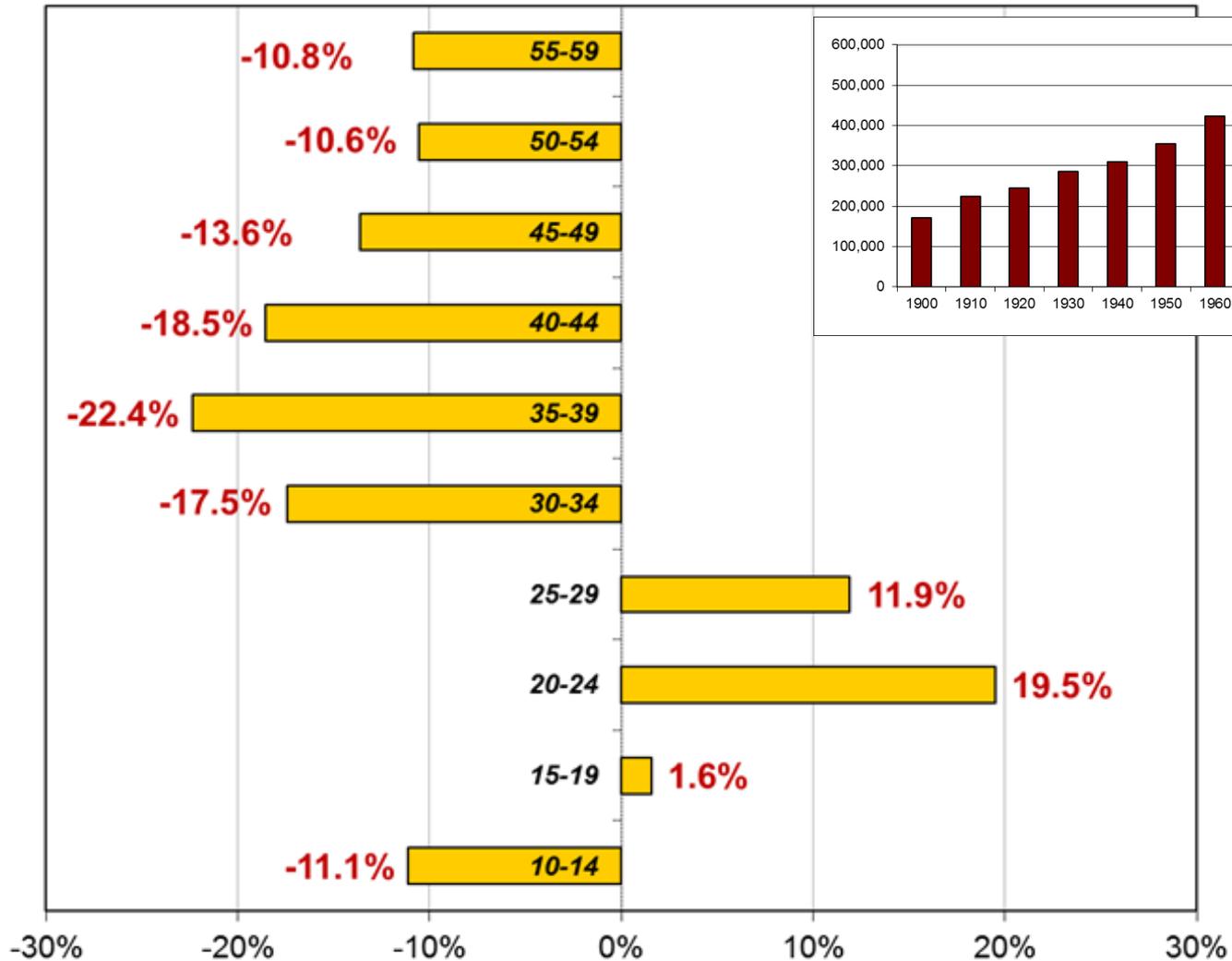
2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



Rural Recreational County



2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



Core Metropolitan County



Newcomers: Why?

Simpler pace of life



Safety and Security



Low Housing Cost

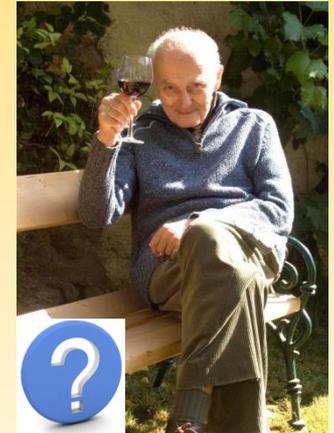




Newcomers: Who?

- 36% lived there previously
- 68%(MN) 40% (NE) attain bachelors degree
- 67% (MN) 48% (NE) household incomes over \$50k
- 51% (MN) 43% (NE) have children in household
- They are generally leaving their career
- Underemployed in current situation
- Yet, Quality of Life is the trump card

Cohort Lifecycle



*Avg. American moves 11.7 times in lifetime
(6 times at age 30)*

Thriving Rural

- Migration varies by age
- Brain Gain: migration to rural age 30-49
 - Brain drain is the rule, not the exception
- Where would our towns be if nobody ever moved TO them?
 - Population
 - Economic Base



Employment and Transfer Receipts

Retirement (Social Security only) and disability insurance benefits and Medicare/Medicaid benefits

Source: Regional Economic Information System, Bureau of Economic Analysis

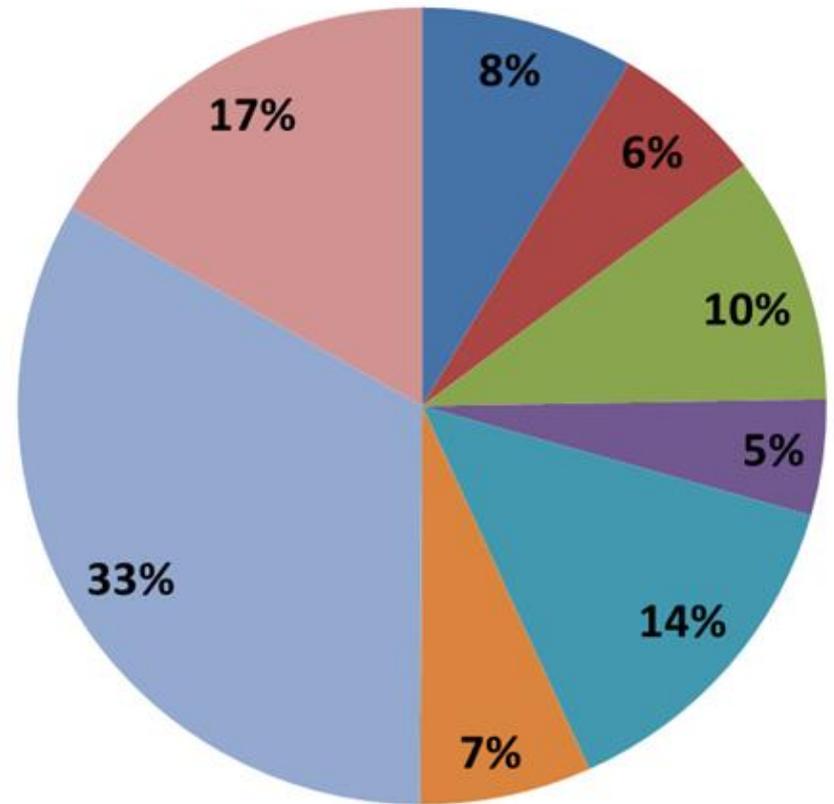
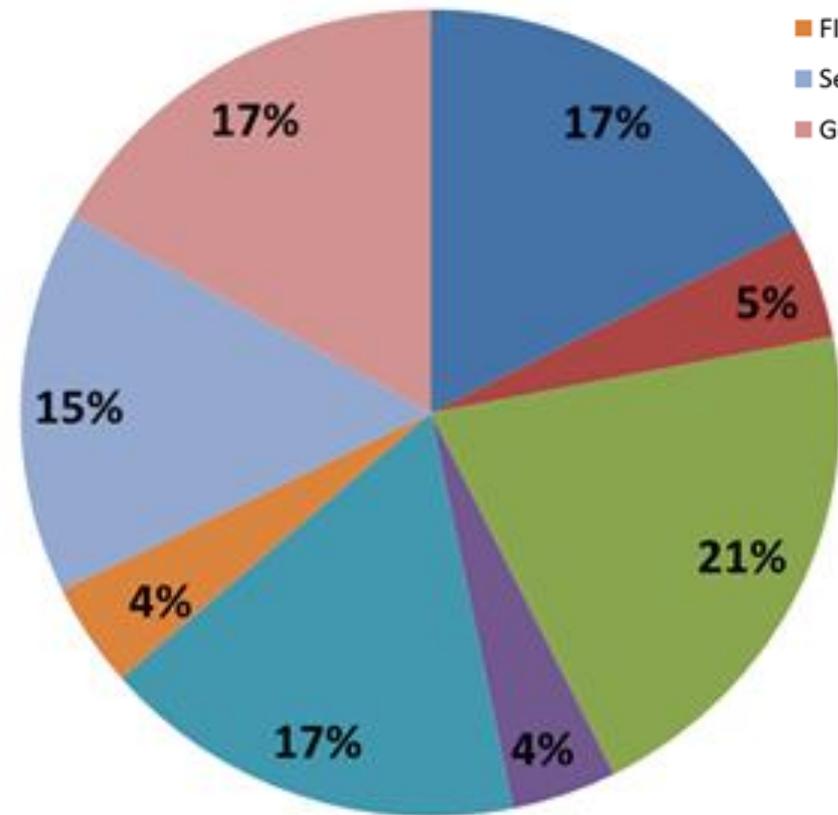


Diversified Rural Economy

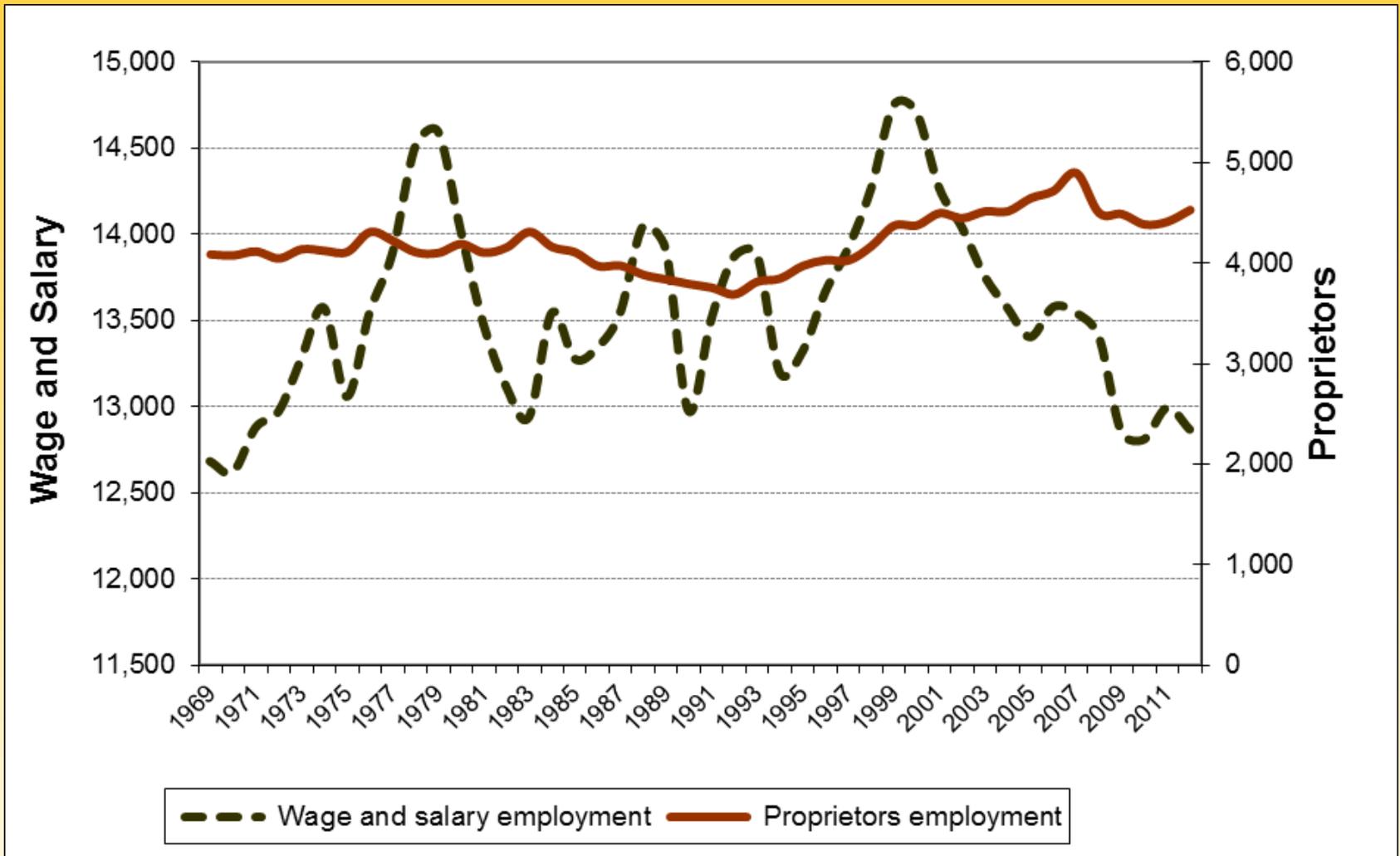
1969

2009

- Extractive
- Construction
- Manufacturing
- TCPU
- Trade
- FIRE
- Services
- Government



Freeborn County, Minnesota



~12,500

~4,500 (26%)

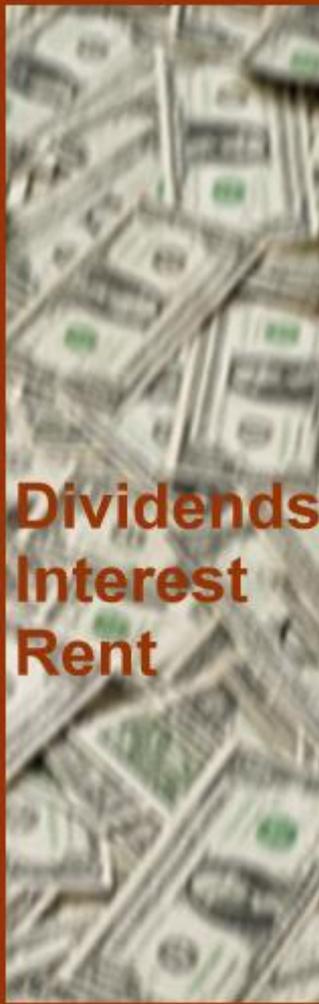




Jobs

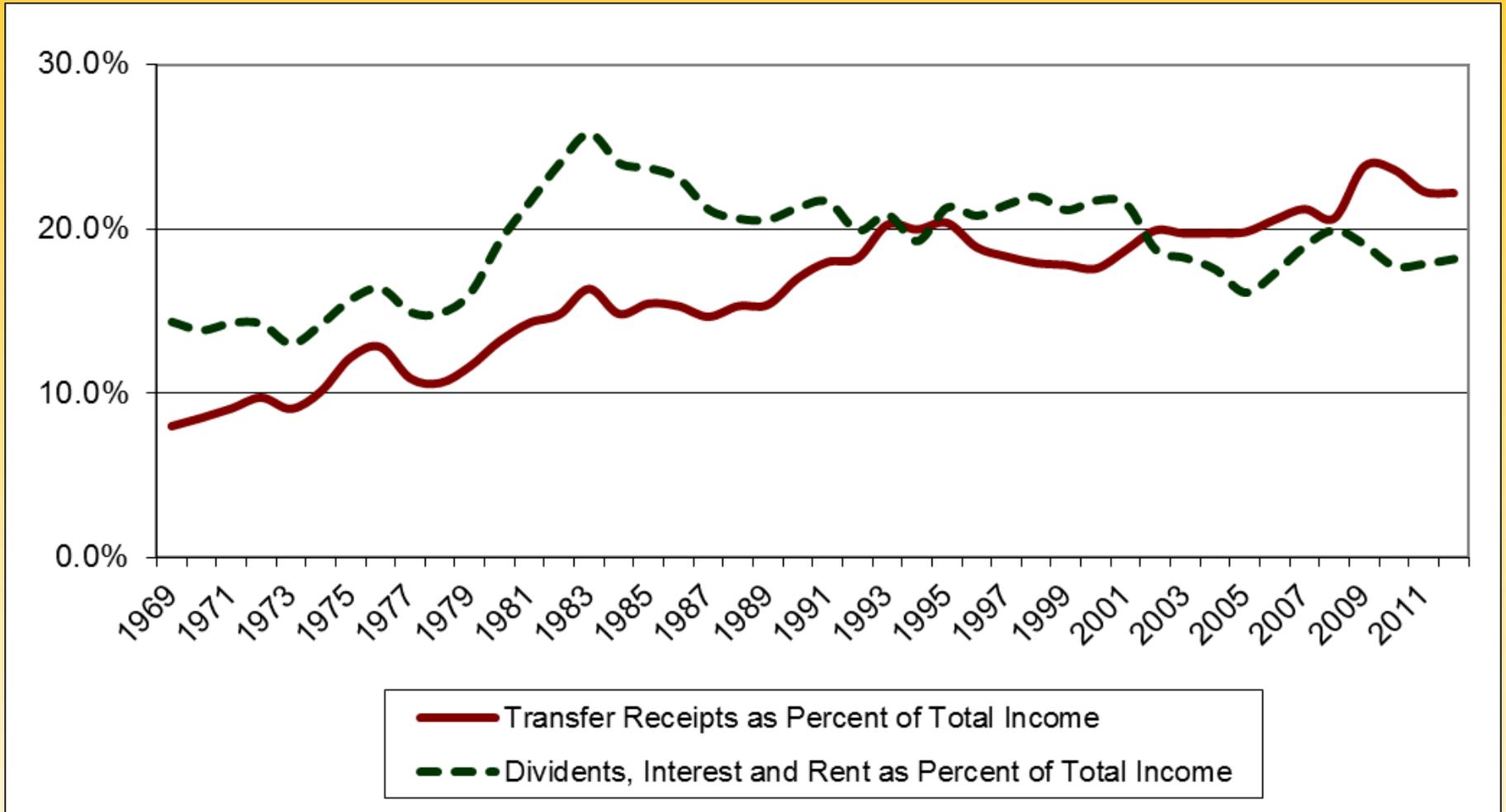


Transfers



**Dividends
Interest
Rent**

Just 55% of income comes from jobs.



Just 60% of all income earned in a rural county comes from a job.

The New Economic Narrative

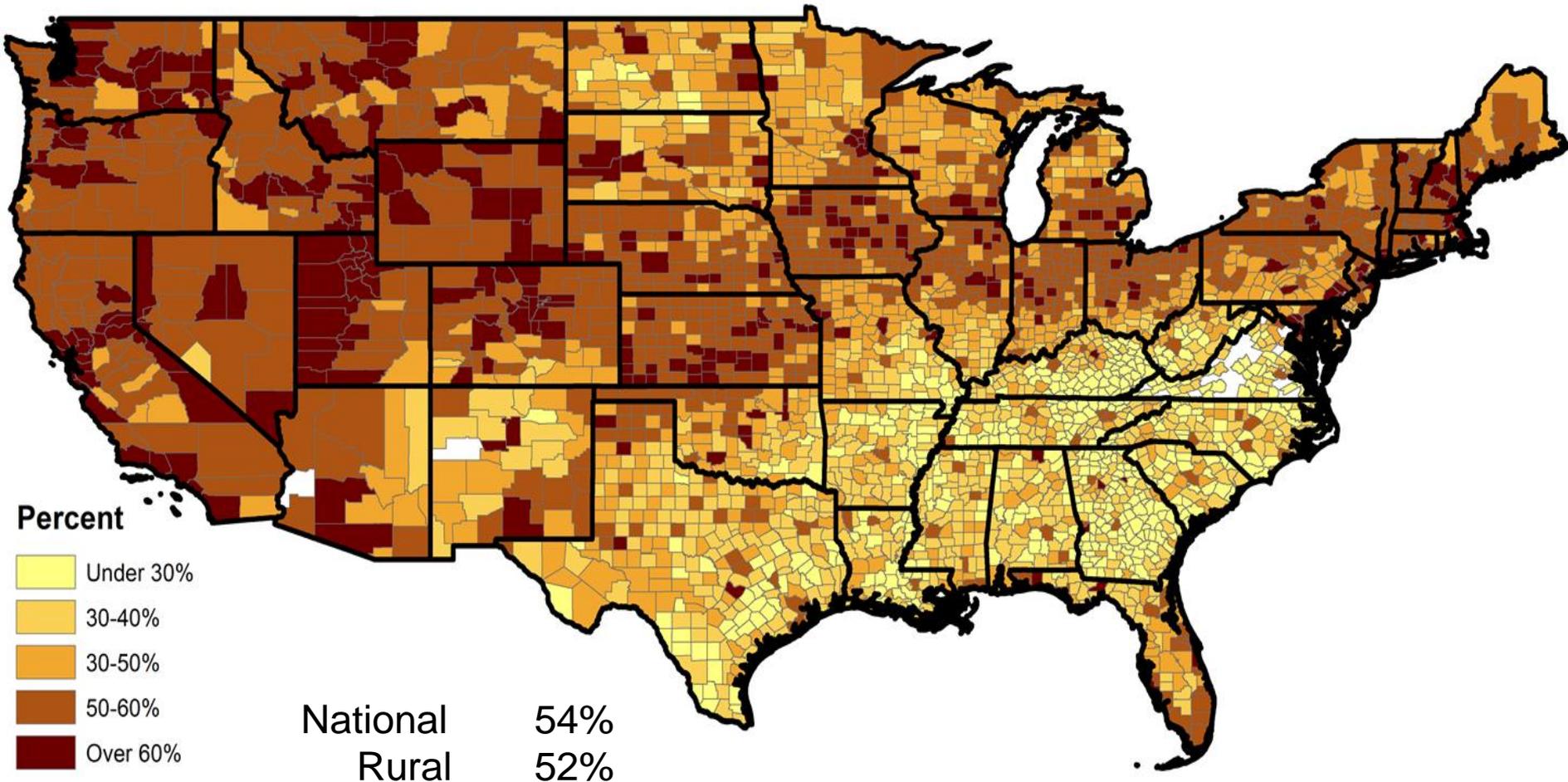
- Brick and mortar is less indicative of local economic success
- People-focused (self-employment, 1099)
- Diversified occupations and industries
- Self-employment, multiple-job holding
- Recruitment is more than just the job and work-related benefits
 - Especially in tight labor markets



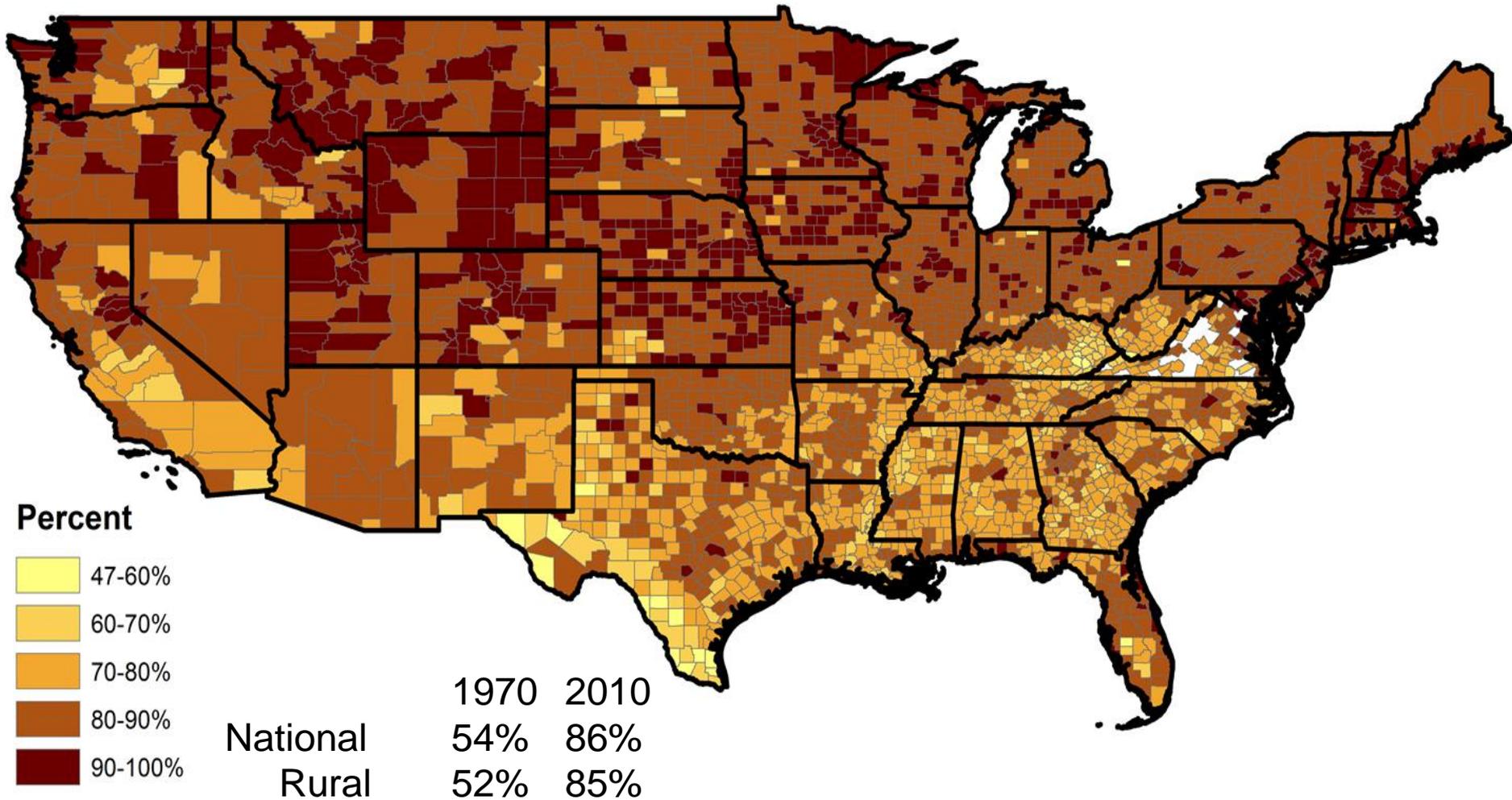
Rewriting the Rural Narrative: Educational Achievement



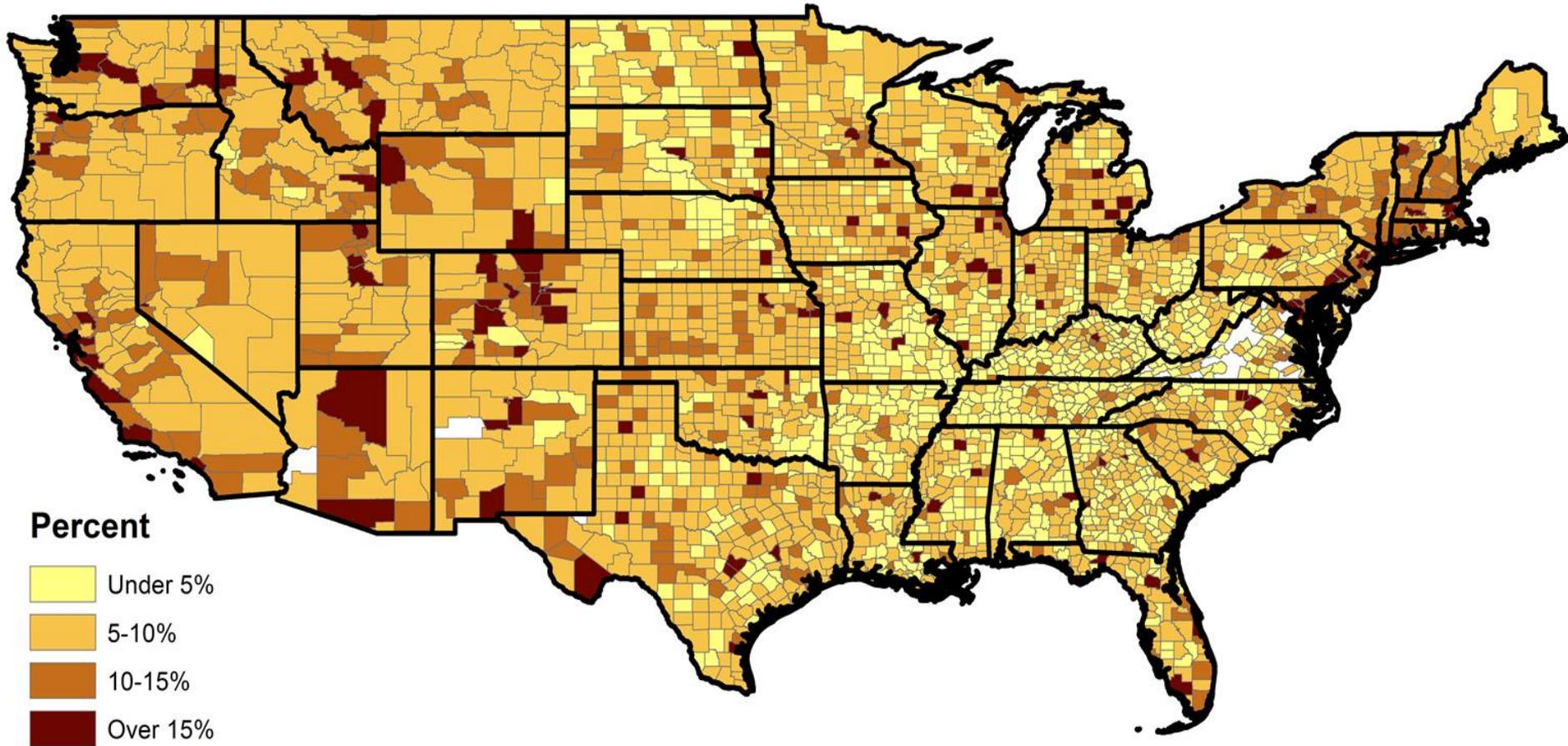
High School Degree + 1970



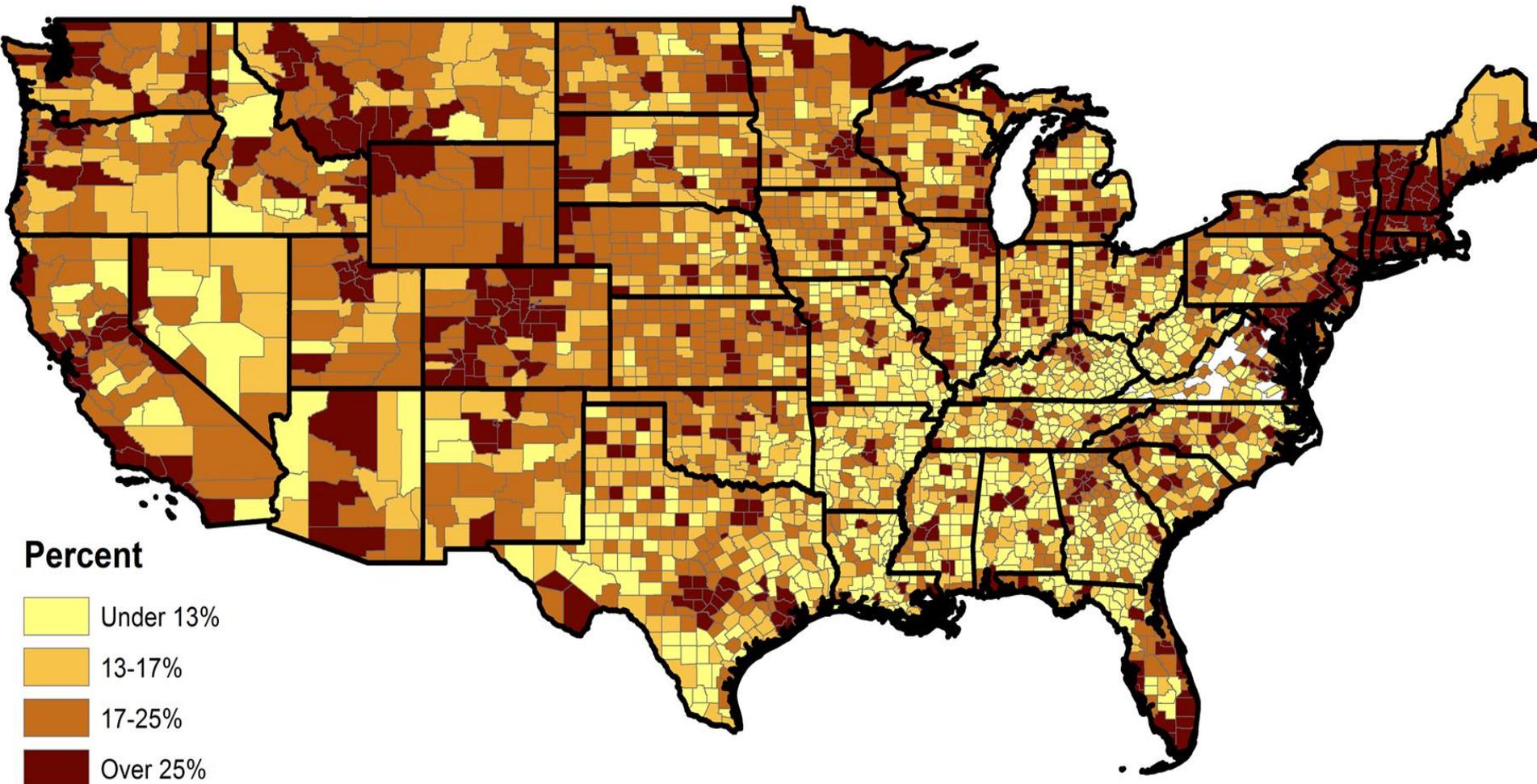
High School Degree + 2010



Pct Bachelors 1970



Pct Bachelors 2010



Percent

- Under 13%
- 13-17%
- 17-25%
- Over 25%

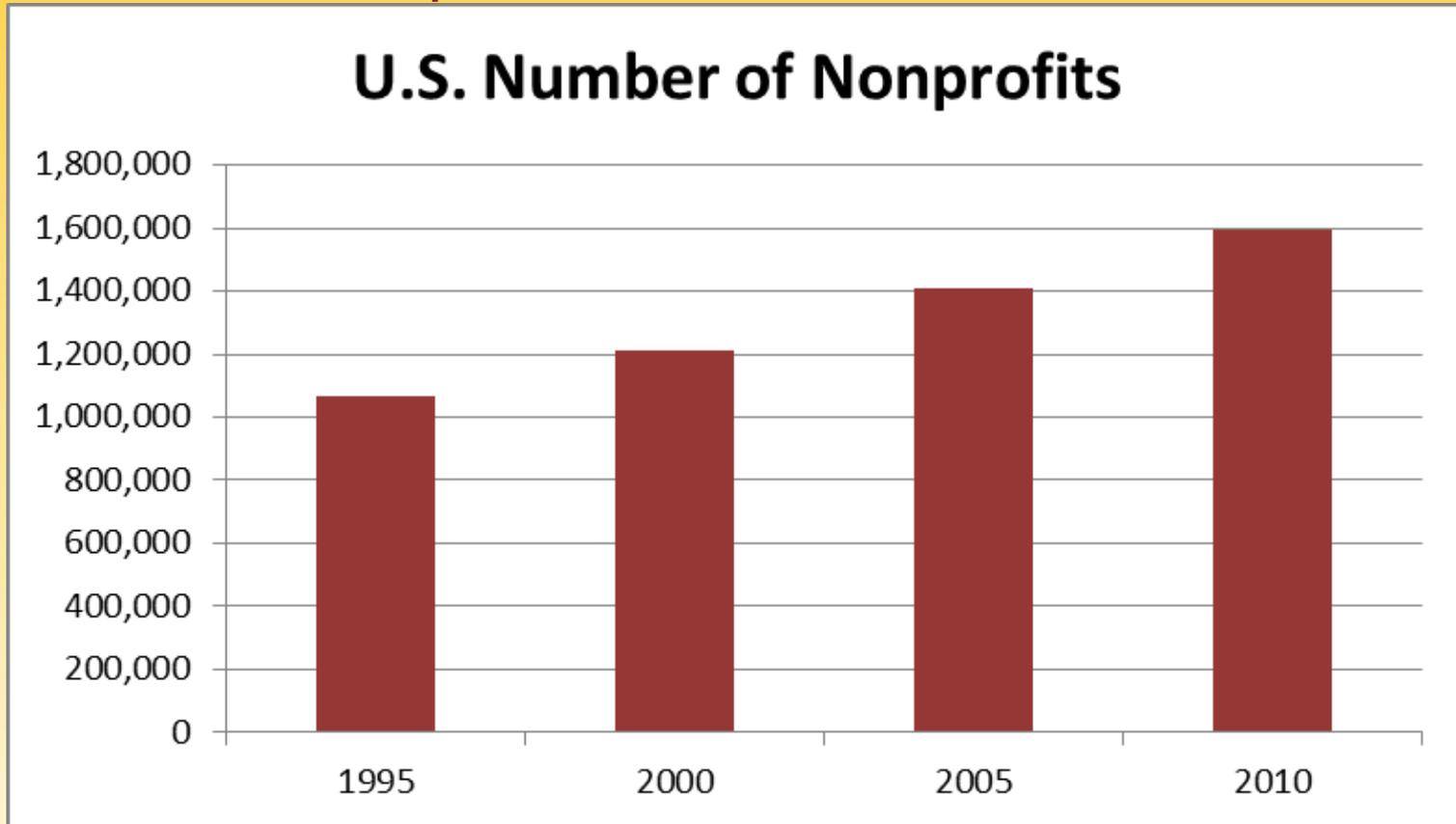


Rewriting the Rural Narrative: The Demand for Leadership in Rural America



Social Life is Not Dying

Nonprofit Growth: 1995-2010



1995-2000	13.6%
2000-2005	16.3%
2005-2010	13.1%

National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau



Social Life is Not Dying

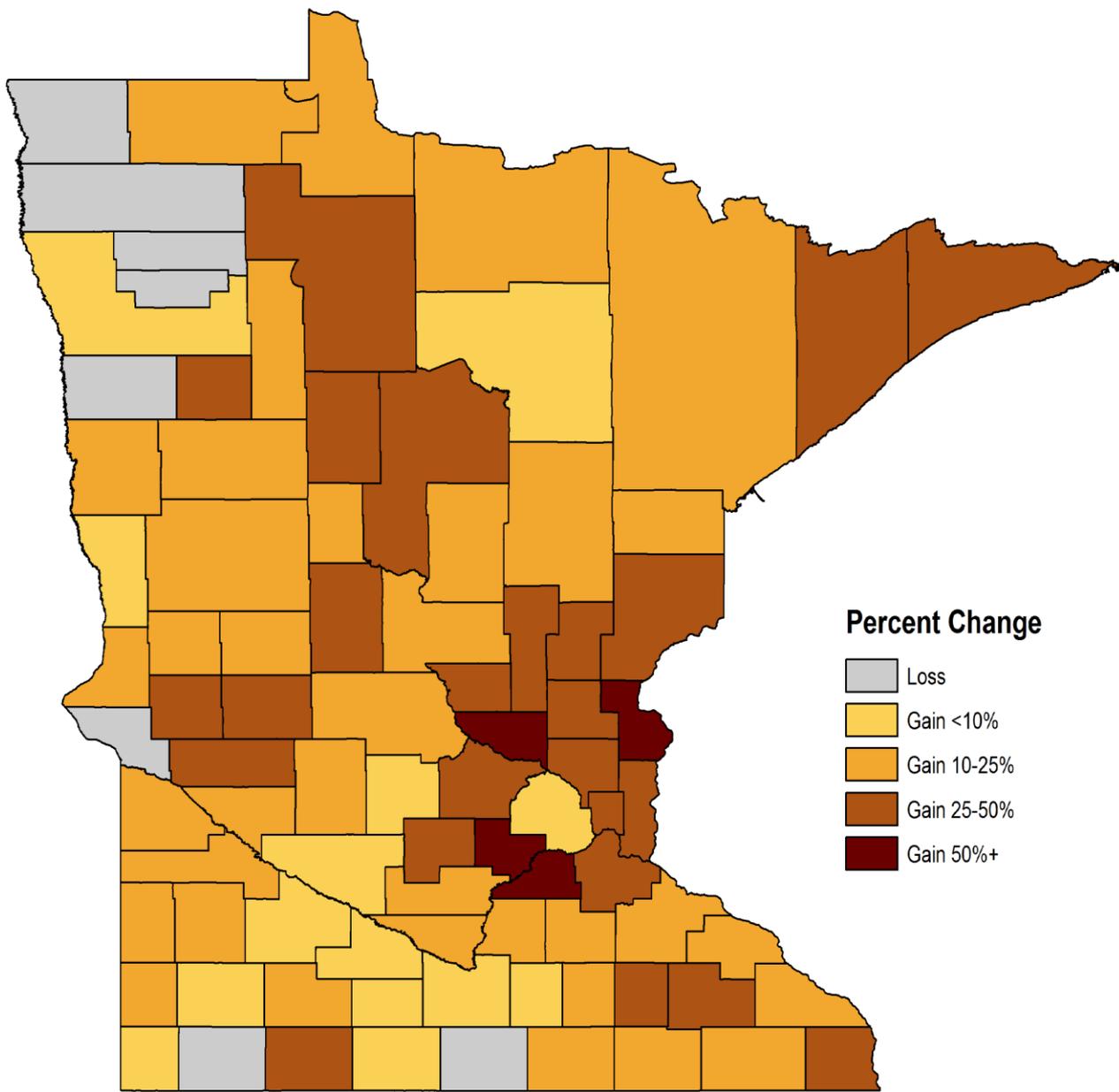
Nonprofit Growth: 2000-2010

- Minnesota gained 8% in population and gained 19% in the number of nonprofits.
 - The most rural counties experienced a loss of 5% in population, yet the number of nonprofits increased 14%.
- This growth can be both good and bad news for rural places.

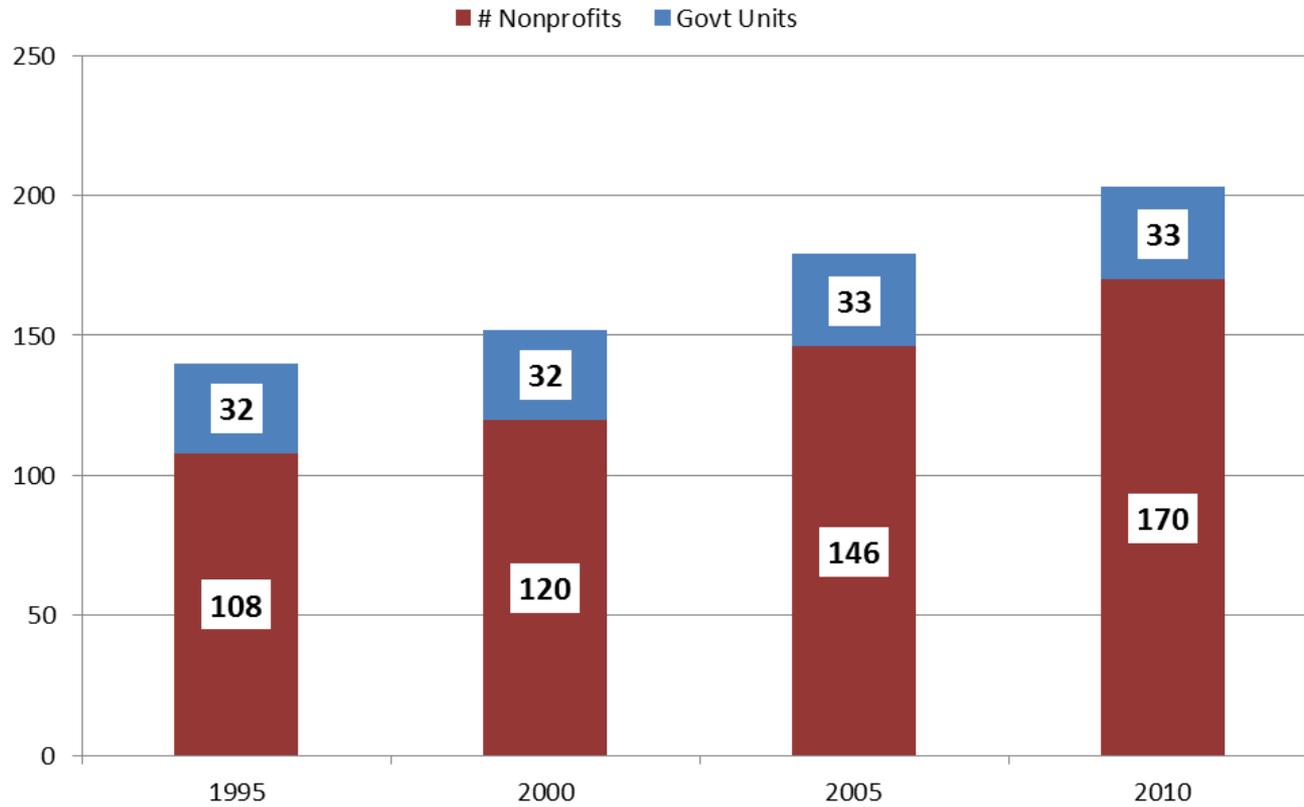
National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau



Nonprofit Change 2000-2010



Houston County, Minnesota



	2000-2010		
	Population	Nonprofits	Gov't Units
<i>Houston County</i>	-4%	42%	3%
<i>Minnesota</i>	8%	19%	5%
<i>United States</i>	10%	32%	3%

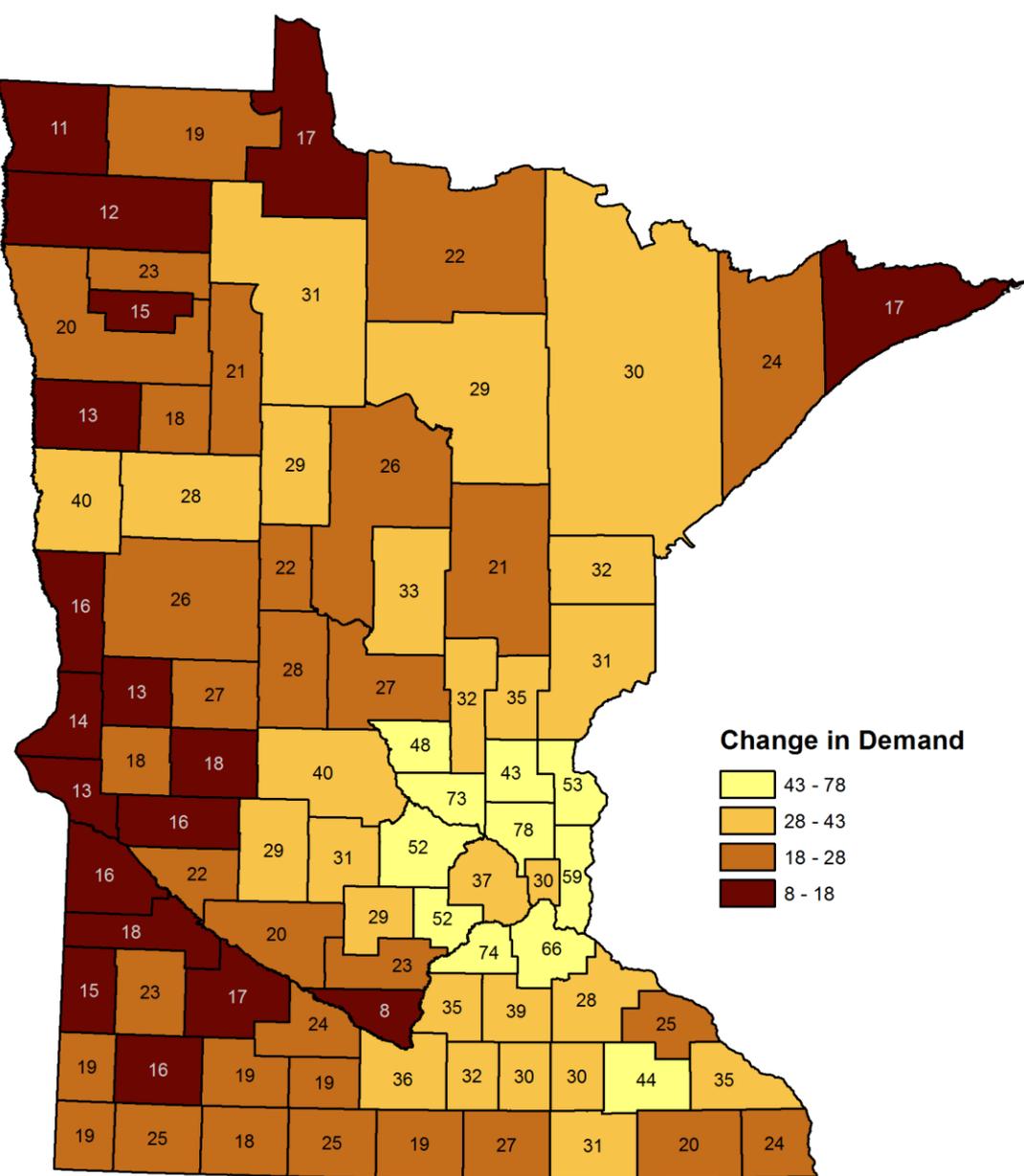
There are also gains and losses between these time periods, losses (or gains) don't mean just losses (or gains).

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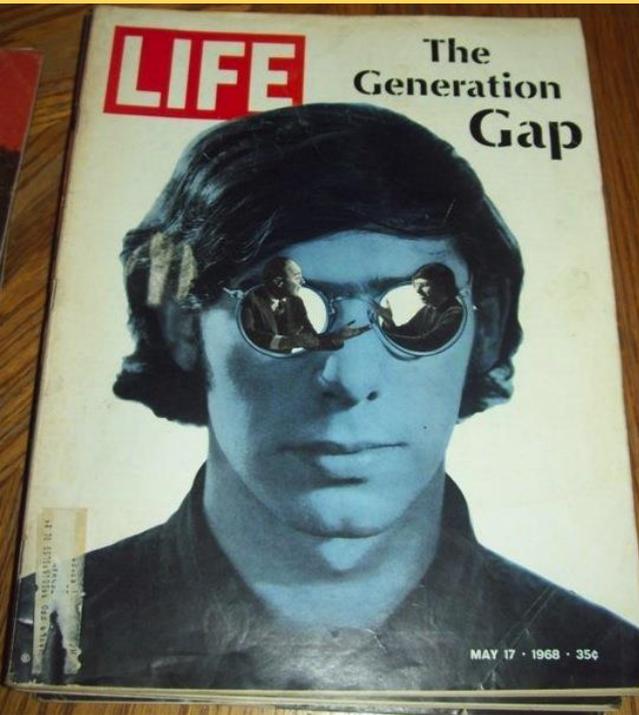
Driven to DiscoverSM



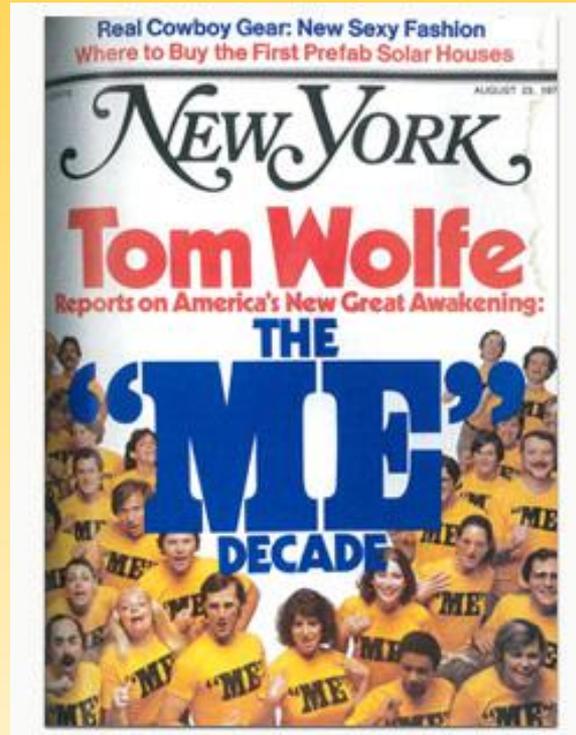
Population per Organizational Role by County, 2010



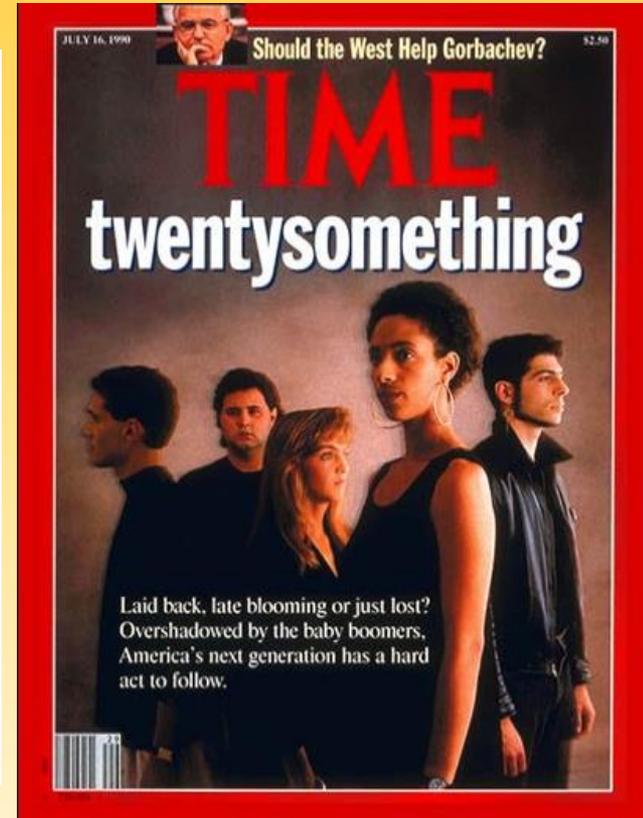
All of this has happened before...



1968

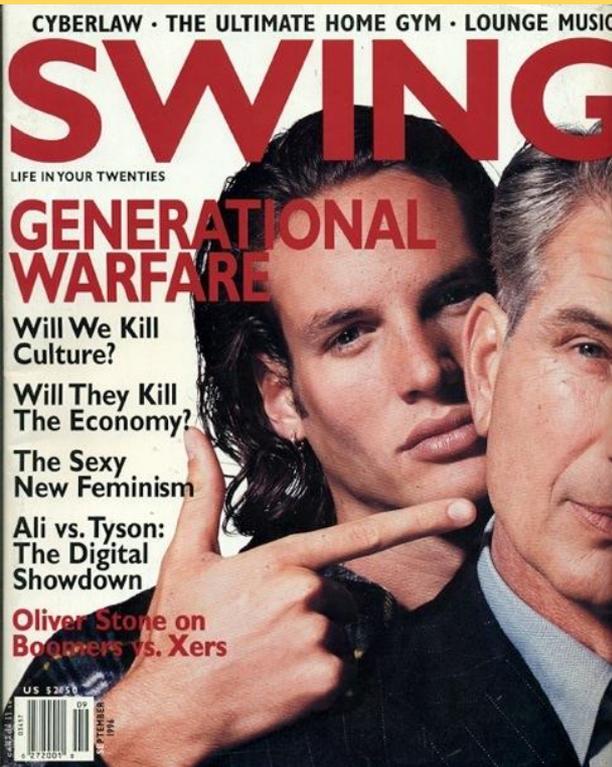


1976



1990

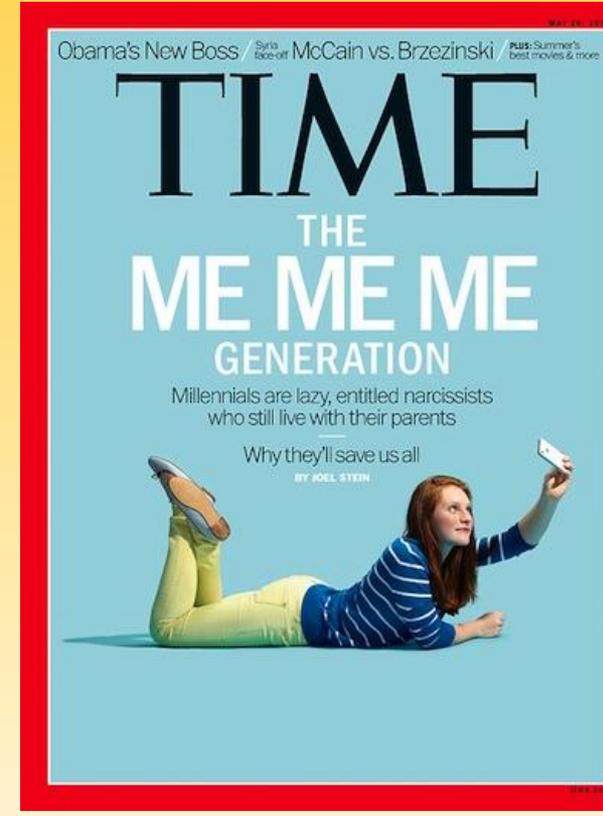
and it will happen again...



1996



2007



2013

Changing Types of Involvement - The Social Organization (historical)

- Place-based
- Broadly focused
- Word of mouth



Green & Haines. 2007. *Asset Building and Community Development*

Changing Types of Involvement - The Social Organization (present)

- Cover wide geographic area
- Narrowly focused goals/
self-interest
- Diverse social interests
- Technological – social media



*The people today are challenged in “connecting”
with the existing social infrastructure.*

Green & Haines. 2007. *Asset Building and Community Development*

Dynamics of the Minnesota Housing Supply



Workforce Housing Shortage

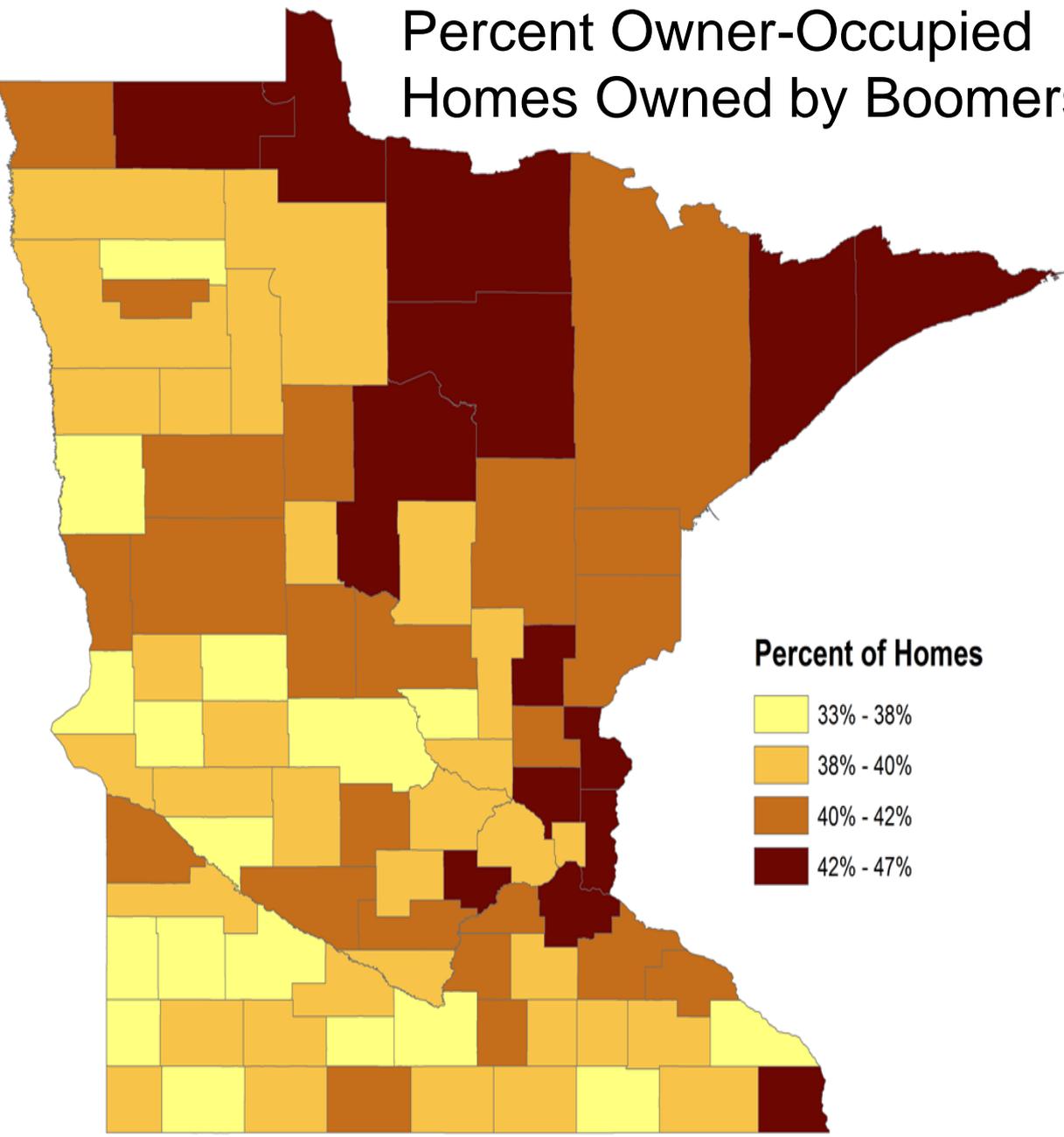
Workers in regional centers > population

- However, many people need to hedge their family economic bets by living between multiple job opportunities
- Some just don't want to live in the larger cities where they work

Population increases don't predict home building, income does

- In many small towns, new homes are appraised at values lower than they cost to build

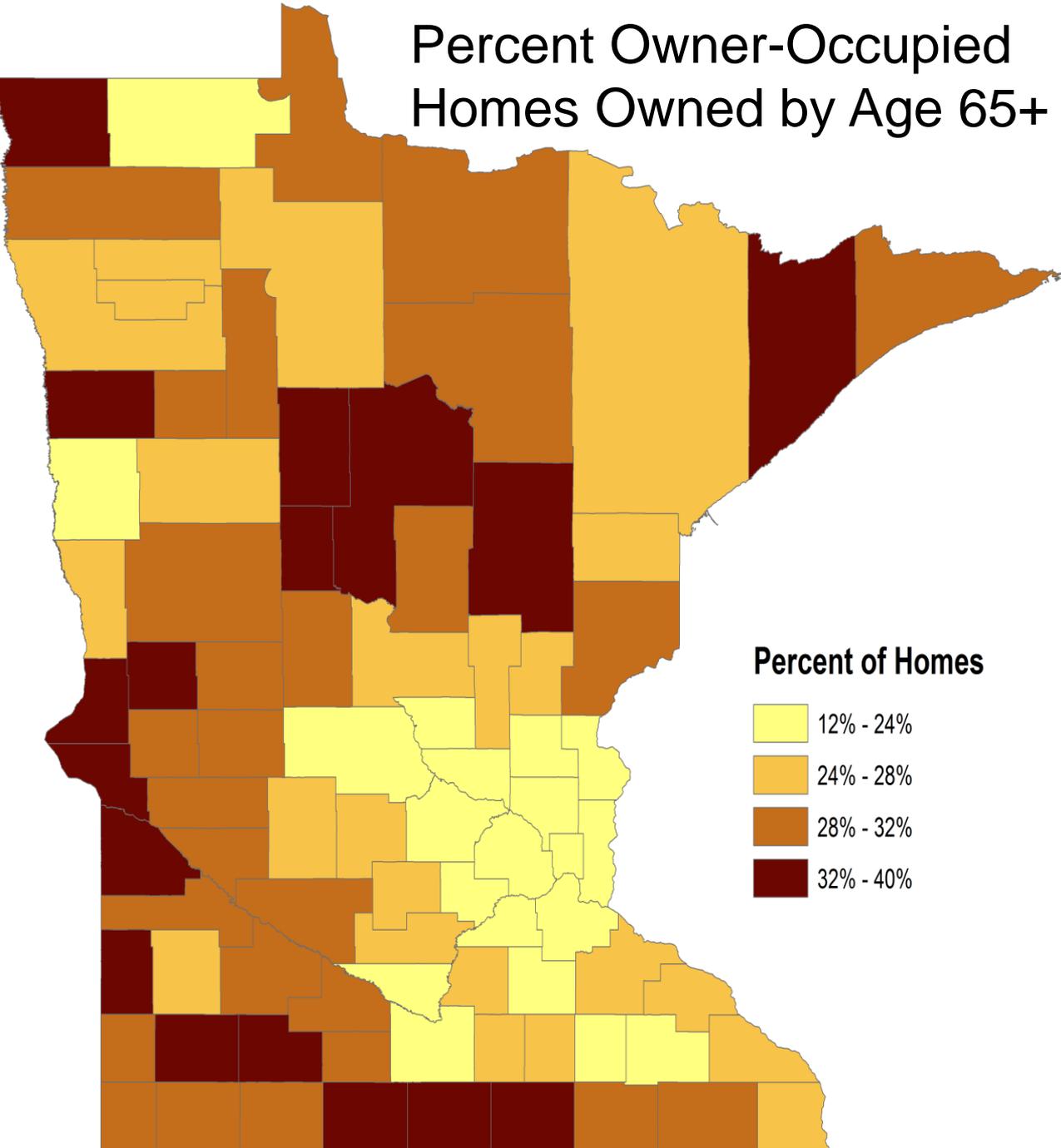
Percent Owner-Occupied Homes Owned by Boomers



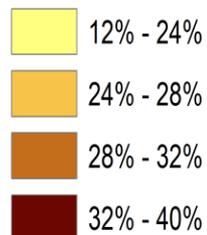
47.0% Cook
46.8% Lake o' Woods
44.9% Washington
43.9% Anoka
43.7% Carver

33.1% Blue Earth
34.5% Stevens
35.5% Benton
35.6% Clay
35.8% Lyon

Percent Owner-Occupied Homes Owned by Age 65+



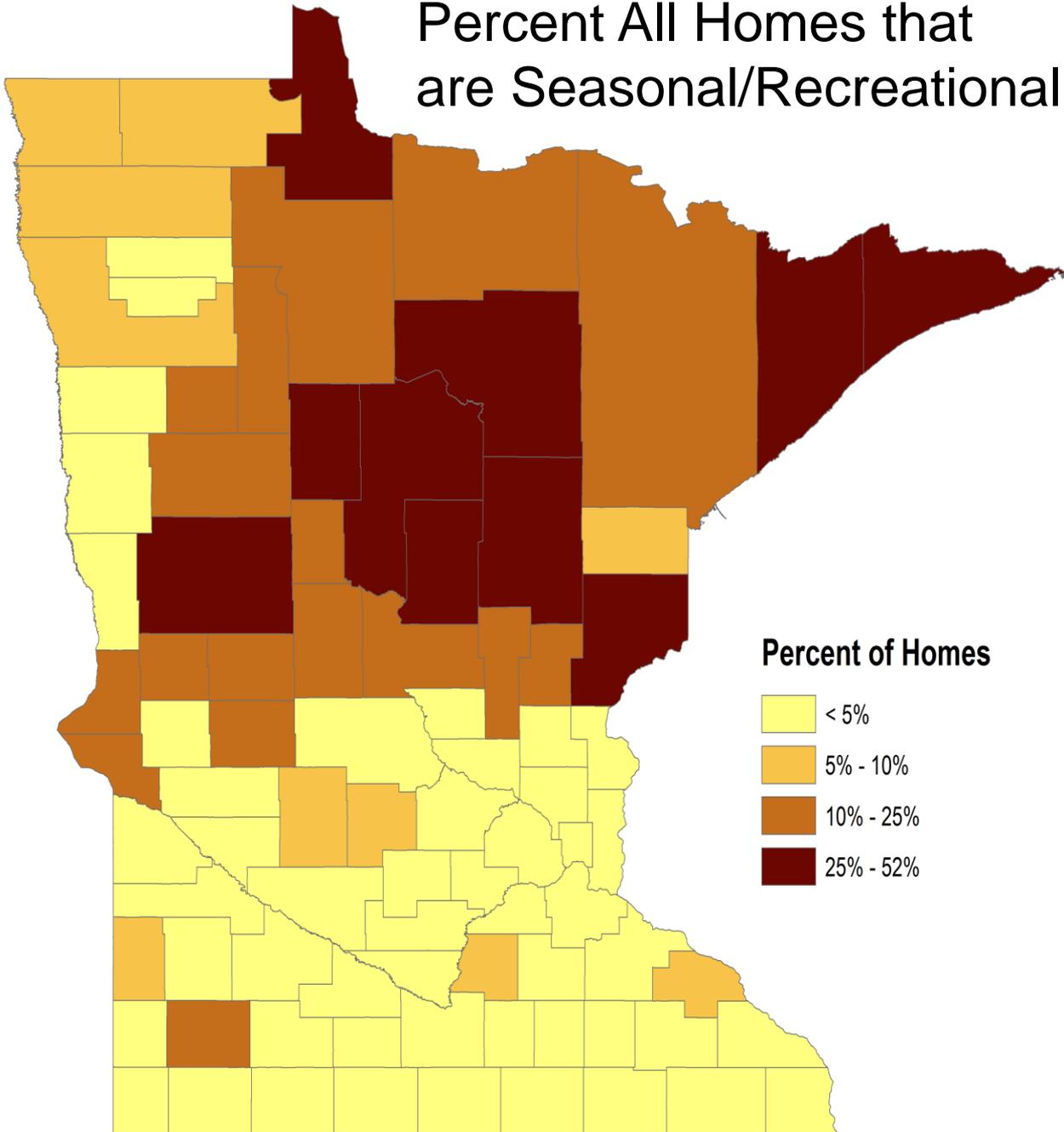
Percent of Homes



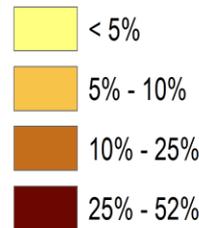
40.2% Aitkin
38.8% Traverse
36.0% Big Stone
34.7% Lincoln
34.6% Faribault

17.2% Dakota
16.2% Wright
13.8% Sherburne
13.6% Carver
12.8% Scott

Percent All Homes that are Seasonal/Recreational



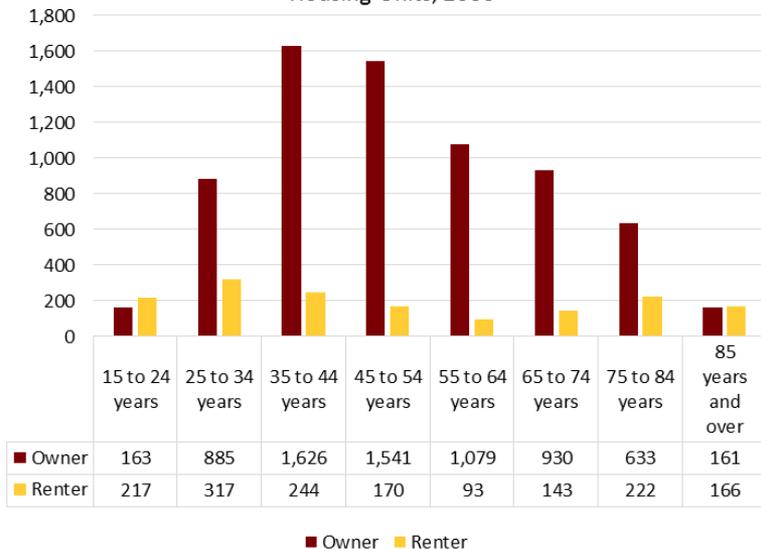
Percent of Homes



- 52.4% Cook
- 49.8% Aitkin
- 47.4% Cass
- 46.2% Lake o' Woods
- 35.2% Hubbard
- 30.9% Lake
- 29.7% Crow Wing
- 28.8% Pine
- 27.1% Otter Tail
- 25.5% Itasca
- 24.3% Becker

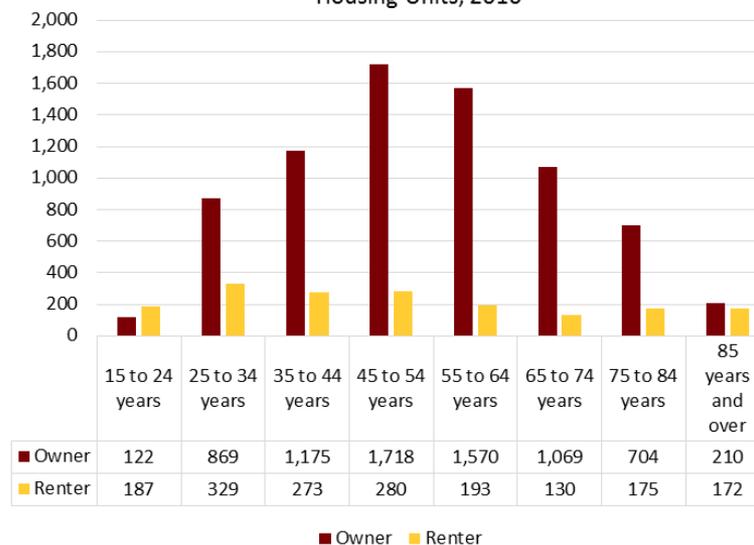
Meeker County, Minnesota

Housing Units, 2000

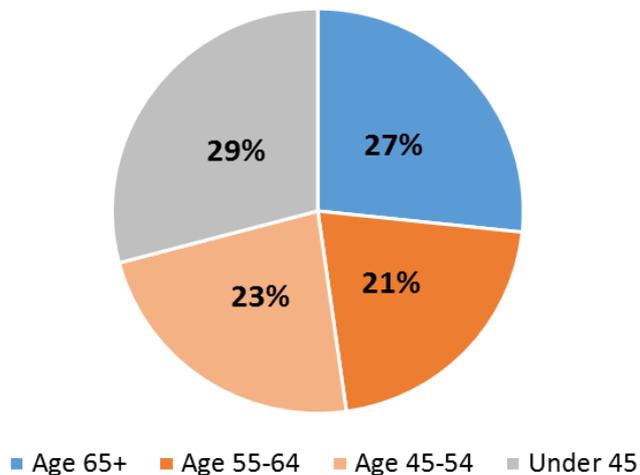


Meeker County, Minnesota

Housing Units, 2010



Percent of Owner-Occupied Homes by Age, 2010



Planned Churning

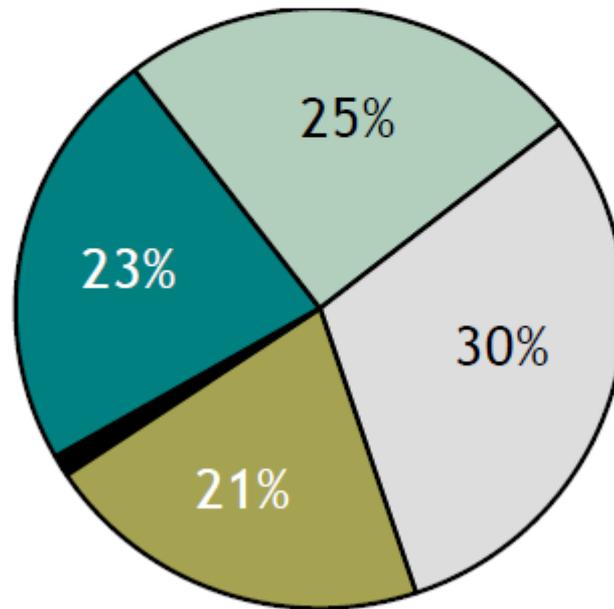
- Rather than just solving the workforce housing problem by building more homes, we may need to encourage those looking to retire to move out sooner, rather than later! (e.g. ensure their preferences are met)
- The baby boomer sell-off is a huge opportunity for resupply. Yet, their homes may need rehabilitation
- Talk about home affordability without it being all about low-income!
- Immigrant home ownership aspirations increase



Where We Live and Where We'd Like to Live

by community type

- City
- Suburb
- Small town
- Rural area



PewResearchCenter

Source: "For Nearly Half of America, Grass is Greener Somewhere Else". Pew Research Center

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Reframing Rural Migration

- National societal preferences to live in small towns and rural places (low-density)
- Not everyone is leaving small towns
 - It's a lot of work to make this move but people are doing it
- Not everyone is flocking to the city
 - Most urban have gotten wider, not taller
- A new urbanity is found in formerly rural places





Migration happening since 1970s and has occurred without a concerted effort to recruit or attract them.

Recruitment vs Retention

- Recruitment involves **people**
 - Regional, individualistic
 - People attraction strategies
 - Middle of everywhere
 - Small numbers mean big things
- Retention involves **places**
 - Social and economic integration, place-making activities
 - Rural survival skills
- Traditional marketing techniques struggle with this distinction



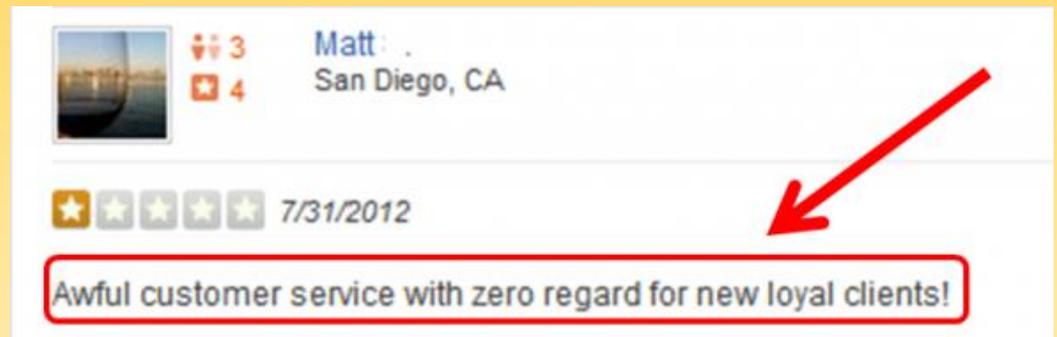
Migration and the Narrative

- Migration patterns open the door to discussing the narrative
- There are varied reasons for people to move to small towns and rural places
- Our “rural” means more and more (network study)



Negative Narratives

- Would we allow this negative language to permeate a product or service we were selling?



- Why do we do it?

- Cannot continue to portray rural success as the exception

VANISHING POINT; Amid Dying Towns of Rural Plains, One Makes a Stand

Rewrite, Not Just Update

- Problems cannot dominate the discourse

We became kind of the poster child for the war on poverty, and any time somebody wanted to do a story about poor people, we were the first stop.

- Don't buy in to someone else's narrative

Internet fast-lane bypassing rural Minnesota?

- This negativity can impact intentions by graduates to return

The Rural Choice

The bottom line is people **WANT** to live and move here for **what you are today and will be tomorrow**, not what may have been!



The Rural Choice

These newcomers are:

- Creating groups, building their community
- Diversifying the economy
- Buying/starting businesses, working from home
- Living in a region (no longer a 1-stop-shop)
- More than warm bodies (employee recruitment)



Rural Issues and Trends Webinars

<http://z.umn.edu/ruralwebinar/>

