



## **Who Killed Rural Sociology? A Case Study in the Political Economy of Knowledge Production**

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**Abstract.** Rural sociology is examined as a case study in the social forces that shape and direct the production of knowledge. Knowledge production is viewed as the product of the nexus of three sets of forces. First, there are the rewards and punishments of any system of social control. While knowledge is produced under very different conditions than other commodities, concrete products ('research') are produced in a social milieu and in response to distinct forces. Forces that pull research in particular directions are represented by the availability of research funds and the clarity by which certain types of research are regarded as more important than others. Pushes are represented not only by the unavailability of research funds but also by discouragement of certain research trajectories. These range from friendly advice by senior faculty to graduate students, to impediments in career development, to active persecution. Second, the system of social control is embedded in an institutional network within which knowledge production occurs. Rural sociology is centrally linked to a clearly delineated institutional network composed of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the land-grant college complex. This complex constitutes a dense institutional network influencing the knowledge production system directly. Third, rural sociology is influenced by its institutional relationship to sociology as a discipline. In this case, as long as it does not involve the mission orientation of the subdiscipline (e.g. the pushes and pulls), the general discipline has effects on what can be termed the 'autonomy' of knowledge production within rural sociology.

### ***30+ Years Later: An Explanation for Delayed Publication***

*This paper was originally researched after my first encounter with rural sociologists in 1978. Almost by accident, I attended a 'day before', specially called session at the University of California, Davis campus before the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society in San*

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Francisco in 1978. I had had only a few casual contacts with rural sociologists during my eight years at Cornell, and they had generated no interest on my part in learning more about rural sociology since there seemed to be little or no interests by rural sociologists about agriculture. The Davis meeting was composed mostly of American rural sociologists who were entirely focused on agricultural issues. This generated an intellectual problematic: why were these (mostly) younger rural sociologists wrapped up with agricultural issues when rural sociology itself had seemingly lost interest several decades earlier?

My focus on U.S. agricultural labor began in 1964, when the student rebellion in the U.S. threw hundreds of American universities into turmoil after the initiation of the Free Speech Movement on the Berkeley campus of the University of California (UCB). I had completed my doctoral studies at UCB and joined the Cornell faculty in 1961 with a specialization in African trade unions, the subject of my doctoral dissertation. I considered myself an industrial sociologist with an African specialization, a reflection of my disappointment with American unionism. Searching for some way to bring relevance to my teaching after 1964, I found African-American migrant workers in upstate New York, Ithaca's hinterland, and opened a research project bringing me back to U.S. research. U.S. sociology also seemed interested in migrant labor. While I had no interest in rurality and what seemed like an intellectual vacuum with rural sociology about agricultural labor, the Davis meeting showed that some rural sociologists were interested in agriculture.

Walking into the Davis meeting was a genuine surprise; dozens of newly minted (and still being minted) rural sociologists, were debating the state of U.S. agriculture (later encapsulated in Buttel and Newby, 1980). Although I had explored the rural sociological literature after 1964, I had found that except for several rural sociologists — Bill Heffernan and Gene Wilkening stood out — U.S. rural sociologists were far more interested in agricultural issues in Malaya, the Philippines, and Bolivia than in New Jersey, Wisconsin, Iowa, or California. Something new had erupted in U.S. rural sociology that seemed unfathomable. There was now considerable interest in what was happening over the newest economic crisis leading to social turmoil, bankruptcies, suicides, and individual actions against local bankers.

Whatever was going on? Why had agriculture, as a topic, essentially disappeared from *Rural Sociology*, the journal? Why, in the list of publications that *Rural Sociology* noted in various issues, was there no category for 'agriculture'? Yet why, at the Davis meeting, was there a raging debate about agricultural issues?

From these contradictions emerged my first problematic. Why had rural sociological research, which had been concerned originally with the decline of agriculture after the turn of the previous century, stopped researching domestic agricultural issues and publication on that topic? Thus, my first study after the 1978 encounter became 'Who Killed Rural Sociology?'. This was to eventuate in the article that failed to get published after I had satisfied my curiosity and moved on to what I considered a more central issues: the structure of American agriculture. What had been the role of the land-grant universities and their governmental sponsors in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in shaping U.S. rural sociology? What would be needed to get rural sociologists to abandon the idea of the rural homestead/community and realize that agriculture essentially consisted of a series of industrial systems of production?

*'Who Killed Rural Sociology?' resolved my initial problematic of the historical account of what had happened; this was interesting but not central to my concerns. I was more interested in looking toward the future rather than the past. How can this system be changed? How can small units of agricultural production be protected rather than obliterated? I have always respected historical analysis, but it has also always served me in building the base for analysis of what can be done to change a system?*

*I therefore didn't stew over the rejections. (I have lost the original file of my submissions for publication. My memory is that I originally submitted to one of the sociological journals that looked like a good prospect — I was still identifying as an industrial sociologist and the paper as a sociology of knowledge paper — and after being turned down, sent it to Rural Sociology where it was also rejected.) The main lessons I learned were that mainstream sociology was not interested in agriculture and that rural sociology, which was interested, continued to look on agriculture as it had been prior to the Second World War and did not see agriculture as a cluster of similar yet differentiated industrial production systems. I put 'Who Killed Rural Sociology?' aside and proceeded to what I considered to be the important agricultural issues.*

*I always regretted the paper never having seen the light of publication. I included a summary in a later publication (Friedland, 1982). Occasionally colleagues who knew about 'Who Killed Rural Sociology?' would ask about the paper and I would shake my head: I had more important fish to fry. When enough colleagues had asked, I finally decided to see if the paper could be published and here it is. Except for several corrections to the References, the article below is reproduced as in the original.*

## **Introduction**

This article is based on an assumption that, while seemingly obvious, may become less obvious as its details unfold. The assumption is that bodies of knowledge are the products of social forces integrally tied to the political and economic systems, and knowledge production is therefore subject to the institutions of social control. Knowledge, in other words, is neither an autonomous activity having no relationship to social structure nor the product of individuals insulated from the social structure.<sup>1</sup> Rather, knowledge production is integrated with the control systems of a society so that certain knowledge gets produced and other knowledge does not.

By taking a case study of a single knowledge production system, *rural sociology*, I will argue that the body of knowledge is shaped in ways that conform to the political economy of our society. Three basic sets of forces will be elucidated.

First, all systems of social control operate through networks that provide rewards for some activities and punishments for others. The reward system in knowledge production functions to provide support to some forms of research as well as honor and status for the conduct of that research. The obverse side of the reward system involves either the formal indifference of the political economy to certain types of research (which takes the form of non-allocation of resources) or various punishments for conducting research considered inappropriate to the social system.<sup>2</sup>

Second, knowledge production takes place within a network of institutions and organizations. Sometimes this network is very 'loose', as exemplified by sociology. Although formally organized within an association, the discipline of sociology is probably less significant to most of us than our individual relationships to departments or specific universities, e.g. the organizational affiliations that provide us our wherewithal. Some networks are more highly organized; this is the case of rural sociology. While its associational relationships (the Rural Sociological Society) take on similar form to the general discipline (the American Sociological Association), the way in which rural sociology gets *done* is very different from the way other forms of sociology develop. This is because rural sociology is organized through a network of closely integrated formal institutions involving the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as well as organizational forms at the level of each state, the State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAES). The SAES constitute a primary funding source for departments of rural sociology and individual rural sociologists. The operation of this institutional network is more crucial for rural sociology, as a subdiscipline, than any equivalent entity for sociology as a discipline. It is because of the way in which research is organized through the USDA and the SAESs that a distinctive political economy, more readily identifiable than with other disciplines or subdisciplines, becomes clearly delineatable.

There is a third force operative on the subdiscipline of rural sociology: sociology itself. Rural sociology developed within general sociology and maintains some attachments to the discipline. The relationship to general sociology manifests itself internally as a form of subdisciplinary 'autonomy'; that is, some knowledge gets produced that fits together with the general discipline and is unrelated to the pushes, pulls, and institutional connections that dominate the subdiscipline. These 'autonomous' forces, it will be argued, manifest themselves in arenas irrelevant to the mission orientation of the subdiscipline; they can come into existence and be significant as long as they do not involve the more direct relations of the subdiscipline.

The analysis begins by examining the historical development of the body of knowledge represented in rural sociology. I will show that rural sociology departed from its antecedents and developed new foci of research considerably different from its primordial interests. This will be demonstrated through an analysis of the changing trajectory of research within the subdiscipline since the formal organization of its journal, *Rural Sociology*. The specification of these changes will be made not only in terms of what *is* done through research but by indicating what has *not* been done. This will be followed by an examination of the punishments meted out to actors within the subdiscipline (and adjacent to it) who violated fundamentals. By controlling actors who propose distinctive trajectories of research, certain areas are delimited as being beyond the boundaries. This, in turn, provides indicators to other system participants as to which research trajectories *are* acceptable. I then turn to an examination of two major trajectories that have developed within rural sociology: diffusion and development research.

The forces producing the foci of what is researched (and what is not) are examined as sets of 'pushes' and 'pulls'. We then examine the 'autonomous' directions mani-

festated through the relationships that rural sociology has to the general discipline. The argument here is that rural sociology departed from its early concerns with collectivities (particularly with communities) and replaced them with concerns for individuals as the units of analysis. This is also manifested in a tendency toward quantifiable research.

### **The Demise of Rural Interests in Rural Sociology**

The origins of rural sociology rest in the early recognition of the problems afflicting those who lived in rural surroundings and earned their living through agricultural pursuits. According to Nelson (1969), rural sociology developed indigenously in the United States with the growing recognition of the difficulties of rural life and agriculture as a way of making a living. The belief that a strong agricultural production system underlies democratic society traces its roots to the formation of the republic and was embodied in Jefferson's belief that a strong independent yeomanry was essential to preserve democratic institutions. At a later stage, this democratic urge became more focused in a belief in the need to develop a firmer economic base in agriculture, which took the form of a push toward the introduction of science into agriculture (Rossiter, 1975). In the middle of the nineteenth century, this orientation shaped the development of a scientific network (Rosenberg, 1976, Part Two) that grew into what is known as the 'land-grant complex' with the adoption of the Morrill Act of 1862. After the creation of the land-grant colleges, the need for rigorous scientific research was implemented through the Hatch Act of 1887, which gave rise to the State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAES) network. In 1914, the final basic legislation of the complex was adopted in the Smith-Lever Act that created cooperative agricultural extension.

While the roots of concern about rural society extend back a long time, rural sociology as a subdiscipline is much younger. One major contribution to its development occurred when the United States shifted in population from a rural agricultural base to an urban base. The Country Life movement was simply one of a number of movements, this one composed largely of intellectuals, created within the milieu of agrarianism in the United States. As the rural population base declined and rural communities withered, there was a growing recognition that the strengthened economic base (resting on scientific research and development) was not strengthening rural society and that, instead, the population base and the rural institutions continued to erode.

The institutional base for rural sociology within the land-grant complex was established by the Purnell Act of 1925, which emphasized the importance of social and economic research (Nelson, 1969, pp. 86–89). While rural sociology predates the Purnell Act, it was this legislation – and the funding provided through the federal government – that created the basis for the modern institutional network of rural sociology.

I turn now to a consideration of the issues that have preoccupied the subdiscipline since the time it was formally organized as the Rural Sociology Society (RSS) and

began to publish its journal, *Rural Sociology* (RS). The most effective way to examine research trends in the subdiscipline is to consider the kinds of research that have been reported by *Rural Sociology*. Tables 1 and 2 undertake this assessment.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1 summarizes an examination of the cumulative indices of 40 annual volumes of *Rural Sociology*. Table 2, drawn from a survey of the content of materials in the journal over a 39 year period (Stokes and Miller, 1975, p. 415), reinforces the analysis in Table 1. While the analytic categories used in Table 2 are not identical to those of Table 1, the two tables show similarities and confirm the decline of a number of topics and the development of new research trajectories.

**Table 1.** Subject categories in *Rural Sociology*.

Subject	Vols. 1-20 1936-1955	Vols. 21-30 1956-1965	Vols. 31-40 1966-1975
Adoption/diffusion	22	51	47
Agrarianism <sup>1</sup>	16	2	4
Aspirations <sup>2</sup>	no entry	24	46
Community <sup>3</sup>	93	33	49
Family	49	16	19
Family Farm	10	no entry	no entry
Farm Labor	27	2	3
Farm Organizations <sup>4</sup>	9	4	15
Farmers	7	no entry	14
Farming part-time	no entry	5	3
Land Settlement (U.S./non-U.S.)	11	2	2
Land Tenure <sup>5</sup>	25	9	7
Modernization/Social Change	37	28	45
Stratification	19	6	13

Source: *Rural Sociology*, Cumulative Index, 1936-1966, 1956-1965, 1966-1975.

Notes: <sup>1</sup> During 1936-1955, the subject category was 'Agrarian Reform'. <sup>2</sup> In 1956-1965, three categories of aspirations were utilized - they have been consolidated here as a single category. In 1966-1975, five categories were used. <sup>3</sup> Includes two categories in 1936-1955 and 1956-1965 and four categories in 1966-1975. <sup>4</sup> In 1936-1955, the entry was called 'Social Groups - Formal'. For 1966-1975, I have incorporated an entry under 'National Farmers Organization'. <sup>5</sup> Incorporates two categories, including four for U.S. and three for non-U.S.

**Table 2.** Classification of articles in *Rural Sociology* by major area and topics (%).

Major Area	1936-1945 N=358	1946-1955 N=339	1956-1965 N=328	1966-1976 N=314
Agricultural Development	-	0.3	3.6	2.5
Aspirations	0.4	-	2.8	7.6
Community	6.9	9.8	4.6	6.7
Diffusion	0.4	4.7	7.0	7.0
Family	4.2	3.8	1.8	2.2
Land Tenure	1.7	1.8	2.1	0.6
Stratification	3.1	2.9	3.1	3.2
Social Welfare	33.5	16.8	7.9	8.7
Policy and Planning	8.6	0.6	0.6	1.3
Farm Labor	6.6	1.2	1.2	1.0
Housing and Level of Living	2.2	3.2	0.9	0.3
Rural Life Problems	5.8	2.9	0.3	1.6

Source: Stokes and Miller, 1975, p. 415.

Note: Numbers shown represent the percentage of articles within the subject category shown. Categories are grouped into larger classes, e.g. 'social organization', 'social change', etc. The table shows the total for one of these larger classes, 'social welfare', and for four categories within this class.



Table 1 shows the high concern with diffusion research. Modernization or social change research shows continuing preoccupation, but the Table does not show how concern with this subject has shifted from U.S. contexts to non-U.S. or Third World ('developing nations') situations. One interesting anomaly is the new importance of 'aspirations', a topic of some curiosity since the prospects for anyone aspiring to a living in agriculture have declined so drastically.

What is just as interesting as the foci of research are the topics that have declined or been ignored by rural sociologists. Two topics of original interest to early rural sociologists have declined significantly: agrarianism and farm labor were originally of concern but have virtually disappeared in recent times. Given the historical antecedents of the subdiscipline in the Country Life movement, one might have expected continuing interest to be manifested in the life conditions of rural people. Perhaps because of the decline in the rural population and the gradual adoption of urban lifestyles, this issue has become largely irrelevant. More important is the absence of much analysis of the rural population base; again, perhaps there is nothing much to be said since the rural population has largely disappeared.<sup>4</sup>

More significant, however, is the low degree of interest in social stratification and income distribution within agriculture. With the possible exception of Smith (1969) and Rodefeld (1979), little attention is given to this subject. It is almost as if a hidden assumption about the homogeneous family farm (and farmer) continues to exist and that, therefore, there is nothing to research. It also turns out that there is almost nothing known about land tenure in the United States; the subdiscipline has developed in such a way that far more is known about land tenure in Bolivia, Columbia, Peru, India, Malaysia and the Philippines than about land tenure in New York, New Jersey, Wisconsin, or California.

Other interesting gaps in the knowledge system also exist. What might be noted, for example, is the curious failure of most rural sociologists (with the notable exception of Morrison and Steeves, 1967) to study the agrarianist tendencies within U.S. agriculture. While it is true that social movements in and around agriculture have declined (as has the entire social sector), movements continue to develop but their analysis continues to be eschewed by the subdiscipline. Rather than being a subject for sociological research, this area has become the 'turf' of historians.

Two additional lacunae in the discipline are notable. First, the absence, with one notable exception (Goss et al., 1978), of any literature dealing with corporate organization within agriculture. This absence is notable not only because there has been such an outcry about the development of agribusiness in populist circles within and outside of agriculture, but because it takes a multiplicity of interesting forms that have been ignored assiduously by the subdiscipline. While much emphasis has been placed on the notion of the entry of large-scale corporations into agricultural production (e.g. Tenneco, United Brands, Castle and Cooke, etc.) by populist critics outside the subdiscipline, no attention has been given either to the incorporation of the family (the 'family farm corporation') and its consequences on family organization or the entry into agriculture of investment groups organized by promoters. While the final type resembles corporate agribusiness, the failure of rural sociologists to deal with

family incorporation and its consequences is quite amazing, especially considering that concern with the family not only formed a primordial interest to rural sociology but has been a topic of continuing research.<sup>5</sup>

The final major gap in the body of knowledge is in what can be called the sociology of agriculture. It is a peculiarity of rural sociology as a subdiscipline that, until the past few years, little interest been manifested in this topic. This absence of a sociology of agriculture is all the more peculiar in that crops get grown, harvested, processed, and marketed; all of this activity implies the existence of social organization. Indeed, since different crops require different ways of being produced, the basis for comparative analysis obviously exists. Despite the fact that the analysis of production originated with Adam Smith and Karl Marx and burgeoned within the general discipline of sociology as industrial sociology (following the rise of mass unionism in the 1930s and the Hawthorne experiments), no concomitant developments have been manifested within rural sociology except in the past few years.<sup>6</sup>

### **Social Control and the Institutional Network**

#### *Shaping Forces: The Pushes*

How to account for the way in which the subdiscipline has developed? In this section, we will examine, through a number of specific cases, what has happened to individuals and ideas when certain trajectories of research have been undertaken.

One obvious way to discourage a particular trajectory of research is to 'starve it to death'. Researchers may like to do research but we really do not enjoy doing it by our lonely selves in the library. Most research requires resources and those resources are often not made available. An example of this can be found in California where, in 1966, a group of researchers in the University of California undertook to create a substantial research organization to examine the effects of the establishment of the California Water Project and the construction of the Interstate 5 highway on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley. These construction developments opened up hundreds of thousands of acres of dry land to intensive agricultural production. While similar projects in Africa, for example, gave rise to studies of the social effects of massive transformations of the environment, this was not the case in California. After a three-year start-up period, the California research project was mysteriously permitted to die. This may have been due to the fact that one subject proposed to be studied was the effects of the two projects on the 160 acre limitation on subsidized water. The project may have died because the national administration shifted from the Democrats to the Nixon Republicans. Although top officials of the University originally supported the project, when it died of lack of federal funding, they took no initiatives to continue it (Fagin, 1970a, 1970b, 1981 personal communication).

Sometimes, however, research trajectories are undertaken that turn out to be 'cans of worms'. Under such circumstances it becomes advisable to discourage their continuation. It also becomes exigent that impediments be placed in the way of those scholars that would like to give their work public exposure. This was the case in the celebrated Arvin-Dinuba studies conducted by Walter Goldschmidt during the 1940s.



Originally supported by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the USDA, the Goldschmidt study supported the argument about the vitality of the Jeffersonian ideal: small *was* better in that communities with small landholdings had richer social infrastructures than those with large landholdings. Goldschmidt's research was cut off and he was unable to finish his work; further, he was originally unable to publish his results and they finally emerged somewhat under a cloud. Goldschmidt, after a promising beginning with the BAE as an anthropologist of American society, departed for Africa and made a career in more traditional anthropological pursuits.<sup>7</sup>

One inevitable conclusion that can be drawn from the Goldschmidt case is that if one wants to publish (necessary if one is not to perish!) it is advisable to pick topics that do not arouse the ire of powerful, established economic interests.

A similar lesson can be drawn from the experience of the 'burning of the farm population estimates' (Rosenbaum, n.d.). Annually produced by the USDA, the farm population estimates show population trends on U.S. farms. In 1958, it was decided to incorporate into the report a selection of written comments from farmers gleaned when the population estimates were developed. This was a period in which the farm population continued to decline rapidly and the comments made by farmers were substantially critical of national farm policies. Through a series of misadventures, the document reporting this was published and distributed before top USDA officials realized what had happened. Every copy of the publication was retrieved and all copies were ultimately burned while a new, sanitized version was released.

Closer to home within the BAE, there was the experience following the commissioning of 71 county community studies in 1944. One such study of Coahoma County, Mississippi found, unsurprisingly, that race relations between blacks and whites were somewhat less than happy. When a draft copy of the report came into the possession of Representative Jamie Whitten, in the process of becoming the 'informal secretary of agriculture' (Kotz, 1969), the BAE found itself beleaguered. Shortly afterward, it ceased to exist (Hardin, 1946). When reorganized, its successor agency did not carry on the kind of research for which BAE became notable. The elimination of the BAE must surely have percolated its way into the visible 'college' of rural sociology.

Although not involving a sociologist, the experience of Henry Anderson and the bracero program is also enlightening (Anderson, 1976; Draper and Draper, 1968, p. 32). Anderson was then a graduate student in the University of California's School of Public Health studying the health of bracero workers imported from Mexico to work in California agriculture. As public pressure built to eliminate the bracero program in the late 1950s, Anderson prepared a statement for a legislative hearing urging the abolition of the program. Anderson was subsequently forbidden to use a bracero center for interviewing and his report was suppressed. He was required to prepare a bowdlerized version and the original report did not appear until years later, in 1976. It should perhaps be noted that California's agricultural interests fought tooth and nail to retain the bracero program.

Although not experiencing the same kinds of pressures, a similar situation was experienced by Richard Rodefeld, one of the younger rural sociologists recently 'released' from the faculty of Pennsylvania State University. Rodefeld has been one

of the few rural sociologists interested in class structure in U.S. agriculture. In one of his studies, Rodefeld critiqued the methodology of the USDA in determining the numbers of corporative farms. Rodefeld was pressured by USDA officials to withdraw his methodological critique (*NFO Reporter*, 1972). While Rodefeld doubts that that USDA criticism had anything to do with his failure to win tenure in his first teaching post, it is worth noting that after this attack he had to relocate and, after several years on the faculty of Pennsylvania State University, failed to win tenure from that institution.<sup>8</sup>

As a final example, of a non-sociologist working in a social arena, the case of Robert Bradfield should be examined. Bradfield was a nutritionist employed by the University of California's Agricultural Extension. In the 1960s, Bradfield became interested in the nutrition of Chicano children. He was warned against studying this topic by the associate director of Extension on the grounds that Extension's constituency would not approve of the subject matter. Bradfield persisted nevertheless. Despite obtaining grants from prestigious foundations such as Rockefeller and Guggenheim, winning recognition through his professional association, his life was steadily made miserable as horror after horror was visited upon him. He was fired three times, ordered not to interact with professional colleagues at Berkeley or to participate in his association's affairs, his mail was opened. As a final indignity, after fighting his discharge from Extension, Bradfield agreed on a negotiated settlement with the University, which provided the equivalent of a golden handshake of farewell. A condition of the settlement was that neither party would make any further public comment. Thus Bradfield was effectively muzzled. Since that time, a USDA investigation was ostensibly conducted but its results too have apparently been suppressed.<sup>9</sup>

There is little point in simply relating the 'horror' stories of the rural sociological trade without drawing the necessary lessons; these examples indicate the experience of persons violating the established 'norms' of the knowledge production system. Through the punishment of people who raise critical or embarrassing issues or who produce data that undermine established and institutionalized relationships (such as embodied around the systematic violation of the 160 acre limitation), a normative climate is established within scientific disciplines. That climate makes clear which topics are controversial, difficult, not to be funded, and therefore to be avoided.

### *Shaping Forces: The Pulls*

If there have been subject areas that have been actively discouraged in rural sociology, other areas of research have been strongly encouraged. Two such areas stand out: diffusion research and development studies. The former, concerned with the process by which new innovations are adopted by farmers and how they are diffused through the agricultural community, has generated an enormous literature.<sup>10</sup>

Rogers (1962) locates the origin of research on diffusion of innovations in the 1920s:

'when administrators in the USDA Federal Extension Service instigated evaluations of their program's effectiveness. One handy evaluation measure

for this adult education agency was the adoption of innovations recommended and promoted by the Extension Service' (1962, p. 31).

After tracing the early development of diffusion research, Rogers notes:

'Since the mid-1950's, there has been a great proliferation of research studies by rural sociologists. Most of these studies have been financed by state agricultural experiment stations or the USDA (but also in very recent years by agricultural companies). Federal and state agencies spend sizable sums for research on agricultural technology. Their administrators have been convinced of the value of sociological inquiry to trace the diffusion of these research results to farm people. Most rural sociologists are employed by state agricultural universities, and the proximity of these sociologists to state Agricultural Extension Services has affected the tradition' (1962, pp. 36–37).

Rogers thus emphasizes the *utility* of this type of research for research administrators. Some want to know how innovations diffuse so that they can spread more effectively the innovations developed by agricultural researchers; others (in all likelihood those working for agricultural companies) want to know how to market their developments).

Rogers delineates six types of innovativeness research developed within rural sociology. These include: correlates of innovativeness, information sources at stages of the adoption process, norms on innovativeness, characteristics of innovations, opinion leadership, and the role of change agents (1962, pp. 37–38). At least two types of innovation/diffusion research, however, have *not* developed. These are studies that examine the social contexts and forces that produce different kinds of innovations, on the one hand, and social consequences of the introduction of innovations, on the other. Thus, while diffusion research proved to have utility to the institutional network of the land-grant system and provision was therefore made to support this kind of research, other forms of diffusion research were not supported.

Reference was made earlier to the fact that rural sociologists know more about land tenure outside than inside the U.S. Part of the explanation for this phenomenon rests on the 'discouragement' of research that would demonstrate how land concentration was occurring. Another part of the explanation, however, must take into account the attractions of other countries. Of course, there can be many explanations for this phenomenon. For example, as rural society disappeared in the U.S., for sociologists interested in rural phenomena (or having rural antecedents and being concerned about them), it becomes necessary to go elsewhere to conduct such research.

A more reasonable explanation for the development of interest in comparative studies, underdevelopment and development, or modernization<sup>11</sup> rests in the special relations that the agricultural organization has with the U.S. government.

Nelson (1969, p. 141) points out that interest by rural sociologists in things abroad goes back to the 1920s, when rural sociology was only beginning to take shape:

'The outbreak of World War II, however, abruptly brought into focus the relationship of the United States with other countries and particularly its

neighbors to the south. As the war cut off traditional sources of jute, rubber, quinine, and other badly needed commodities, South America and the Caribbean assumed unprecedented strategic importance. The required products came from rural and often remote areas. Yet North America possessed little reliable information about the rural hinterlands of the capital cities, which had too often engaged the almost exclusive attention of embassy personnel' (1969, pp. 142–143).

Thus it was that the special relationship of U.S. rural sociology to Latin America began; just as 'trade follows the flag', sociology also follows. Before too long, a number of rural sociologists were recruited to work in Latin American countries and a knowledge base was built about 'Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela' (Nelson, 1969, p. 149).

Following the war, rural sociologists worked abroad not only under the auspices of the U.S. government but also through the support of the Ford Foundation. Nelson notes (1969, pp. 149–150) that relatively little research was done in Europe and only slightly more in the Middle East. A considerable amount of research was generated about Asia, however, particularly Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines, India and Ceylon. Few rural sociologists were involved in African studies, a domain that tended to reflect more the urbane interests of the Ford Foundation on that continent.

Looking at the area interests of rural sociologists, what is notable is their involvement with those two arenas that were staked out, before the war and after, as being foci of interest of the United States as it entered its overt imperial phase. As a world power, the U.S. was concerned, of course, with Europe and Africa, but its most direct interests lay with its traditional 'sphere of influence', Latin America, and that enormously important continent in which a vacuum was created through the independence movements of the post-war era, Asia. Sociologists, in other words, continued to follow the flag.<sup>12</sup>

The flowering of development studies within rural sociology was thus related to the global knowledge-development needs of the United States. Development studies did not develop simply because people were curious or enjoyed travelling and living abroad but, because they fitted the material needs of the political economy, the incentives and rewards were made available and therefore attracted a sizable number of social scientists to generate new research trajectories within the subdiscipline.

### **Shaping Forces: General Sociology and Autonomy**

I turn finally to a consideration of the social forces that have shaped rural sociology and its interests *external* to the land-grant network in which it is enmeshed. Here the primary constellation of forces have been focused on sociology as a general discipline to which rural sociology has been related.

Perhaps the best way to consider this relationship is to study that body of materials in which the subdiscipline has examined its relationship to general sociology. For these purposes, the most reflective analyses can be found in various addresses of presidents of the Rural Sociological Society published in *Rural Sociology*.<sup>13</sup>

Rural sociology has always suffered something of an inferiority complex in its relationship to the broader discipline. Benefited by funding levels that, by comparison to the discipline, seemed rich and lucrative,<sup>14</sup> rural sociologists have been 'rich but poor relations', something like second-class citizens within the discipline.

Examination of the RSS presidential addresses dealing with inner-subdisciplinary issues, while generally complementary of the accomplishments of the subdiscipline, have often indicated the problem of rural sociology's relations to the discipline. All too often, it has been stated, rural sociologists have been atheoretical or untheoretical and have lacked disciplinary rigor.

The search for rigor has contributed, at least from the viewpoint of this observer, to the development of a major focus on quantitative analysis, in which the individual became the unit of analysis.

Two distinct factors have produced this methodological emphasis. First, what has characterized much of the internal and external criticism, especially in the earlier period of rural sociology, has been its excessive empiricism and qualitative character. When this criticism was developing, the general discipline was undergoing a major transformation under the influence of structural functionalism, on the one hand, and quantitative empirical analysis, on the other.

Rural sociology could make a shift toward quantitative analysis because it fitted with the empirical antecedents of the subdiscipline. It was probably precluded from developing a theoretical orientation because of its institutional connections in the land-grant system, which emphasizes 'practical' and 'useful' research rather than theoretical work.<sup>15</sup>

With no reward structure within the SAES to sustain theoretical work, it is unsurprising that rural sociology did not resonate the theoretical demands of the Parsons-Merton period of the 1950s and 1960s. Instead, the subdiscipline turned to the quantitative orientations that became pervasive within sociology during this period.

A second factor contributing to this development rests in the relations that rural sociology has as a stepchild of the land-grant research organization, which has so heavily emphasized hard science and productionist orientations. If the 'hard' scientists (primarily biologists) of the agricultural science network could barely understand the 'mushy' qualitative community studies that characterized early rural sociology, they could at least read a table and understand a test of significance. Thus by moving towards quantification, rural sociology could relate itself simultaneously to the broader mainstream of the discipline while talking a language understandable to those elements dominating the institutional network of which it is a part.<sup>16</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Perhaps the most pervasive social influence responsible for the demise of rural sociology has been the annihilation of rural society in the United States. With no social base left to study, what is there to do? Rural sociology responded to the destruction of its population base by shifting interests to subject areas serving the political-eco-

conomic interests of the land-grant network and its clients (or, more accurately, they should be characterized as patrons). This transition occurred with some pain and difficulty as individual rural sociologists (and some agricultural economists) fought the trends.<sup>17</sup>

Responding to the incentives of the productionist-oriented science establishment dominating the land-grant complex as well as recognizing the punishments of those that persisted in examining controversial issues, rural sociology as a subdiscipline departed its antecedents and became transmogrified into a very different subdiscipline, concerned with restricted issues and failing to raise critical questions about the changing character of rural society.

The burgeoning of Marxist and neo-Marxist trends within sociology, under the influences of the 1960s and early 1970s, has produced the beginnings of some change. One can note, for example, the work of a small number of younger rural sociologists reflecting a Marxist and/or populist orientation. Similarly, the issues of the clientele and constituencies of the land-grant system have come under scrutiny from some rural sociologists (Flora and Converse, 1978). The formation of an informal grouping of (mainly) rural sociologists interested in the sociology of agriculture represents a development worthy of note. These new developments represent, in effect, the 'autonomous' features of the subdiscipline, e.g. the influences feeding rural sociology from the main discipline. These influences must contend with the day-by-day influences and pressures that exist at the departmental level in interaction with experiment station directors, deans of colleges of agriculture, and presidents of state colleges and universities linked to the land-grant complex.

A hard-nosed assessment of the institutional linkages indicates that where 'autonomous' tendencies come into conflict with the more direct relationships embodied in the land-grant system and *its* network of connections, autonomy comes in second place. No definitive statement of where emerging trends will evolve is possible but the examination of the development of the subdiscipline leaves this observer somewhat less than optimistic.

## Notes

1. For a discussion of autonomy and accountability in the agricultural sciences, see Nicholson (1977) and Busch and Lacy (1979).
2. There is no intention here to impute the existence of any conspiracy. Rather, following the structuralist formulation of some neo-Marxists (cf. Gold et al., 1975), the conceptualization is that social systems operate through generic structures irrespective of the intentions of actors. This is not to argue that there is no merit in the instrumentalist formulation of the nature of the state; there is ample indication that some formal and informal agreements are arranged by powerful individuals and organizations.
3. Of necessity, I will not elaborate on the methodological assumptions implicit in this procedure. An enormous amount of rural sociological research gets done that is not reported in *Rural Sociology*. However, as the pre-eminent journal of the subdiscipline, it is reasonable to assume that the material published in *Rural Sociology* represents what the subdiscipline regards as important.
4. See Note 11 below.
5. I know of no rural sociologist presently studying family incorporation. A small literature has developed on this subject but it deals with legal implications and arguments about its advantages (Levi, 1971; Davis, 1976; Harl et al., 1977).



6. Beginning in 1979, a group of predominantly younger rural sociologists began to raise issues around the sociology of agriculture. A first, informal meeting held at Davis in 1978 was primarily focused on the fate of the family farm (rather than on the sociology of agriculture). Subsequent meetings were held prior to each RSS meeting in 1979 and 1980. A continuing preoccupation of this group is with the fate of family or small-scale farming, although some tendencies have developed concerning the sociology of agriculture more directly. For an overview of these developments, see Buttel 1980. For a specification of the sociology of agriculture, see Friedland et al., 1981.
7. Goldschmidt's original studies have recently been republished with auxiliary materials (Goldschmidt, 1978a), including an attack on a historical analysis of his calvary (see Kirkendall, 1964); see also Kirkendall's response (1979) and Taylor (1976) on this matter. Goldschmidt (1978b), it should be noted, readdressed the issue of land tenure in the U.S.
8. On the substantive subject involved here, it is parenthetically curious to note that, among USDA social scientists, much effort is currently being invested to argue that a 'turnaround' is occurring in the rural sector with population moving out of urban into rural areas. While this population movement may indeed be occurring, USDA population specialists, by emphasizing the population movement, continue to obscure the trends towards decline in the agricultural population. At the same time, much of the 'turnaround' phenomenon fails to benefit rural populations. (for example, see Hansen, 1973).
9. The Bradfield case never found scholarly analysis. The story was covered in the press. For example, see the *Sacramento Bee*, 24 March 1978 and the *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April 1978. For a fully documented chronicle, see the *University Guardian*, of the United Professors of California (AFT), January–February 1978 and March 1978. For a discussion of the USDA repression of the investigation, see Schrag, 1978.
10. Rogers (1962, pp. 317–353) provides a very substantial bibliography of the literature of this field, much of which originates from rural sociology.
11. For the sake of brevity, I will refer to this congeries of studies as 'development' research.
12. I should emphasize that I am not claiming moral superiority in this analysis. I personally became part of the process by accepting a fellowship from the Ford Foundation for doctoral research in Africa. There is no question in my mind, in historical perspective, that I became part of an American knowledge base essential to the U.S. as it became the prime world power.
13. The presidential addresses of Larson (1959), Hoffsomer (1960), Hoffer (1961) John (1962), Kaufman (1963), Jehlik (1964), Beal (1969), Copp (1972), Ford (1973), Warner (1974) and Capener (1975) have been drawn upon in particular. Other presidential addresses were concerned with issues other than the state of the subdiscipline. Articles by Sewell (1965), Nolan et al. (1975) and Stokes and Miller (1975) as well as an overall assessment of the subdiscipline by Anderson (1959) have also proved helpful.
14. Parenthetically, it can be noted that while rural sociology is 'rich' compared to the general discipline, it is the poverty-stricken segment of the agricultural research community. Hathaway (1972) notes that the agricultural social sciences get only about 10% of the total budget dedicated to agricultural research and rural sociology obtains only 10% of the funds given over to social research. Thus, rural sociology is endowed only to the extent of about 1% of the agricultural research budget.
15. Considerable debate exists within the land-grant research network about basic vs. applied research. For example, see Mayer and Mayer (1974); Nicholson (1977); Busch and Lacy (1979). Rosenberg (1976, Part Two) has dealt with this tension historically within the land-grant research organization.
16. Additional analysis of the corpus of material embodied in *Rural Sociology* remains necessary to demonstrate part of this argument. This research remains to be completed.
17. Robin Williams, in a personal communication, points out that a number of rural sociologists fought to maintain a concern with the demise of rural communities. Unfortunately, while people such as C. Horace Hamilton and Carl C. Taylor have to be remembered, their legacy has tended to be buried by the overwhelming body of materials that represent the current preoccupations of rural sociology.

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