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PROBLEMS AND SPECIAL NEEDS OF NEGRO YOUTH IN RURAL AREAS.

BY- JONES, LEWIS W.

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IN RURAL AREAS, MANY PROBLEMS OF NEGRO YOUTH ORIGINATE IN THE LIMITATIONS WHICH RESULT FROM UNEDUCATED FAMILIES AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL POVERTY OF THE FAMILIES. DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES REMAIN AS AN EFFECT UPON YOUTH. THE NEGRO'S ADJUSTMENT TO RURAL LIFE AND TO SCHOOL IS NOT GOOD AS A RESULTANT OF FOUNDATIONAL UNREADINESS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE NEED TO PREPARE HIS LIFE'S ACTIVITIES. THE PROSPECT FOR THE FUTURE IS FRUSTRATION AND ANXIETY. SCHOOLS HAVE REORGANIZED BUT NOT CHANGED THE CURRICULUM TO TEACH USEABLE SKILLS, AND AREA DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS ARE CARRIED OUT BY LOCAL AGENCIES. THESE PROGRAMS SELDOM BENEFIT THE NEGRO. TABLES OF POPULATION PERCENTAGES ARE INCLUDED. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR PRESENTATION AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PROBLEMS OF RURAL YOUTH IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT (SEPTEMBER 1963). (SF)

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by

Lewis W. Jones  
Fisk University

National Committee for Children and Youth  
1145 Nineteenth Street, N. W.  
Washington, D. C. 20036

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Lewis W. Jones  
Fisk University

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## ABSTRACT

In 1960 there were nearly three million non-white children and youth in rural areas of the United States; 87 percent of them were in the South and 95 percent of these were Negro. In rural areas, particularly in Southern rural areas, tradition is most unyielding. Social and cultural changes lag behind technological and economic changes. Rural Negro youth need opportunities in areas where they are growing up including an education that will permit them to compete for jobs and social status, wherever they may ultimately find themselves. The rural South is the matrix of much of America's poor and disadvantaged. Too little concern is shown for what is happening to the development of people in this region while alarm is expressed about what they are when they appear in urban areas within and without the South.

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### INTRODUCTION

Ethical and ideological considerations of the problems and prospects of Negro youth are a demanding public concern. Strong emotional overtones about the activities of Negro youth in the civil rights movement and the counteractions against their expressions of discontent present a challenge to the social scientist to analyze and interpret the phenomena. Meticulous care needs to be exercised in maintaining the perspective of the student of human behavior and to resist the social pressures to assume one or another stance of advocacy.

When the dramatic activities of Negro youth that make news have ceased (perhaps more so if they are long-continued) the problems of Negro youth will by no means have been solved. Removal of legal and customary restrictions on the range and depth of Negro participation in economic and institutional life of America will no doubt make more glaring those disabilities they suffer because of decades of neglect of Negro youth. The relative disadvantaged position of Negro and often other youth who migrate from rural to urban areas is readily apparent. Equally important, even as they go unnoticed, are the disadvantages facing youth who remain in rural areas where many will grow up despite the pace of migration.

Effective consideration of the problems of Negro youth who live in rural areas requires a sharply focused perspective whose achievement depends upon respecification of outworn familiar concepts. The first of these is "rurality."

### RURALITY

"Rural" is no longer synonymous with "farm" and farm no longer fits any traditional stereotype of a self-contained family enterprise. The census classification of farms indicates diversity in agricultural enterprises. Selected states may be used here to suggest the characteristics of the diversity.

Between 1930 and 1960 the number of farms in several states decreased 45 percent or more. Farms of 500 acres or larger increased by the following percentages: Alabama 147, Mississippi 174, South Carolina 85, and Texas 67. Despite the fact that tenant farms decreased more than one-half in all of these states, there were still tenants and sharecroppers. The percentages sharecroppers were of all tenants: Alabama, 27; Mississippi, 51; South Carolina, 44; and Texas, 7. Negroes are a little more than half all sharecroppers in Alabama, 80 percent of them in South Carolina, and 90 percent in Mississippi.

As to farms enumerated in 1959, 7 percent in Texas, 17 percent in South Carolina, 21 percent in Alabama, and 24 percent in Mississippi were Class

VI Farms, those whose annual value of products was less than \$2,500. In Class VIII Farms, those whose operator was 65 years old or over, the percentages were: Texas and South Carolina 13, and Mississippi and Alabama 15. The Part-Time Farm, Census Class VII, is not necessarily or even usually a problem farm but there are problem farms in this category. The percentages Part-Time Farms were of all farms in the states were: Texas 26, Mississippi 31, South Carolina 32, and Alabama 35. The combined percentages of all farms in these categories were Alabama, 71; Mississippi, 71; South Carolina, 63; and Texas, 47.

"Rural nonfarm" has become a catch-all category for a population having a wide variation in occupations and styles of life.

### DIMENSIONS OF THE RURAL NEGRO YOUTH POPULATION

#### DIMENSION 1

According to the 1960 Census there were 2,930,149 non-white children and youth in rural areas of the United States; and 2,539,401 (87 percent) of all rural non-white children and youth were in the South.

The Census trichotomy - urban, rural nonfarm, and rural farm, showed the non-white population below the age of 20 to be proportionately greater than that of the white population. The non-white adults have a greater burden of dependent young than the white adults have.

Percentage of U. S. Population Under Age 20, 1960  
Three Selected Age Categories by White and for Non-White Groups and by Residence Groups

Age Group	Total		Urban		Rural Nonfarm		Rural Farm	
	White	Non-white	White	Non-white	White	Non-white	White	Non-white
Under 5	10.9	14.4	10.8	14.3	11.8	14.8	9.3	14.8
5 - 14	19.3	23.1	18.5	21.7	21.2	25.7	21.7	29.6
15 - 19	7.3	7.9	7.0	7.1	7.8	9.5	9.1	11.7
Total Under 20	37.5	45.4	36.3	43.1	40.8	50.0	40.1	56.1

In the total population under 20 and in the three selected age groups percentages of non-whites were greater than those of whites.

#### DIMENSION 2

The proportionately greater dependent young population is the responsibility of the less economically advantaged wage-earner group as reported in the 1960 Census.

Median Annual Income of Persons with Incomes 1960  
By White and Non-White for the United States and for the South

Area	U. S. Total	South	
		White	Non-White
Total	4,103	3,473	1,615
Urban	4,532	4,247	2,153
Rural Nonfarm	3,297	2,862	1,145
Rural Farm	2,098	1,312	744

In 1960 the median annual income of rural farm Southern Negroes with incomes was \$744. In this population 56 percent are under age 20, and this figure does not include adults who are not in the labor market.

The fact that these rural people are poor may be emphasized by reference to family income rather than personal income in selected Southern states. More than 80 percent of the non-white rural people in each of the states had annual family incomes of less than \$3,000. More than 40 percent had incomes of less than \$1,000. The rural white families were somewhat better off. The percentage of white rural nonfarm families who had incomes of less than \$3,000 ranged from 39 in South Carolina to 47 in Alabama. The range for white farm families was from 49 in South Carolina to 60 in Alabama. The percentages of white farm families whose incomes were less than \$1,000 were 16 percent in South Carolina and 20 percent in Mississippi.

### DIMENSION 3

Rural Negro youth suffer disadvantages of parents with limited education. Not only are they poor, they are also uneducated. The median school grade completed for rural Negroes 25 years old and older in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina was between 5 and 6 years; in Texas 8 years. Rural white persons 25 years old and older had completed less than 9 years in Alabama, less than 10 years in Mississippi and less than 11 years in South Carolina and Texas.

In the South 79 percent of rural nonfarm non-white adults and 85 percent of rural farm non-white adults had 8 years or less schooling in 1960.

### INSTITUTIONAL LIMITATIONS IN RURAL AREAS

The technological changes in rural areas of the South have contributed to some changes in the social structure. Displacement of workers from agriculture, with consequent migration from rural to urban areas, has been accompanied by problems related to institutional services in rural areas.

Once populous rural communities have been decimated and some have all but disappeared. Churches, schools, and lodge halls in which community life centered have been abandoned, leaving a void for those who remain.



The enlarged community to which rural Negroes now belong centers in a small town or small city. The neighborhoods in which they live are residential only with stores or recreational facilities on the passing highway designed to serve the passerby as well as those who live in the vicinity.

The social services taken for granted in urban areas are not provided in rural areas and small towns. Such services as are available are limited in their use because of established patterns of segregation and discriminations based on race, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, by the failure of social service agencies to adapt themselves to the needs of a poor lower status clientele. Most Negroes suffer from the disadvantages of being both poor and Negro.

Token desegregation, now appearing in urban areas in the South is not yet practiced in rural areas and small towns. Discriminatory practices will be most unyielding in these areas, where tradition is rigid.

When desegregation comes the problems of a lower status population will be faced by young Negroes as they are faced by the lower status disadvantaged person everywhere.

#### THE ADJUSTMENT OF NEGRO RURAL YOUTH

Factors in the Adjustment of Rural Families in Low Income Areas, by Seung Gyn Moon, is concerned primarily with the levels and potentials of adjustment of rural families in low-income areas. In this investigation, adjustment is viewed as a necessary process of self or group adaptation to survive in a changed environment. This new environment may arise externally as a result of socio-cultural, technological or institutional changes or internally as a result of biological changes, in the case of a person, or interpersonal changes, in the case of a group.

Anxiety states are evidence of unsolved adjustment problems. To reduce or control unbearable anxiety -- which is the foundation of almost all forms of nonintegrative human behavior -- people use various adjustment mechanisms, including defense, escape, fears, and ailments.

Nix has shown that a relatively high degree of despair and uncertainty exists among low-income rural families in rapidly changing Alabama county. Furthermore, he suggests that the apathy and the inability of those suffering from despair and uncertainty have been largely responsible for their low social participation.

Youth who want to get out of and away from school find it easy in rural areas where there is weak, if any, enforcement of school attendance. They are largely poor and know that their poverty is a determining factor in the limited educational experience they are offered. Education that seems to be appropriate for them does not open the way to the economic and social status goals they covet. Since no acceptable choices are offered they introduce their own alternative: to continue in the school and end up in the cul-de-sac toward which it is moving them, or get out.

Ceasing to take school seriously, truancy, and dropping out of school are symptoms of an idea formation that makes beating the game a way of life. Evasion or rebellion against parental control and being a disciplinary problem in the school is interpreted too readily as evidence of a problem child.

#### PROSPECT

There is apparently a strong trend from distinctive subcultural characteristics of the rural population and of the Negro population and toward greater heterogeneity. Both "rural" and "Negro" are rapidly losing their long-standing connotations.

Economic and social influences that are operating to change the two statuses and especially the rural Negro status may be expected to continue. This will mean more social disorganization and personal maladjustment as the old order disintegrates.

The emerging new order in the rural South makes little provision for the disadvantaged Negro population. The Rural Area Development Program of the Federal Government is carried on by local agencies which operate within the traditional Southern political framework. This means that Negroes are not included and seldom share directly in the benefits of programs.

Young Negroes who are growing up in the rural South see little evidence that there will be more opportunities for them in the developing system than there now are for their parents.

Not only have economic and technological changes along with agricultural policies of the Federal Government made farm tenants expendable, but the Negro owners of small farms find themselves marginal and less able to compete. Agriculture is by no means an attractive career prospect for young Negroes.

School improvement in the rural South as represented by consolidation and new buildings is a deceptive. The content of instruction appears to lag behind improvements in plant and equipment. Young Negroes are not being given an education that will fit them for higher levels of employment in nonfarm occupations.

The overall prospect for rural Negro youth is frustration and anxiety. The adjustment mechanism most useful to them is escape. This is escape is to urban communities within and outside of the South. Their problems in the areas to which they flee will be compounded, but they will no longer be a rural problem.

#### SPECIAL NEEDS

Special needs of rural Negro Youth include:

1. Realistic appraisal and understanding. This means research. There has been none in a generation, not since Charles S. Johnson wrote Growing Up in the Black Belt and this was thirty years ago.

2. A good basic education. The new buildings, new busses and new facilities do not mean a new education. In much of the South, Negro teachers have better education than white teachers, if measured in terms of degrees. The fact remains that these teachers received their degrees from "Negro" colleges that are not now respectably accredited.

3. Special training for new opportunities in the rural areas. The new plants being built in the South employ trained white workers; not enough white or Negroes educated in the South are "ready" for the jobs.

4. A satisfying sense of belonging. The Negro has been told for generations from slavery to now that he lives in the rural area so long as he is useful to the white neighbor. He must feel he has rights where his parents have lived.

5. An understanding that a person does not have to live in a city within or outside the South to have the service available to him in the city.

The rural Negro child in the future has no hope to remain rural and Negro and to enjoy life. He must get out, go to an urban slum and be a dependent because he is not aggressive or become a delinquent because he is aggressive.

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