7-1979


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Mid-continent Net Migration Losses Decline

CENTERS OF NET MIGRATION GAINS IN THE GREAT PLAINS, 1970-1976

By Armin K. Ludwig

Since the American region known as the Great Plains suffered net migration losses in each of the five census periods prior to 1970. During the following six years, however, these losses had begun to abate. This study examines the 1970-1976 net migration changes in a bloc of 320 nonmetropolitan, non-metropolitan-fringe counties roughly coincident with the Great Plains and seeks to account for the higher net migration gains recorded by some of these counties.

The Study

The bloc of 320 counties is referred to in this study as the Mid-continent region and is made up of parts of the states of Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana (Map 1). The region is effectively bordered on the east and south by metropolitan fringe counties which are in most cases contiguous to one another. Where they are not, state borders serve as the boundaries of the region. On the west a combination of metropolitan fringe and mountain counties serves as the Mid-continent region’s border.

Recent Migration Changes

Between 1970 and 1976 the net migration losses in this region had declined to a mere 3,200 persons (Table 1). This small number represented a sharp reduction from the net migration losses of 165,000 persons suffered by this same region between 1965 and 1970. In the 1970-1976 period almost 35 percent (111) of the 320 nonmetropolitan/non-fringe counties in the Mid-continent region recorded net gains. These gains ranged from a few to 4,700 persons (Table 2, Map 1). Sixteen counties gained 1,000 or more persons, and in the aggregate they accounted for almost 53 percent of the Mid-continent net migration gains in the 1970-1976 period.

Distribution of High Net Migration Counties

The 16 counties with net migration gains of 1,000 or more persons are widely distributed over the Mid-continent region. Oklahoma has four: Garfield (Enid is the principal town), Woodward (Woodward), Jackson (Altus), and Texas (Guymon). Two other states each contain three: North Dakota has Burleigh (Bismarck), Cavalier (Langdon), and Morton (Mandan), and Kansas has Saline (Salina), Finney (Garden City), and Riley (Manhattan). South Dakota contains two such counties, Pennington (Pierre), and Hughes (Pierre), and so does Wyoming with Converse (Douglas) and Goshen (Torrington). Nebraska has one, Lincoln (North Platte), and Montana one, Valley (Glasgow). These counties also range widely in population. Garfield, Oklahoma; Pennington, South Dakota; and Riley, Kansas all had 1970 populations exceeding 55,000, and the cities of Enid (population 44,008) and Rapid City (population 43,836) approached metropolitan status in 1970. Garfield and Pennington will doubtless be the first two counties to breach the contiguous bloc of Mid-continent nonmetropolitan counties. At the other end of the population scale Platte and Converse in Wyoming each had fewer than 6,500 inhabitants.

Changing Economic Bases in High Net Migration Counties

High net migration into a county is usually the result of that county’s growing and/or changing economic base. The employment structure of each of the 16 counties underwent significant changes in the 1970-1976 period (Table 3). In every case the percent of civilian labor force growth in one or more industry groups far exceeded such growth in other industry groups and in the civilian labor force as a whole.

Three kinds of activities triggered growth in the various industry categories. Energy development and associated activities were primarily responsible for increasing the civilian work forces in eight of the 16 counties. Activities related to the distribution of goods and services produced employment growth in five. Direct state and Federal government expenditures triggered work force growth in the remaining three.

Energy Development and Associated Activities

Drilling for gas or oil and the activities associated with these products were primary stimulants to the labor force growth in four of the counties. Increased drilling for oil and natural gas raised employment in the mining category in Converse County, Wyoming and in Woodward County, Oklahoma. In the latter the growth of energy company headquarters further increased the work force in the mining category. In addition, a fertilizer plant using natural gas and a plant producing iodine from oil-well salt brine...
Unshaded counties are those beyond the metropolitan fringe in the period 1970-76, and for beyond-metropolitan-fringe counties in the period 1965-70. Net migration gains and losses among mid-continent counties beyond the metropolitan fringe for the period 1970-1976.

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Net Migration Gains</th>
<th>Net Migration Losses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-1976</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1965-1970</td>
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Table 1 presents the net migration gains and losses among mid-continent counties beyond the metropolitan fringe for the periods 1970-1976 and 1965-1970. The data show the net increase or decrease in population for each county, providing insights into demographic shifts within the mid-continent region.

In every one of the eight counties which owed its growth to energy development and related activities, net migration accounted for half or more of the 1970-1976 population growth (Table 3). The migration proportion ranged from a low of 50 percent to a high above 90 percent. On the average 64.3 percent of the 1970-1976 population increase in these counties came through net in-migration. Their employment growth is a product of what might be termed the "energy rush" for the mid-1970's. The three counties supported by state and federal commitments have a very similar pattern.
In all of them more than half of the 1970- 
change was made between 1970 and 1976, 
the net migration proportion averaged 66.1 percent.  

The distribution centers, however, present a different picture. Their net migration gain of the 1970-1976 

period was more than triple the population increase from a high of just over 60 percent to a low of just 

over 20 percent. The net migration proportion averaged only 42.9 percent. These counties 

as a group were not caught up in the population push that tended to mark the energy supported counties.  

The Effects of Economic Growth on In-migration: The Long View 

In many of these 16 counties the employment 

development was in activities which are traditionally regarded as unattractive over a long period. Construction is very 

stable as a source of employment in any one given place. When power lines, 

factories, and power plants are completed, 
television labor force moves on or seeks other employment when the 

ABM missile site was completed in Cavalier 

County, North Dakota in the mid-1970's, 

the loss of the construction labor force had by 1978 brought the county's employ-  

ment pattern back nearly to its pre-boom 

condition. The same thing may occur in 
those construction-supported counties such as Burleigh and Morton in North Dakota and Garvin in Wyoming. The 

regional construction labor force, however, 

can find work in other counties which have yet to exploit their coal 

resources and power development potentials.  

Energy development and associated activities were primarily responsible for increasing the civilian work 

forces in eight of the 16 counties which showed net migration gains of 1,000 or more persons.  

Oil, gas, and coal are finite and non-

durable resources, although continual new discoveries of the former two and 

the immense reserves of the latter may yield steady employment for several 

decades at various places in the Mid-

continent region. As sites of exploration 

shift, however, one county's employment 

loss may be another's gain. Large energy 

headquarter operations, however, will 

probably remain in place, rising or declin-

ing as regional production changes. Most of 

the new manufacturing plants making 

use of gas, oil, and coal as fuel or as 

raw materials are capital and technology 
tensive and not employers of large 

labor forces. 

Direct government commitments are not likely to sustain long-run economic growth if recent expenditure trends are 

any indication. The state government construction at Pierre, South Dakota is likely to level out in the short run, and the Federal commitment to the Family Train-

ining Center in Valley County, Montana must be considered short run if only because its director has a good job that he 

out of work.  

Local and regional distribution centers, long a hallmark of the Mid-continent economic scene, are dependent upon the 

steady growth of population and produc-
tivity on the farms and in the smaller 
towns around them. Although the counties 

containing these centers show a lower 

net migration than those counties sup-

ported by other means, their employment 

structures are probably more stable than 

energy or state and federally supported counties. They are part of a much more 

tightly fixed economic system dependent 

upon trade and agriculture. The roles 

they play in the system are not likely to be easily taken over by other places.  

CAUR Staff Has Busy Summer 

CAUR is undertaking a comprehensive 

educational needs assessment and impact 

survey for Omaha Metropolitan Technical 

Community College. The survey will aid 

the college in evaluating and planning its 
curricula and auxiliary services. Students 

are conducting a three-part study of the 

employment patterns of the following 

county groups: Oglala Lakota, Nebraska 

and Custer, South Dakota. Dr. Murray 

Frost is principal investigator. Jack 

Ruff, housing coordinator, is currently 

conducting a survey which needs a 

comprehensive community development plan for the City of Norfolk. He is also conducting a study of the benefits of preservice and in-service training of community 

leaders including public administrators. Nearing completion is his report on the 

Department of Economic Development of the 

attitudes of builders and leaders toward 

Section 235 financing of single-family 

housing.  

Footnotes 

Mid-continent Migration 

1 Estimates of the Population of Counties and 

Municipal Areas: July 1, 1975 and 1976, 

Bureau of the Census, Current Population 

Reports, Series P-25, No. 739, issued 

November, 1976.  

2 A nonmetropolitan county is one that is 

not part of a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. A nonmetropolitan-fringe county is one 

that is contiguous to a county that is part 

of a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. 

3 County Business Patterns, 1970 and 1976, 

industrial categories. 

4 Personal Contact with Business Patterns, 1970 

and 1976. 

5 Excludes only those industry groups with gains of 180 or more employees in the 1970-1976 period. 

6 Excludes only those industry groups with gains of 180 or more employees in the 1970-1976 period. 

7 Federal commitment to the Family Training 

Center, issued November, 1975. 

8 CAUR Joins CAUR Staff 

CAUR has joined the University of South 

Dakota as a member of CAUR.  

John Cross was appointed as an Assistant 

Professor of Economics to fill the vacant 

position. John Cross comes to UNO from the 

University of Missouri in Columbia.
Foster Care Is Focus of National Meeting

"In celebrating the International Year of the Child, we must look at the needs, and the rights, of a special group of children—our nation's 500,000 foster children," declared Elizabeth Taylor Warner, speaking at the Washington Town Meeting on Foster Care held last month.

A major focus of this meeting was H. R. 3434, the Social Services and Child Welfare Amendments, which is the first major piece of comprehensive legislation on foster care and adoption Congress has considered in this decade, according to David Evans, former president of the National Association of Foster Parents. Speaking at the same meeting as Mrs. Warner, Mr. Evans had this to say, "As the phenomenon of child abuse and neglect has grown, so has the need for foster family homes. If we are to restructure young lives and reunite families, we must have stable substitute families who are in turn adequately supported and assisted in their efforts.

Training of Trainers

Following the development of the curriculum, four workshops were held last fall and winter at the Boys Town Center for the Study of Youth Development in Omaha, Nebraska to train trainers. In all, 73 people were trained making up 35 teams.

The recruitment of foster parents was easier than some teams had anticipated, and in many cases, additional participant's materials had to be sent out. The smallest group averaged five persons in attendance; the largest, 18. The evaluation tools used during the training workshops were also utilized during the 12-week training sessions.

At the end of these sessions, certificates were awarded to 463 participants, 163 of which were men. All 163 teams completed their training sessions by the first week of June.

Evaluation and Technical Assistance

The group discussion learning process appears to be a valuable one for foster parents. The sharing of experiences and learning from each other has been beneficial to Nebraska's plan for foster parent education. A more detailed evaluation of the training program is being prepared by Carol Ertl, curriculum and training specialist.

A needs assessment survey completed by 369 participants indicates that 85 percent would like to participate in further training sessions.

"We feel that these sessions have been very meaningful and beneficial to all of us. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be of service in this program."—Group Leader, Gage County.

All the classes have helped me understand children's needs and problems. The classes have also helped me in my daily life with my family. Thank you for giving us your time and knowledge. It's been a very rewarding time for me," Foster Parent.

In summary, the program appears to be successful. The evaluation reports received from both participants and trainers indicate they have found the training to be beneficial, rewarding, and enjoyable. This fall 17 teams throughout the State will continue to offer the basic 12-week program of the Foster Parent Training Program. Curriculum modules for an orientation program and a six-week (Continued on Page 8)
FOSTER PARENT TRAINING PROGRAM

(Continued from Page 7)

course specializing in problems of adolescents will be developed during the next 14 months.

Brochures describing the program and curriculum are available by writing to Barbara Kendrick, Room 111, 501 North 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68588.

The training manual ($20.00), participants' materials ($5.00), slides and accompanying tapes, "Picture of Me" and "Is It Legal?" ($20.00 per set), and a set of posters ($1.00) may be ordered from the Center for Applied Urban Research, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 60th and Dodge, Omaha, Nebraska 68182.

REVIEW OF APPLIED URBAN RESEARCH

Vol. VII, No. 7

July, 1979

Published monthly by the Center for Applied Urban Research as a public service and mailed free upon request in Nebraska. Annual subscription rate outside Nebraska $3.60. The views and opinions expressed in the Review are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Material in this publication may be reproduced with proper credit.

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