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TRS

The Rural Sociologist

May 1987

Volume 7, Number 3

FORUM

- RSS During the Depression and World War II Years:
1937 - 1950 John S. Holik and
Edward W. Hassinger
- Revolutions and the Hope for Agrarian Transformation:
The Case of Algeria J.M.A. Opio-Odongo
Hunger and Starvation in Africa: An Appraisal Hailu Abatena

COMMENTARY

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Forum

RSS During the Depression and World War II Years: 1937-1950

John A. Holik and Edward W. Hassinger
University of Missouri-Columbia

From its beginning in 1937 until 1950 the Rural Sociological Society (RSS) lived through two of the most momentous events in American history -- the Great Depression and World War II. Both influenced the Society's history.

The Depression was well underway but not yet over when the RSS was born. By that time, many rural sociologists had been drawn into national government agencies dealing with the multiple and severe problems of the Depression. A beachhead for rural sociologists in the national government had been established in the Division of Farm Population and Rural Life Studies headed by Charles Galpin (2). However, the influx of rural sociologists to the federal payroll swelled via the research programs of the Division of Research and Statistics in the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Thus, Howard Myers [8:771] noted:

During the past three years [1933-1936] we have witnessed a marked expansion of social research in this country. Much of this research has been a by-product of the relief program of the Federal Government, and it has been financed in large part from the Federal treasury. Not only have the C.W.A., the F. E. R. A. and the Works Program established and financed research organizations to guide administrative action -- they have granted far larger sums for surveys and studies of the most varied character, conducted by Federal, state and local agencies participating in the various relief activities.

The rural research program in FERA was headed originally by Dwight Sanderson until his return to Cornell. Thence, the program came under the Works Progress Administration (WPA); it was headed by John H. Kolb in 1935, and, from 1936 until its conclusion in 1939, by Thomas J. Woofter, Jr. Throughout, the practice was to recruit rural sociologists as state supervisors and to hire unemployed college graduates as field workers to conduct county surveys. Nelson [11:91] reports that by December of 1934 some 23 states had supervisors and staffs in place.

The impact of FERA expenditures for rural sociological research is suggested by Sanderson's [16:181] presentation in 1934 to the Section on Rural Sociology of the American Sociological Society (A.S.S.):

Although no exact figures are available, it can be authoritatively stated that the expenditures for rural research by the F.E.R.A. during the present calendar year have probably equaled those of all the state agricultural experiment stations during the past five years, or by the Division of Farm Population and Rural Life of the United States Department of Agriculture during its whole existence of fifteen years.

As funds for research from federal emergency-gearred agencies decreased in the later years of the Depression, rural sociologists again found their fortunes significantly tied to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics' (BAE) Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare [11:95-97]. Charles Galpin retired as head of the Division in 1937 and was succeeded by Carl C. Taylor, who was already in Washington as an administrator in the Resettlement Administration. As noted by Lowry Nelson [11:96]: "The regular budget of the Division was extremely limited, but it was possible to use personnel paid by the Resettlement Administration and its successor in 1937, the Farm Security Administration [FSA], to inaugurate and carry out some projects."

Taylor, active in the RSS and its second president, tried to make the work of the Division contribute both to developing rural sociology and to the operations of government planning and action agencies. Noting [21:374] that sociologists were called upon during the Depression "to render actual counsel and service in studying and guiding large public activity programs," he said, "sociologists should be glad to be thus put on the spot because it is better to be called on than to be ignored or ridiculed, and because science develops not in a vacuum, but only by being useful." In the words of Kirdendall [6:222] Taylor "sought ways to take advantage of the demands stimulated by depression and war that sociology become more useful and to employ these demands to develop research programs that would also make it more scientific."

Taylor took a cue from anthropology. He thought that the culture of particular regions was a key to understanding and, hopefully, solving rural problems. "Each region ... constitutes a more or less unique cultural area, the characteristics of which must be understood in the promotion of programs of adjustment in agriculture and rural life" [22:1048]. This philosophy was instrumental for executing

field work in six rural communities done in 1939. Separate reports were issued under the general heading, "Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community." The reports, appearing variously between 1941 and 1943, become a recognized part of classical literature in rural sociology. The communities selected and the persons responsible for each publication were as follows: El Cerrito, New Mexico, by Olen Leonard and Charles P. Loomis; Sublette, Kansas, by Earl H. Bell; Landaff, New Hampshire, by Kenneth MacLeish and Kimball Young; Lancaster, Pennsylvania (The Old Order Amish), by Walter Kollmorgen; Irwin, Iowa, by Edward O. Moe and Carl C. Taylor; and, finally, Harmony, Georgia, by Walter Wynne, Jr.

Taylor's efforts to place agriculture within the social and cultural contexts of the several regions of the United States moved beyond these essentially case studies to culminate in a research design that selected for observation 71 counties representative of the seven types of farming areas [20]. But luck would not see through the full-scale study.

Reconnaissance surveys were made prior to the intended full-blown study [11:98]. One of the reconnaissance surveys in the summer of 1944 was conducted in Coahoma County, Mississippi, by Frank D. Alexander. Its focus primarily was on race relationships and the plantation system. Alexander [1:17] insisted:

There are two dominant features of the culture of the people of Coahoma County -- one is Negro-white relations, the other is the plantation system of farming. Almost every phase of the people's thoughts and behavior is influenced by these two complexes. Schools, churches, families, law enforcement, public welfare, earning a living are all under the domination of the plantation economy. Similarly, all of these institutions and activities are carried on within the definitions of white supremacy and racial segregation.

Alexander's report was not meant to be circulated beyond the BAE. It numbered only some 35 dittoed copies and was marked as being for administrative purposes only but confinement did not occur. Rather, and perhaps predictably, it came to the attention of Southern legislators and others hostile to the BAE and its companion, the FSA.

Another famous piece of work was done by Walter Goldschmidt. He was an employee of the Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare when he undertook his comparison of the California agricultural communities of Arvin and Dinuba. Goldschmidt regarded his study [3] to be "a kind of extension" of the "Culture of a Contemporary Community"

series. Overall, his research reflected harshly on the effects of large-scale agriculture and was attacked by its spokesmen and representatives.

The BAE was decimated in 1945 with the closing of its regional offices and was eliminated as an agency in 1953; the FSA lost its identity in 1946. Goldschmidt's study of Arvin and Dinuba and Alexander's report on Coahoma surely contributed to the BAE's problems with the agricultural establishment. Sometimes these "community studies" are credited with having caused the elimination of the BAE and the FSA. It is clear, however, that the BAE story was a power struggle pitting the agricultural establishment against advocates of the rural underclass and involved many more episodes than just these two. The outcome would probably have been the same without Arvin and Dinuba, or Coahoma. Nonetheless, following the Coahoma brouhaha, a ban was placed on "cultural" surveys, and BAE field offices were closed (3).

The years we have just focused also marked the period in which the RSS was getting underway as an independent group. Things went relatively smoothly and understandably so: the organization had apprenticed as a section of the A.S.S., its journal (always a major undertaking) was already birthed, and a leadership was in place (we were struck, in reviewing the archives of the Society, with the circulation of the same few persons as officers and committee members). Yet, it is somewhat puzzling that in *Rural Sociology*, and in the available correspondence of the archives, there is little recorded about the national battles that affected so many Society members. As T. Lynn Smith [17:23] has observed:

Very few, if any, rural sociologists worked through the years between Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inauguration and the attack upon Pearl Harbor without being intensively involved personally in the administrative and research activities of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (or Works Progress Administration), the Resettlement Administration (or Farm Security Administration), and the Division of Farm Population.

In the journal, however, the only mention of rural sociologists' problems in the BAE, besides the noted field staff reassignments, was the following item [18:191]:

As a matter of information comments were made [at the March 2, 1946 meeting of the RSS] about the proposed reduction of funds for the U.S.D.A. Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and the possible effects this action upon social surveys and other work of the Division of Farm Population.

The first volume of Rural Sociology in 1936 included a large number of articles contributed by authors in various federal programs, but articles from that source decreased sharply thereafter [5:401]. Perhaps rural sociologists in government were too busy with practical matters to write for a professional journal. Furthermore, publication outlets were provided by the agencies in expanded formats not available in Rural Sociology and, perhaps, it was felt that the journal did not reach an audience which activist rural sociologists wished to influence. In any case, T. Lynn Smith [17:31] appraised the output of publications by rural sociologists as shifting following World War II:

Since 1946, however, it has been different. The bulletins, circulars, memoirs, and other publications issued by the agricultural experiment stations constitute the great bulk of rural sociological literature. Even the research activities of various federal agencies withered on the vine following 1945, so that in recent years the accomplishments of the rural sociological personnel remaining in the U.S. Department of Agriculture make a poor showing alongside the achievements between 1935 and 1945.

Normal operations of the RSS were interrupted by entry of the United States into WW II. The annual meeting was held in 1941; but the one scheduled for December 29-31, 1942, in Cleveland was cancelled [12]. The Office of Defense Transportation requested professional organizations to curtail travel in the national interest.

The war played havoc with regularized RSS functions. Thus, on January 1, 1943, the Executive Committee [13:106] sent the membership a special ballot asking for approval of these propositions: that the 1942 officers remain in office until RSS could arrange an annual meeting, at which time new officers would be put in place; and, that the 1942 election (in November, by mail) should determine the officers to be installed at the next annual meeting. Eventually, RSS joined with the Farm Economics Association for a meeting in St. Louis on September 15 and 16, 1943. Charles E. Lively, having served as president for almost two years, was succeeded by Lowry Nelson. No attempt was made to hold a December meeting that year.

The St. Louis gathering in 1943 was an official, but somewhat limited, meeting of the Society. About 60 rural sociologists managed to attend and discussed three topics related to the war [13:322]: "The neighborhood as a unit of organization for the promotion of state and federal programs;"

"rural sociological research in wartime;" and, "rural social change in wartime."

Recruitment and postwar training was an important issue for Societal discussion; it was a topic at the September 15th business meeting [14:92]: "Dr. Taeuber suggested a committee of social scientists be organized immediately to plan the financing of graduate training of students in social science, to be initiated as soon as the war closes." A motion was approved that the Executive Committee consider the problem of personnel training.

On December 13, 1943, President Lowry Nelson appointed John Kolb, Charles Lively, Dwight Sanderson, T. Lynn Smith, Conrad Taeuber, Carl Taylor, and Edmund Brunner to serve as members of the Committee on Post-War Recruitment and Training of Rural Sociologists. With the 1944 meeting cancelled due to travel constraints, it was not until the next RSS meeting in March of 1945 that the Committee's report written by Brunner could be presented and acted upon [15:225]. The Executive Committee was instructed to develop plans and procedures for the early release of rural sociologists from the armed services and to contact the Social Science Research Council, the General Education Board, and other social science organizations about providing fellowships and scholarships to veterans, government employees, and others whose professional training had been interrupted by the war. Another motion directed the Executive Committee to arrange for regional refresher training conferences on teaching and research in rural sociology as soon as there was sufficient demand.

Throughout the two-day RSS meetings of 1945, discussions took place on the need to reorganize the standing committees on teaching, research, and extension [15:226]. A motion was passed to appoint a committee to study the said structure. The committee's report was presented at the following meeting in 1946 and referred to the Executive Committee for further action. This meeting also was marked by the refusal of the headquarter's hotel (Chicago's Morrison) to honor the confirmed reservation of a black member, Dr. Charles G. Gomillion of Tuskegee University. President Lowry Nelson sent a strong letter of condemnation to the hotel's management, as well as a letter of apology to Dr. Gomillion [10].

Though the war was coming to a close, things were still not "normal" for professional organizations. In the September issue of Rural Sociology, President Brunner announced the cancellation of the 1945 Annual Meeting. In the next issue of the journal the urgency of a need for rural sociologists to get together and discuss the affairs of the Society was apparent from Brunner's declaration [2:452]:

SPECIAL NOTICE: The Executive Committee of the Rural Sociological Society has decided to hold a meeting at the earliest possible date. However, it is not yet possible to settle on the time because of current difficulties with transportation and particularly with the hotel situation.

It is also the judgment of the Committee that the next meeting of the Society should be devoted almost entirely to the affairs of the Society and the immediate tasks facing rural sociologists of the United States. Major emphasis in the program will therefore be placed upon committee reports and discussion.

In the event that a full meeting becomes absolutely impossible, it is probable that a smaller meeting, largely on a regional basis, comparable to the one held last year in Chicago, will be held in the East. This, however, will be a last resort.

The postponed 1945 meeting was held in Cleveland, March 2-3, 1946 [18:190-193]. At the first business meeting, Leland Tate reported that a special memorandum, explaining the report on "Postwar Recruitment and Training of Rural Sociologists" had been sent to "deans, directors of research, extension and graduate studies." President Brunner noted that the Executive Committee had distributed information on the "G.I. Bill of Rights" to the land-grant colleges, but had not made any plans for regional refresher courses for returning rural sociologists. This business meeting closed with a noting of the proposed reduction in funds for the BAE, a matter commented upon above.

The second business meeting, March 3, 1946, ended with the reading of the report of the Resolutions Committee, which was then published in *Rural Sociology* [18:192-193]. Instead of the usual perfunctory cordialities, the first five resolutions were rather extended statements of policy on research, extension, teaching, a national research agency, and proposed cooperative efforts with various education institutions.

The announcement of the December annual meeting was published in the September issue of *Rural Sociology*, along with two proposed amendments to the constitution: one would raise dues to \$3.50 per year; the other asked that the Secretary-Treasurer be appointed by the Executive Committee instead of being elected annually by the membership [18:306-308]. These amendments were passed [19:93].

In 1947, the Society departed from its tradition of meeting at the same place and time as the A.S.S. Instead, RSS met in late August in Fontana Recreation Village (North Carolina) at the invitation of the Tennessee Valley Authority [19:458]. Acting on the earlier refusal of the Morrison Hotel in Chicago to honor a black member's reservation, a resolution was passed that committed the RSS to meet only at places that did not practice racial discrimination.

During the 1948 Annual Business Meeting, major items of discussion were on the forthcoming decennial population census and publication of a biographical directory of rural sociologists. The members also agreed to establish a joint committee with the American Library Association to explore ways and means for the two groups to carry on cooperative endeavors. This committee reported back to the membership at the next Annual Meeting [4].

At the 1949 Annual Business Meeting, a motion was passed to expand the Research Committee to 15 members. This action was precipitated by the activities of the Farm Foundation, which was showing interest in the status of rural sociology.

The pressure to examine the status of rural sociology in land-grant colleges and as a discipline had been building for some time. On April 28, 1944, David Lindstrom, Chairman of the RSS Extension Committee, sent President Lowry Nelson a letter which recommended "that a national conference on rural sociology be called by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Extension Service" [7]. Nelson, in turn, sent copies of Lindstrom's letter and his reply to members of the RSS Executive Committee [9].

Correspondence in the RSS Archives shows that the discussion of Lindstrom's letter resulted in an exchange of correspondence among the Executive Committee members expressing concerns about the status of rural sociology. At the December 30, 1946 RSS business meeting, Douglas Ensminger, reporting for the Extension Committee, indicated that [19:93-94]: "plans were underway with Foundation aid to have a spring meeting of some college administrators, rural sociologists and others to consider ways and means to make rural sociology a more vital force in the land-grant colleges and the states they serve."

In May of 1947 the Farm Foundation sponsored a Chicago conference where a group of rural sociologists, experiment station directors, and others deliberated the status of rural sociology. This conference, and discussions among the RSS Executive Committee members, was the beginning of a close attention to the status of the discipline that occupied the Society's attention for much of the 1950s.

NOTES

1. This is the fourth part of a six-part series on the history of the organization. It is written in conjunction with and under the auspices of the Rural Sociological Society's 50th Anniversary Committee, D. J. Hobbs, Chairperson.
2. The name of the sector was later changed to the Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare.
3. The "News Notes and Announcements" of *Rural Sociology* [18:195-196, 399-400] showed the location of personnel of the Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare before and after the closing of field offices. The first situation is shown in Table 1 in the Appendix; the second in Table 2. Most of those designated as social scientists or social science analysts in Table 1 were rural sociologists.

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[Editor's note: the asterisk, following the references to the Rural Sociological Society of America Papers, refers to Joint Collection, University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Columbia and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts-Columbia, Missouri.]

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APPENDIX

Table 1. USDA, Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare roster as of February 1, 1946.

Washington, D. C.: Headquarters
 Carl C. Taylor, Head
 Earl H. Bell, Social Scientist (on leave to UNNRA)
 Gladys K. Bowles, Social Scientist
 Nettie P. Bradshaw, Social Scientist
 Louis J. Ducoff, Agricultural Economist
 John C. Ellickson, Agricultural Economist
 Douglas Ensminger, Social Scientist
 Grace L. Flagg, Social Scientist
 Josiah C. Folsom, Agricultural Economist
 Margaret Jarman Hagood, Social Scientist
 Oscar Lewis, Social Scientist
 T. Wilson Longmore, Social Science Analyst
 Elsie S. Manny, Social Scientist
 Ralph R. Nichols, Agricultural Economist
 Louis Persh, Social Scientist
 Arthur F. Raper, Social Science Analyst
 Barbara B. Reagan, Agricultural Economist
 Edgar A. Schuler, Social Scientist
 John P. Shea, Social Scientist
 Pauline S. Taylor, Social Scientist

Lincoln, Nebraska: Region I (Great Plains)
 Anton H. Anderson, Regional Leader, Social Science Analyst
 John P. Johansen, Social Science Analyst
 Lawrence B. Lyall, Social Science Analyst

Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Region III (North Central)
 Nat T. Frame, Regional Leader, Social Science Analyst
 Ronald B. Almack, Social Science Analyst
 A. Lee Coleman, Social Science Analyst
 Paul J. Jehlik, Social Science Analyst

Upper Darby, Pennsylvania: Region IV (Northeastern)
 Donald G. Hay, Regional Leader, Social Science Analyst
 Evlon J. Niederfrank, Social Science Analyst
 Henry W. Riecken, Social Science Analyst

Atlanta, Georgia: Region V (Southeastern)
 Frank D. Alexander, Regional Leader, Social Science Analyst
 James E. Montgomery, Social Science Analyst
 Robert E. Galloway, Social Science Analyst

Little Rock, Arkansas: Region VI (South Central)
 Theo L. Vaughan, Regional Leader, Social Science Analyst
 Herbert Pryor, Social Science Analyst
 M. Taylor Matthews, Social Science Analyst

Berkeley, California: Region (VII) (Western)
 Walter C. McKain, Jr., Regional Leader, Social Science Analyst
 Walter R. Goldschmidt, Social Science Analyst
 William H. Metzler, Social Science Analyst

Washington, D. C.: Appalachian Region
 Roy L. Roberts, Regional Leader, Social Science Analyst
 Linden S. Dodson, Social Scientist
 Joseph R. Cates, Social Science Analyst

Portland, Oregon: Northwestern Region
 Olaf A. Larson, Regional Leader, Social Science Analyst
 Michael R. Hanger, Social Science Analyst

Table 2. Location of USDA, Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare personnel after closing of the BAE regional offices.

With the BAE
 R. E. Galloway, at Washington State College (Pullman)
 W. H. Metzler, at the University of California (Berkeley)
 L. B. Lyall, at Montana State College (Bozeman)
 Anton H. Anderson, at the University of Nebraska (Lincoln)
 C. R. Draper, at Oklahoma A & M College (Stillwater)
 Paul J. Jehlik, at Iowa State College (Ames)
 Frank D. Alexander, at the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis)
 T. L. Vaughan, at Clemson Agricultural College (South Carolina)
 Donald G. Hay, at Pennsylvania State College, (State College)
 Walter C. McKain, Jr., BAE in Washington (DC)
 Nat. T. Frame, BAE in Washington (DC)
 Robert L. McNamara, BAE in Washington (DC)

With Other Public or Private Agencies
 M. R. Hanger, War Assets Administration, Portland (Oregon)
 Walter R. Goldschmidt, University of California at Los Angeles
 Olaf F. Larson, Cornell University, Ithaca (New York)
 J. P. Johansen, University of Nebraska (Lincoln)
 R. B. Almack, American Hospital Association, Chicago
 J. E. Montgomery, Federal Housing Administration, Atlanta
 Roy L. Roberts, Social Security Administration, Baltimore
 Linden S. Dodson, Veterans Administration, Washington (DC)
 Joseph R. Cates, Veterans Administration, Washington (DC)
 Edgar A. Schuler, Michigan State College (East Lansing)

On Detail to Other Agencies
 Earl H. Bell, with UNNRA, Warsaw (Poland)

On Leave for Graduate Study
 Henry W. Riecken, Harvard University
 T. Wilson Longmore, Michigan State College
 A. Lee Coleman, Cornell University
 James S. Brown, Harvard University

Unassigned
 Herbert Pryor ("recovering from a serious operation")
 M. Taylor Matthews
