

# The Urban Context: Continuity and Change

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*America enters the new century with a growing population, one that has a renewed immigration component, is becoming more diverse ethnically and racially, and shows a tilt toward the elderly. Cities in many cases are shrinking, while outlying areas, and some rural regions, are growing. These demographic factors have profound implications for education: demands on facilities, funding, and curricula.*

*These quantitative shifts in the population are accompanied by changes in the way Americans see themselves. Categories which define such diverse attributes as race, participation in the labor force, and residential location are in flux. Such shifts and ambiguities affect the way we can calculate the state of our nation, assess differentiated welfare, and establish the locus of political power.*

With the new century, it is appropriate to look at the larger setting for our schools, the context for their support and funding, and new as well as old demands put on curricular and other decisions.

The first part of this paper will consider the basic demographic and broader socio-economic environment in which education functions, particularly in urban America. Understanding the population size and composition has deep implications for education. Today's children are tomorrow's voters and parents (or non-parents). They become the workers who engage the economy. Assets, such as schools, and practices, such as curricula, in place today will be assets (or burdens) in the next decades. This, in turn, is seen to have consequences for the political and policy domains in which schooling operates.

The last part looks at one aspect of the dynamics we shall note: how we go about categorizing people, economic units, social entities and institutions. There are major changes to note, and how we classify affects (and is affected by) these shifts. In turn, such specifications affect how public policy decisions are made, how we understand our world, and how we assess our environment.

## National Demographics

With a population of some 275 million as of the year 2000 census (the baseline we use to characterize the present), we have grown by some 130 million people since the end of World War II. In turn, the nation will add something like 60 million more people by 2025 (about one generation), or as many as were added since 1975. By the year 2050 (not quite as far in the future as the Second World War is in the past), there will be 50% more Americans than there are today, or some 403,000,000 people. This assumes that the presently

low levels of fertility will continue, and that the net immigration stabilizes at the current pace of between 700,000 and 1,000,000 per year. There may be a few ten million more, or less. Some parts of the country will see major growth, others little or even decline.<sup>1</sup>

What does this mean for our cities, suburbs, outlying areas, and communities in the countryside? It would take a hardy optimist to view this growth channeled to cities, especially the older ones. Many of our urban centers, mainly but not exclusively in New England, the Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, have experienced reduced populations and may experience further decline. To be sure, the era of precipitous loss of population in places such as Detroit or St. Louis, and smaller cities as Altoona or Youngstown, is probably over. Yet few are the older, formerly industrial centers which can expect population growth. Indeed, not only cities, but the inner rings of suburbs can also expect future decades of some population loss or at best stability. It is in the periphery of metropolitan areas that substantial growth can be expected: with two provisos.<sup>2</sup>

Some urban cores (New York, Boston) for a variety of reasons have sufficient amenities, and draw enough immigrants, to experience growth, a pattern likely to persist in the future. And, in certain metropolitan areas, "smart growth" initiatives and other efforts to counter sprawl may have some limited effectiveness: such as in Portland OR. Overall, though, much of the net increase in population will be found in the outlying areas surrounding stable or even declining central cities.<sup>3</sup>

Fewer than one fourth of Americans now live in rural counties. But there is a paradox to note. Outside metropolitan areas, while the decline of population in the hinterland and in small cities and towns continues, well over one half of the nation's rural counties are again growing.

This is a turnaround of long-lasting trends in place since the depression era. Again, it is the amenities found in some (especially where there is accessibility to major urban centers) which appear to be drawing new settlers to the countryside and small population settlements.<sup>4</sup>

When we look into this population in terms of its components, a number of crucial changes can be noted. As is well known, the population is ageing. People over 65, now just under one fifth, will account for one quarter of all Americans by 2020, and in 2050 they will make up over one third. Given the differential mortality of men and women, one facet of this growth is that the older population will be more heavily female.<sup>5</sup>

The number of children, proportionately, is expected to remain roughly stable. It is one third today, and will remain so. As a consequence, those of school age will increase from about 58 million to some 80 million by 2050. One indicator: this translates to some one million new school rooms, in addition to those built to replace existing facilities.<sup>6</sup>

The two groups, children and elderly, together constitute what is called the "dependent population": those essentially not in the labor force. The dependent population is supported by those working, who are between these two age groups. The dependent portion, now just over one half of the total, will exceed two thirds of the whole population by the year 2050, less than three generations from now. That means that those working will have to support a much larger proportion of the total population. New stresses will surface in the political arena with consequent competing claims on resources.<sup>7</sup>

Family types are in flux, and can be expected to change more in the next decades. Two parent families with children in the household have fallen from about two thirds just after World War II to only one half today. Single parent families now constitute a fourth of all families and about one third of all children are in such households.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the country, these figures mask a somewhat different picture when we look at the number of households (defined as families and individuals living alone). Since the household size is decreasing, with smaller and smaller families on the average, jurisdictions with stable populations will generally see an increase in the number of households, and even some of those with declining population are so characterized. In some municipalities (e.g., New York NY) single person households account for one third of all, a pattern which is expected to continue.<sup>9</sup>

The population is changing in terms of its origins. Immigrants once again, in a long historical and cyclical shift, are accounting for a larger share of all residents. The number born outside the USA is at its highest since the 1930's, and that pattern is expected to continue in the coming decades. Immigrant concentrations are particularly noteworthy in certain urban areas, such as Los Angeles, Miami, and New York (though as is well known, clusters are growing almost everywhere including in small towns and rural domains). It would appear that those central city and inner suburb jurisdictions which have increasing populations most

generally have a large proportion of the foreign born, with this population tending to be concentrated only in some such areas.<sup>10</sup>

If we look at the racial composition of the nation, many commentators have seized on the observation that by 2050, non-Hispanic whites will represent less than one half of the total, down from 70% in 2000. Hispanics are expected to grow dramatically this coming half century – absolutely and proportionately – from 12% to over 20%, while Asians, who today constitute only 4% of the total will make up 10%. Blacks, today 13% of the total, will in all likelihood account for some 15% by mid-century: only a small shift in their relative strength. Underlying these figures are differential fertility rates, with whites having the lowest. Ethnically and racially distinct mortality rates also have a part to play. This pattern is expected to continue throughout the next decades, accentuated by family patterns among new immigrants.<sup>11</sup>

Economic aspects of the population disclose that a number of important changes are under way. No one will be surprised to read that the proportion and number employed in manufacturing is falling: from about one fourth of the employed at the end of World War II to about 15% today, with all indications suggesting further declines in the coming decades. Those actively engaged in agriculture and related activities now number less than 2%: a dramatic fall from almost a third of all workers a bit more than a century ago. The rapid rise of employment in the services fills the gap: today three quarters of the labor force is engaged in personal and business services.<sup>12</sup> A second major shift is the number of self-employed: now exceeding 10 million workers out of the 135 million employed. This is associated with a marked increase in the number of small businesses in the USA, a significant growth in those who work at home, and a major leap in women's participation in the labor force: to the point where theirs is increasing and men's is decreasing.<sup>13</sup> Household income distribution shows an erratic pattern: with inequality once more rising after a long post war period of trends toward equalization.<sup>14</sup>

There are some major changes in where and how Americans live. Increasingly the residence of choice is in the periphery of cities. This is true for all people, though proportionately the new, further out suburbs have a predominantly white population; there is little indication this will be less so in the future. Inner suburbs have in some cases become home to growing numbers of Black and Latino households, particularly where adjacent to center city minority areas. Home ownership is on the rise for all, though the gap between whites and nonwhites is still large and in some cases growing. With some notable exceptions, housing conditions (indicators such as crowding, age of unit, value) continue to show disparities by ethnic and racial groups, favoring whites.<sup>15</sup>

### Policy and Political Implications

This overview is by necessity brief and glosses over

exceptions. But it provides a framework for highlighting a number of important political and policy consequences of concern to educators at the elementary and secondary school levels.

- The political balance in the national government has shifted to suburban jurisdictions; in the coming years, central cities will have still less influence in national and state legislatures;<sup>16</sup>
- Ethnic and racial balance will adjust at all levels of government giving more power to Hispanics, Asians, and to a lesser degree to Blacks. This even allowing for lower levels of political participation among immigrants and the recently arrived, as this is further attenuated by more youthful Hispanic, Asian, and Black populations. There is also some indication that Hispanics (and to a lesser degree Asians and Blacks) through intermarriage and otherwise will gradually blend into mainstream "white" America.<sup>17</sup>
- Traditional constituencies providing support to education (funding and other) may well decline: older and younger Americans engaged in what has been called a generational war.<sup>18</sup>
- Even more than in the past jurisdictions within a given state and in specific metropolitan areas will show high differentiation in needs for public services (including education) and resources to fund these.
- A growing number of pupils will have special needs (e.g., language); this will particularly place needs on school systems where these children are locationally mobile.<sup>19</sup>
- In a slightly different vein: what is in place today and built in the immediate future will have a life spanning decades of shifts in the population composition and increase in size. By the same token, decisions being made in the immediate future must take into account what will happen in the coming half century, two or three generations ahead
- Insofar as there are links between education and employment, the work place will increasingly need service sector entrants who are flexible, computer literate, and mobile.

Though the nation's population has been increasing, the declining birth rate has as one consequence a smaller increase in the number of children attending school. There are many aspects to this process, but one which should be noted is the major decline in the pupil-teacher ratio over the past four decades, which can be expected to continue in the future. It is also noteworthy that enrollment in private schools has remained stable or declined. The one major growth area is in pre-school enrollments.<sup>20</sup>

For all of the past century, the median years of schooling have grown and can be expected to reach almost universal retention through twelve years. The proportion with college education as is also well known is rising, with expectation that about 30% will graduate in the next decades. The gap

between racial groups though diminishing is still a factor to take into account. The reality that for many, if not for most, high school is preparatory for higher education has profound curricular consequences.<sup>21</sup>

While the country is still burdened by the racial differences in participation and attainment, it must be noted that just as the population at large is increasingly Hispanic, and to a somewhat lesser degree of Asian and Black origin, so too will the school population take on a different hue. Immigrant children as now can be expected to constitute a growing share of enrollments. Put another way, the number of school children with difficulty speaking English, and those in households where a language other than English is spoken (about one in eight), has been growing: a figure likely to be higher in the future. Higher fertility rates among recent arrivals to this country will assure that this trend is indeed firmly in place.<sup>22</sup>

About two percent of the population is employed in public elementary and secondary education. The ratio is slowly rising. About three quarters of these are engaged in instruction, with slightly more than one quarter in staff and support positions. This represents the largest single component among public employees: a recognized force on the political scene. For the past decades, funding for public education has increased substantially (and with it average salaries), though the relatively small share originating in the Federal government has been declining.<sup>23</sup>

Two factors will have impact on what is happening overall to the education sector. First, the number of children in the national population can be expected to increase significantly the next decades, though as a proportion of the total this will (according to medium Census projections) hold close to one third over the period. That, however, is of little comfort to those concerned with the needs, resources and assets of a given school district. For as we have noted, there are major shifts within the nation: regionally, between parts of metropolitan areas, and indeed even within given jurisdictions. There will thus indeed be parts of the country and of metropolitan areas which will experience major pressures to accommodate large new numbers of pupils, while others will see dwindling rolls. Local planning and analysis is of paramount importance under these circumstances.

The demographic and educational trends give us some indicators what we can expect in the coming decades:

- Traditional sources of support for public education will be harder to come by: if for no other reason than the graying of America (older people do not support education as intensely as young folk), and the lower participation politically among immigrants, the poor, and minorities: households with proportionately more children, greater needs, and a higher stake in public education.
- As the number of children in home schooling and with other alternative arrangements grows, competing demands for scarce resources can be expected.

- Changes in the population composition at the local level can be earth-shaking in a short time: as in inner ring suburban communities, or in formerly rural jurisdictions on the periphery of metropolitan areas. With this come dramatic changes in educational expectations and needs, yet often without concomitant increase in resources to meet such shifts.
- The internal management of schools, curricular expectations, and availability of resources face challenges as ever growing diversity comes to characterize the environment in which education functions.

### Classes and Categories

So far this paper has dealt with conditions and trends using what are self-evident and clear categories: population, households, racial groups, residency determination, etc. Yet, classifications we use in analysis, as well as in building theories and in designing and implementing policies and programs, may not reflect reality, or at least not as well as they might have in the past. As the above pages suggest, we live in a dynamic society, economy, political setting. This being so, the building blocks for information are also fluid. The next section of this paper looks at some of these informational considerations. We shall comment on important changes of this sort which need to be identified, interpreted, and assessed for their impact on policy and on education.

- **Household Structure:** While the traditional, modal configuration (father, mother, with their children) now constitutes less than one quarter of all households, new configurations are frequently found in all their complexity and temporary essence. At present, families make up two thirds of all households. The number of single person households has ballooned; one fourth of the population at this point has never married. And there is a large number, within the class of families, of single parent families (mother, also father, grandmother, sibling), conflated families of children from assorted parentages, three generation households, same sex partnerships (some with children), to name just a few which a few decades ago had lesser or negligible presence.<sup>24</sup>
- **Racial and Ethnic Designations:** The confusion generated by the Year 2000 Census as new, multiple self designations were permitted reflects shifts in societal attitudes. This is particularly a factor in determining the at times vaguely defined Hispanic or Latino population. Also, new protocols were introduced in accounting for mixed marriages. The national ethos also defines a person with the least nonwhite blood to be nonwhite (especially so with regard to "Negro", "Black", or "African" antecedents), yet self-designation may take quite another direction.<sup>25</sup>
- **Immigrant Status:** While in most cases there is clear legal definition, the social construction of migration is far more complex. How to account for the legions of temporary or seasonal workers, especially those who annually repeat their travel to the US? The tourist or student who imperceptibly (and silently) changes status to permanent residence represents another ambiguous category. Similarly, there has been recent documentation of a large population who maintain both US and foreign residence (including the mayors of a Colombian and a Mexican city). The presence of uncounted illegal immigrants simply complicates the tally and raises contentious public policy issues such as access to education and other public services.<sup>26</sup>
- **Employment Status:** Part time managers of micro-enterprises (who have not "given up their daytime job"), the mass of part time workers (often immigrants, legal or illegal), and the underground workers represent a not insignificant part of the labor force. Yet their tally is difficult. Another aspect is that the labor force itself is a slippery concept, based as it is on those who are at work and those actively looking for work. Those who have for whatever reason given up the search are not included: at best a concept subject to challenge, one which vastly understates the unemployment rate.<sup>27</sup>
- **Nonprofits:** The traditional breakdown of the economy into the public and the private sector overlooks the one in eight workers in nonprofit organizations, which are powerful, buoyant actors particularly in the urban economy. For example, Medical-Education sectors in many areas are the sole source of growth.<sup>28</sup>
- **Urban-Rural Distinction:** What had been a clear distinction half a century ago is ambiguous and politically charged today. The edge of the metropolitan domain represents an area that is often the most vibrant and stressed. Its characteristics are hard to define. Furthermore, it is not much of an exaggeration to say that for most residents of rural areas, the urban life style is theirs: a counterpart to the concept of "Urban Villagers" observed five decades ago. One further aspect of this has been the significant increase in time and distance traveled between home and work with impacts on household time budgets, expenditures, and more elusively, on the sense of locality.<sup>29</sup>
- **Residential Location:** The increasing frequency of second home ownership is only one aspect of the temporal and spatial ambiguity associated with residence. This gives rise to new categories of stakeholders. A growing proportion of the population furthermore is living in group quarters, including care and residential facilities for the

elderly, college housing, prisons and other custodial institutions, and in the military. The inclusion of such populations in the local count raises a number of issues, as does the failure to make these a part of the jurisdictions' total.<sup>30</sup>

- **Housing Categories:** The traditional distinction between rental and ownership does not reflect all of today's residential arrangements. Coops and condominiums, with characteristics partly common to each of these forms of tenancy but with some unique attributes, are found in many cities and older suburbs. There are numerous other arrangements: barter of accommodation in return for care of elderly family member, to name just one. As far as types of structure goes the traditional classification as one and multi-family housing does not capture the flavor of the supply. Trailers now account for 7% of the housing stock, and are growing in number. Seasonally occupied housing, possibly on a shared basis, adds to the complexity. Technology offers ambiguously characterized solutions for residence, as in the case of recreation vehicle or houseboat which exist at the edge of legally defined housing.<sup>31</sup>
- **The Economy:** It has been estimated that some 20% to 25% of the US economy is a combination of the criminal sector, gray activities (tax evading), bartering, etc. The figure, of course, is much higher in other nations, perhaps exceeding one half in countries such as Ukraine. Conventional categories of enterprises, inter-industry flows, income and product concepts only partially incorporate these activities. To the extent that this is so, there are errors in determinations of the level of economic activity, demand for public services, potential tax base, standards of living, and so forth.<sup>32</sup>

An understanding of the demand for education, and of what resources can flow to the sector ultimately depends on precise knowledge of the social, economic and political setting. Knowledge of this context in turn requires precise informational building blocks.

While gross generalizations are hardly appropriate, it can be noted that

- Non-conventional categories are important, and have growing significance, accounting for a larger share of a process (as where home schooling exists – in all its variations – in addition to public and private educational providers)
- Non-conventional categories are harbingers of trends and signal significant characteristics of future environments (e.g., demand on educational facilities arising from occupants of secondary homes or from temporary, transient households; also pressures on local services occasioned by such populations as well as generation of revenues based on their assets).

- The non-conventional categories are lightning rods for political conflict: as where entitlements are based on counts which may or may not include minority populations, or resident households – both, as noted above, fuzzy concepts.

Ours is a fuzzy world. Fuzziness is both an indicator of confusion and lack of understanding. It is also a signal to legislate and respond administratively, as where assignment of funds to categorical targets in a fiscal regime is at stake. It also is a sign that research is appropriate: where for example it becomes important to assess the impact which “immigrant” children will have on the resources, and the curricular responses, within a given school district.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Kolankiewicz (2000); U.S. Census (2001a), table 4.

<sup>2</sup> Katz (1998); Glaser and Shapiro (2001); Wendell Cox Consultancy (2001);

<sup>3</sup> Kolankiewicz and Beck (2000); Katz (1998); also Jackson (1996).

<sup>4</sup> National Center for Policy Analysis (2001); U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) table 37.

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Policy Analysis (2001); U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) table 17.

<sup>6</sup> National Center for Policy Analysis (2001); U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) tables 14, 17

<sup>7</sup> Kolankiewicz (2000); U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) table 14.

<sup>8</sup> Smock (2000); U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) tables 64, 69.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) tables 52, 60, 61, 64, 65; The Census NY. New York Times May 22, 2001. B1.

<sup>10</sup> Population Reference Bureau (2001); U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) table 4; U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001b).

<sup>11</sup> National Center for Policy Analysis (2001); Population Reference Bureau (2001); Kolankiewicz (2000); U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) table 15.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) table 672.

<sup>13</sup> Population Reference Bureau (2001).

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) tables 41, 45.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census (2001a) tables 41, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Katz and Bradley (1999); Paget (1998).

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000); Paget (1998); Kolankiewicz (2000).

<sup>18</sup> Brooks (2000); Etzioni (1988).

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000a) table 51.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000a) tables 239, 265.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000a) tables 41, 45, 249, 250

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000a) table 51.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000a) tables 524, 525, 528.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000a) table 65; Smock (2000).

<sup>25</sup> Annie C. Casey Foundation (2001).

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001b).

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) tables 626, 771; Servon (1999).

- <sup>28</sup> Independent Sector (2001).  
<sup>29</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) tables 37, 1033.  
<sup>30</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001a) tables 85, 1233  
<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>32</sup> Feige (1999).

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