

The Forum: *The strength of any discipline is in its ability to critically examine the basic premises and assumptions that underlie the discipline and its sub units. Debate is a scholarly activity that is seldom a part of social science journals. The Forum is a continuing feature for encouraging debates of topics relevant to rural sociologists. We welcome and encourage your comments on this issue or other topics you would like to see discussed.*

INTEREST IN RURAL RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

WILLIAM P. KUVLESKY, Guest Editor*

Less than three years ago I decided to attempt to change what I perceived to be increasing neglect on rural ethnic minorities among rural sociologists. There is no question that interest in this substantive problem area was on the wane as indicated by some observations about RSS affairs. At the 1988 meetings in Athens, Georgia there was only one paper or panel session, out of about 85, that included explicitly the mention of "race", "ethnic" or made reference to a particular U.S. ethnic group. A look at the membership of the RSS indicates that miniscule proportions were ethnic minority members (Willits and Ghelfi, 1988). How many rural sociologists who are also Chicano, American Indian or African American do you know?

I tried very hard at the 1988 meeting to recruit RSS members to work with me in building a formally organized interest group of colleagues having a primary interest in the problems and needs of rural ethnic minorities. I was discouraged at the general lack of interest of my RSS colleagues at the meetings. I recruited my good friend and colleague Clark Knowlton to work with me to increase the visibility of the substantive area of race and ethnic studies at the 1989 meetings in Seattle. Through these efforts we did

increase presentations on the program and, in the process, developed a network of over 20 people interested in forming an RSS interest group. With generous support from the RSS Council, who approved our request to form a recognized interest group as part of the RSS, we had a base to build on. A crucial opportunity for growth was again provided by the RSS when Rex Campbell invited us to announce our formation of an interest group in the Summer 1989 issue of TRS (32-34). Gene Summers' selection of "Rural Minorities" as the theme for the 1990 meetings in Norfolk, Virginia was a fortunate coincidence which gave us a once in a lifetime opportunity to build the interest group. Working closely with Jess Gilbert, Program Chair of the 1990 RSS meetings, we were able to assist him in organizing 16 sessions, which included some 50 papers on the subject of rural ethnic minorities. As of now we have 53 members in the interest group, and I think we have become a positive force in expanding RSS membership.

Gene Summers' initiatives, coupled with our organization effort, should provide for an exciting future for those of us in the RSS interested in research and action programs aimed at the problems and needs of ethnic minorities. In addition to this special issue of TRS, the editors of *Rural Sociology* are organizing a special issue on rural minorities. And Tom Durant (LSU) is back in the RSS; he's organizing on the behalf of the interest group, a monograph on the subject of rural ethnic minorities. The US as a total

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society and rural America in particular, are no doubt experiencing a social and economic regression; however, the RSS is definitely moving forward and broadening its base of membership.

This special issue consists of volunteered pieces from four members of the RSS having a primary interest in research and policy related to problems of racial and ethnic minorities in our society. The foci of these pieces are fairly diverse. Tom Durant (LSU) and Rogelio Saenz (Texas A&M) give their views on minority involvement, or lack of involvement, in the RSS and the subdiscipline of rural sociology. They offer specific suggestions on how to change the present situation of the underrepresentation of Afro-Americans and Mexican-Americans. Matthew Snipp (University of Wisconsin) takes this opportunity to inform rural sociologists of current intergroup problems facing American Indians and provides suggestions of how rural sociolo-

gists can provide assistance. A long-term member of RSS and a civil rights activist, Bill Payne of the Office of Advocacy and Enterprise, USDA, shares with us some observations of institutional discrimination that need to be addressed. I find these statements provocative and challenging. My hope is that they will stimulate responses from you. Do you disagree with some proposition or assertion made by them? Do you have relevant experiences or additional suggestions you would like to share? Help get some dialogue flowing by sending in a statement to *TRS*.

If you are interested in joining the Rural Racial and Ethnic Minorities Interest Group, let me know. Also, I am working on an annotated bibliography of current research reports by rural sociologists relevant to our interests. Please send me any papers, reports, or articles you would like to see included.

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The Rural Sociologist

VOLUME 11, NO. 1

WINTER (1991)



The Forum

**Interest in Rural Racial
and Ethnic Minorities**

THE RURAL SOCIOLOGIST

ISSN 0279-5957

A Quarterly Publication of the Rural Sociological Society
Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall

SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT:
Bozeman, MT 59715 and additional mailing offices

Postmaster and RSS Members

Send address changes to: *The Rural Sociologist*, Wilson Hall, Department of Sociology, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59715.

Office of Publication

The Rural Sociologist (TRS) is published by the Rural Sociological Society; 101 Sociology Building University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia, Missouri 65211.

Submissions

All letters, new items and manuscripts for the journal should be sent to: Rex Campbell, Editor, *The Rural Sociologist*, Department of Rural Sociology, 101 Sociology Building, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri 65211. Telephone number: (314) 882-6358. Submission of material for possible publication in *The Rural Sociologist* presumes transfer of all copyrights to the RSS upon its acceptance for publication.

Subscriptions

Members of the Rural Sociological Society receive *The Rural Sociologist* as part of their yearly dues. Others can subscribe at the annual rate of \$18.00 (U.S.). Send payment to Patrick Jobes, RSS Treasurer, Rural Sociological Society, Wilson Hall, Department of Sociology, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana 59715.

Manuscript Style Requirements

Refer to January (Winter) 1989 issue of *The Rural Sociologist*.

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Rural Sociological Society

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EDITORS INTRODUCTION

The Forum section for this issue, on race and ethnic relations, has been "in the works" for many months. The topic is particularly appropriate following the recent RSS meetings and the growing public concern over problems associated with racial and ethnic tension. Each of the forum papers offers a timely yet considered response to both phenomena.

The discussion in The Forum is practical and challenging; and its success is due to the hard work of Bill Kuvlesky. Bill suggested the idea for the topic and accepted our invitation to serve as guest editor. In this role he recruited authors, collected manuscripts, negotiated textual changes and delivered the package to us in a timely manner. (Perhaps only past and present journal editors can appreciate the kind and quality of work this entails). We thank you, Bill, for your commitment to see this issue through. We hope it is widely read, and that it will serve

to stimulate further interest and research among society members.

This issue also contains news of importance to the Society, as well as two papers in the "Sociological Imagination" section. The first, by Dishongh and Worthen discusses soil conservation service policy research needs concerning limited resource farmers. The second, by Shultz and Regan describes computer software packages designed to analyze and map various kinds of demographic data of importance to rural sociologists.

The editors appreciate and encourage your contributions and suggestions to the journal. We look forward to the Spring issue, which features several papers on the topic of rural development, with Ken Wilkinson serving as guest editor of The Forum.

COPIES OF LOWRY NELSON'S MEMOIRS AVAILABLE

Lowry Nelson was one of the founding members of the Rural Sociological Society, and served as one of the Society's earliest presidents. The family of Lowry Nelson has donated the last few dozen copies of his memoirs, *In The Direction of His Dreams* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1985) to Utah State University to help generate funds for the Lowry and Florence Nelson Fellowship, which provides financial support for graduate students involved in rural community studies at USU. Copies of this hardbound volume are available, as long as the supply lasts, at a cost of \$16.75, including postage and handling. Orders may be sent to:

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