

Demography & Maine's Destiny

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In October 1347, after a trip to the Black Sea, several ships docked in Sicily. They were carrying plague and within three years a third of the European population was dead --twenty-five million people. Half the population of Avignon died; within a year and a half, sixty percent of the residents of Florence. After the initial pandemic, smaller outbreaks continued until the sixteenth century. Many areas did not recover their pre-plague populations until the sixteenth and some not until the seventeenth century.

The banking industry was hit hard. Debtors died. Everyone in their households died. All their relatives died and no one was left to repay the debt. Craftsmen died and couldn't be replaced. Construction projects stalled. Labor shortages pushed up wages. Commodity prices fell because of the lessened demand occasioned by the population decline. With rising wages and falling prices, labor's standard of living rose. Some historians think the labor shortages caused by the Black Death provided the initial stimulus for the scientific and technical revolution which we are still undergoing.

Now, fast forward to 1999 and focus on sub-Saharan Africa. The World Health Organization estimated that fourteen million sub-Saharan Africans had died from AIDS leaving twelve million orphans. Another twenty-five million people are infected most of whom will die within ten years. Children eight and ten years old are caring for their dying parents. In whole villages there are only the very old and the very young left.

The AIDS epidemic, as did the Black Death, is reshaping society. The American Foundation for AIDS Research says eighty percent of the dead are workers between age twenty and fifty. Employers report that illness and death are now the principal reason employees leave their jobs. Employer provided life insurance has become prohibitively expensive and some companies hire two and three workers for a single position on the assumption AIDS will kill one or two of them. The president of the World Bank has said, "Many of us used to think of AIDS as a health issue. We were wrong. AIDS can no longer be confined to the health or social sector portfolios. AIDS is turning back the clock on development."

Let us reassure you. We have nothing apocalyptic to report about Maine's destiny. Instead, we've introduced these stories about the Black Death and the AIDS epidemic to make the point that demographic change is a powerful force. It can transform entire societies. Culture, social institutions, the economy: all can be reshaped by population events and trends. They are transforming ours, albeit in a less catastrophic way.

We have chosen to explore five aspects of Maine's recent demographic history which are shaping our destiny, today, tomorrow, and for the future. They are:

- The Passage of Maine's Baby Boomers,
- Maine's Changing Households,
- Maine's Missing Populations,

- Maine's Suburbanization, and
- Maine's Geographic Divergence.

We think they offer insights not only about the past but, about the near term future. Our approach will be to briefly outline the demographic facts and then to pose some of the issues and questions which the facts suggest to us.

1. The Passage of Maine's Baby Boomers

1960 was at the crest of the post-World-War-II baby boom which lasted from 1947 to 1964. After 1964, the numbers of births declined rapidly with the widespread adoption of the birth control pill and the legalization of abortion. Maine, which averaged 22,000 births a year during the baby boom, has averaged only 16,000 a year since. Indeed, in 2000 and the five years preceding, births were below 14,000 a year, the fewest since we started keeping records in 1892, when Maine's population was only half its present size. Births since 2000 have remained below 14,000.

The baby boom was not a surprise to demographers. Baby booms usually follow wars. They occur as people catch up on the marriages and child bearing that have been deferred by war. What was a surprise was the duration and magnitude of the baby boom - eighteen years with a total of 72,000,000 births in the U.S. and 400,000 in Maine. It turned out that people were not only making up for the lost war years, but for the prior Great Depression, as well, when economic conditions discouraged marriage and family formation.

One can visualize the baby boom as a wave forming far out at sea and rolling in towards the beach. Immediately ahead of it, closer in, is a trough representing the forty percent fewer births during the Great Depression and World War II. Further out, twenty-seven years behind the baby boom, is the crest of a following, but smaller wave. This wave is made up of the baby boomers' children. Between the baby boom and their children is another trough containing the few children of the Depression and World War II birth cohorts. In the coming decade, a third wave - the baby boomers grandchildren - will begin to form. However, it is projected to be still more attenuated, an echo of an echo.

The wave metaphor suggests we think of social institutions as boats tethered to a jetty which extends out into the water. Tethered furthest out are the boats (institutions) the wave encounters first: the individual's family of orientation, his or her play group, day care center, nursery school. Then come religious instruction, elementary school, middle school, high school and college or trade school. Next are workplace, commercial and financial institutions, the individual's family of procreation, civic groups, political and governmental institutions, etc.. Still further inshore are the institutions addressing the later years of life: pensions, retirement communities, elder hostel, Medicare, assisted living and so on. As a wave or trough rolls toward shore it successively passes the clusters of moored boats although its strength or force is gradually depleted.

Pursuing our metaphor, an important feature of the wave-like character of population fluctuations is that the passing waves and troughs set the boats (institutions) pitching and rolling

and straining at their tethers, always at risk of damaging their hulls on the jetty or even of parting their lines and sweeping them away. It is important, therefore, to put out bumpers and allow enough slack in the lines for the boats to fall and rise with the passing waves and troughs.

In 1960, the baby boomers were under age fourteen with the oldest just about to enter high school, with more than 100,000 still to be born in Maine. Two generations – or forty years – later, they were between the ages of thirty-six and fifty-three.

Comprising, as it does, such a large portion of the population, the baby boom wave dragged the median age of the Maine population upward ten years from twenty-nine in 1960 to thirty-nine in 2000. It would have pulled the median even higher were it not for the following wave of baby boomer children. The baby boom generation also pulled the U.S. median upward, but by much less.

After the end of the baby boom in 1964, births declined for a dozen years and then swelled as the baby boom women reached child-bearing age and began having their own children. Although the boomer women had fewer children per woman than had their mothers and older sisters, the following wave was still large because of the many potential mothers in the original baby boom. This wave crested at 17,500 births in 1989, when the baby boom women were between the ages of twenty-five and forty-two. Then, births fell to fewer than 14,000 a year in the nineteen-nineties, as the older baby boom women began to enter menopause. Today, in 2003, the youngest baby boom women are thirty-nine and nearing the end of their child bearing years.

The trough following the end of the baby boomers' child-bearing years has already roiled educational institutions and will continue doing so into the future. By 2000, public school enrollments in kindergarten through grade five had fallen as result of the decline in births after 1989. Projections by Sherwood to 2015 show this grade level continuing to decline until 2007 and then growing very slightly thereafter as the baby boomer's grandchildren begin to enter school. Middle school enrollment has now begun to decline which Sherwood projects will continue until 2011 after which it will resume growing at an anemic one third of a percent per year. High School enrollments will follow; starting to decline in 2005 as the trough continues towards shore. Projections to 2012 by the National Center for Education Statistics show a similar trend with total Maine public school enrollment declining until 2009 and then leveling off. Some already small schools in rural areas confront the possibility these declining enrollments will force them to close.

While enrollment of traditional undergraduates may decline as this trough rolls past age eighteen, the University System has other constituencies which can allow it to continue growing. Enrollment in graduate school, continuing education and Senior College are all healthy and can offset declines in the traditional undergraduate population. And, efforts to encourage greater college attendance among Maine youth, if successful, can also help compensate for the smaller numbers of eighteen to twenty-two year olds.

The baby boomers were too young in 1960 to move out of their parents' homes and establish independent residences. By 2000, all were certainly old enough and nearly all had.

Thus, the maturation of the baby boomers created a demand for an additional 91,000 homes in 2000 – a number equal to a third of all homes in 1960. What had been two households in 1960 with perhaps three children each had become five households in 2000: the two parental households plus the three created by the marriages of the children.

About the time the first baby boomers were turning eighteen and leaving their parents' homes, in the mid-nineteen-sixties, Maine's migration flow reversed itself. For the preceding quarter of a century, more people had been leaving Maine than entering it. Indeed, if one overlooks a small net in-migration of fewer than 3,000 people during the nineteen-thirties (most likely Mainers who had left the State earlier and returned home to wait out the Great Depression with relatives), then Maine had had nearly continuous out-migration since 1910.

This 1960s reversal of the historic rural-urban migration flow was not peculiar to Maine. It occurred in New Hampshire and Vermont. It occurred in Virginia just beyond the other end of BOSWASH – the Boston to Washington Megalopolis -- and it occurred around the fringes of all the other megalopolitan areas in the mid-west and on the west coast.

Several factors contributed to the new urban-rural flows. One was the completion of the interstate system. Now, one could live in rural Maine or Vermont or Virginia and be only a two, three or four hour drive from Boston, New York or Washington. A second factor was cheap housing and land. Decades of rural out-migration had held down demand and kept prices low. This would have been particularly attractive to young baby boomers starting out in life. The third factor was a back to the land movement among the baby boomers. This was one of several ways the baby boomers' sought to live a more authentic life style than their parents'. The back-to-the-landers were undoubtedly a tiny percentage of the boomer population, but, given the enormous pool of boomers, the back-to-the-landers still represented a sizable number of individuals. Furthermore, once here, they offered potential contacts for other baby boomers who were not themselves back-to-the-landers, but who were casting about for suitable places to settle. For, it is the case that most migrants choose destinations where they have friends or relatives.

Maine had a net flow out of state between 1980 and 2000 of people right out of high school and in their twenties, and a countervailing in flow of people thirty to forty-four. Many of those leaving were the children of baby boomers, while many moving in were baby boomers themselves. One wonders how much both flows were shaped by the initial in-migration of baby boomers in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies. How many of the young people leaving Maine in the eighties and nineties were the children of baby boomers who moved to Maine earlier? Were the decisions by these young people to leave related to the fact that their in-migrant parents had family and friends out of state who provided contacts for the young people? How many of the thirty and forty year olds moving to Maine in the eighties and nineties were baby boomers? Were their decisions to come influenced by contacts with relatives and friends who moved to Maine in the earlier in-migration of baby boomers? Certainly, migration has markedly increased the links between Maine and other states since 1960. The proportion of Maine residents born in other states and, therefore, likely to have family or friends there more than doubled between 1960 and 2000.

The baby boomers began entering the labor force in the early nineteen-sixties. By 2000, they had twenty to thirty-five years work experience and made up almost half the working age population. One might have expected that their work experience and large number would pull the average earnings of the overall labor force upward, just as they have pulled the average age of the population upward. The law of supply and demand, on the other hand, would suggest that the potential labor supply represented by the boomers should have kept wages low. And, indeed, that seems to be the case. Average labor force earnings in constant dollars were no higher in 2000 than they had been in 1970 even though the 2000 labor force had a much larger percentage of very experienced workers. Exerting additional downward pressure on wages has been the increased labor force participation of baby boomer women. Between 1960 and 2000, the percentage of women in the paid labor force almost doubled.

The baby boomers began turning age forty-five in 1992. For most people, the age range from forty-five to fifty-five or sixty is the lifetime peak of earnings and savings. They are established in their careers. They have purchased and furnished their homes. Their children have left or are leaving home. Expenses are declining, while their incomes are as high as they're ever going to be. On the other hand, after age sixty or sixty-five most will spend more than they earn, as they draw down their pensions and life savings in retirement. The bull market of the nineteen-nineties, the ready availability of capital and low interest rates through the decade and beyond, were surely connected to the pool of savings accumulated by the baby boomers as they began to pass age forty-five. One might hypothesize as well that some of the recent gains in labor force productivity reported for the nation are due to the large number of baby boomers who now have twenty or more years of work experience.

As the baby boom wave continues on, it will begin to roll past age sixty-five in 2012. By 2029, it will have entirely passed sixty-five and the leading edge will be beyond age eighty.

Pessimism is frequently expressed about the ability of the economy to produce all the goods and services society needs if the large labor force of baby boomers is allowed to retire. Will subtracting that many workers from the economy create labor shortages and force up wages the way the Black Death did?

A statistic called the "dependency ratio" allows one to compare the burdens different age structures impose on the economy. Generally, our society discourages full time labor force participation before high school graduation or about age eighteen, while full social security benefits are available at age sixty-five with many private pensions available even earlier. The dependency ratio tells us how many potential dependents there are (persons under eighteen or over sixty-five) for every hundred persons of working age (eighteen to sixty-four).

As you can guess, the 1960 dependency ratio was high. There were eighty-eight potential dependents – persons under eighteen or over sixty-five -- for every hundred Maine residents of working age. The baby boomers, all of whom were under fourteen, accounted for two thirds of the potential dependents. By 2000, the baby boomers were between the ages of thirty-six and fifty-three – all of working age – and the dependency ratio had declined by a third. Two thousand twenty-five is the furthest out for which there are age projections for Maine which will allow us to calculate a dependency ratio. By then, four fifths of the baby boomers will be

over sixty-five and potential retirees. While the projected 2025 dependency ratio is higher than that of 2000, it is still less than the 1960 ratio. This suggests the effect on the labor force of the baby boomers retirement will not be as dire as predicted by the pessimists and we shall be able to say, “Been there. Did that and more in 1960.”

By 2025, at least a fifth of the total Maine population will be over age sixty-five. With this in mind, the second Governor King – Angus, not William– adopted a policy of fostering the growth of the retirement industry in Maine. The reasons for doing so are several. It is a clean industry. It brings new money into the State from the pensions and social security and health insurance benefits migrant retirees have earned elsewhere. We already have an edge with more people moving to Maine to retire than the number of Maine retirees leaving for warmer climates like Florida and Arizona. And, the growth of retirement services here may dissuade some Mainers from going elsewhere to retire. The Legislature, partly to encourage this industry, has exempted up to six thousand dollars of retirement income from taxation. The goal is to some day exclude all retirement income from taxation. It will not be all gain though. There are costs associated with an elderly population. And, the Federal government bears a smaller share and state government a higher share of those costs than is the case for children.

The finding, by the way, that there are retirement flows to cold weather states took researchers by surprise.

2. Maine’s Changing Households

In both 1960 and 2000, three percent of the Maine population lived in group quarters (that is, school and college dormitories, rooming houses, nursing homes, military barracks, jails and prisons, convents and monasteries, homeless shelters, etc.). The remaining 97% lived in individual homes and apartments; and while the population living in them increased by only one-third, the number of occupied homes and apartments almost doubled between 1960 and 2000. Several factors contributed to the rapid growth in occupied units. None were peculiar to Maine. All were common to the U.S. as a whole.

As we said earlier, the maturation of the baby boomers alone increased the demand for housing by forty percent.

A second factor was the increase in the over sixty-five population, which grew three times as fast as the younger population. Housing the senior population requires more units than housing an equal number of younger people because many seniors are widows and widowers living alone.

The percentage of divorced and separated individuals, not including those who have remarried, increased five-fold between 1960 and 2000. Separation and divorce, of course, mean the occupation of two units where only one was occupied before.

The age at marriage has increased, with the concomitant likelihood that some who have postponed marriage will never marry. Evidence from national samples suggests that not only are people postponing marriage, but many of these are also not cohabiting. Instead of moving in

together, many couples retain their separate houses or apartments so that it becomes a question each night of “my place or your place?”

The net effect of all these changes is that the number of homes and apartments required to house a thousand Maine people increased from 300 units in 1960 to 400 units in 2000. Or, another way to think about it, had the average number of occupants remained constant from 1960 to 2000, there would be a surplus of 150,000 homes today.

For municipal governments, the decline in average household size has increased per capita costs for water, sewer, trash pick up and police and fire protection. Even in a community where the population remained constant from 1960 to 2000, real costs for these services would have risen by a third or more, as the residents spread out over more units requiring the services. Indeed, the per capita increase in municipal costs may contribute more to the perception that property taxes are too high than the increase in the cost per home. A 1960 tax bill of, say, \$2,000 in today’s dollars would have been equivalent to \$600 per capita (or per occupant) while the same tax bill in 2000 would have been equivalent to over \$800, because of the smaller household.

On the other hand, educating children is usually the biggest municipal cost; and the increase in the number of homes paying taxes combined with the decrease in the number of school age children of has helped hold down tax rates. In 1960, there were eighty-five school age children to be educated for every hundred occupied homes. In 2000 there were only forty-four.

To live together is to share each other’s burdens. But, when everyone lives alone, with whom may we share? Before we reach that unlikely extreme, we might ask if there is a cost to us and to society of relying on paid outsiders to provide the intimate assistance to the ill, the infirm, and the aged which the other members of our households used to give.

3. Maine’s Missing Populations

“Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention,” asked Inspector Gregory? “To the curious incident of the dog in the nighttime,” Sherlock Holmes replied. “The dog did nothing in the nighttime,” said Gregory. “That was the curious incident,” remarked Holmes. In a similar vein, two of the curious demographic facts about Maine are the populations that aren’t here.

The first are persons of color. In 2000, one in three U.S. residents was non-white or Hispanic, but only one in twenty-nine Maine residents; this makes Maine the whitest state in the nation. There is an historic reason for this: Maine had no large employment centers like Boston, Chicago or Detroit to attract black migrants in the nineteen-forties and -fifties and Hispanics more recently.

Immigrants are the second missing population. One in nine U.S. residents was an immigrant in 2000, but only one in thirty-five Maine residents. Yet, Maine in 1960 had a larger proportion of international immigrants than the U.S. Of course, in 1960, over eighty percent of

the foreign born in the U.S. were from Europe, the Soviet Union and immediately adjacent Canada and Maine is closer to all these than most of the U.S.. By 2000, on the other hand, over three quarters of the foreign born in the U.S. were from Asia and Latin America and Maine is as far from those places as one can get in the U.S. The implicit operative principle, of course, is that the greater the distance between origin and destination, the smaller the migration flow. Another factor has been the concentration of the flow of international immigrants into six major U.S. debarkation cities and the gradual dispersal of the immigrants in short moves outwards from those cities. Maine has no such city; Boston being the closest one. And, with many opportunities for resettlement closer to Boston, few recent immigrants have reached Maine.

There are several reasons that it is important that Maine has so few immigrants and persons of color.

First, minority populations contribute disproportionately to population growth because they have higher birth rates and lower death rates than the non-Hispanic white population. Their death rates are lower because they are younger on average than the non-Hispanic white population. Their birth rates are higher partly for the same reason and partly because they tend to have larger completed families. Immigrants, of course, contribute directly to population growth by moving to the U.S. But, they also tend to be younger with higher birth rates and lower death rates.

We noted earlier that Maine's median age increased by ten years between 1960 and 2000 while the U.S. median increased by only six years. Because they are younger, on average, than the native, white population, immigrants and persons of color have kept the U.S. median age from rising as far as Maine's has.

Persons of color accounted for half the total population increase in the U.S. between 1960 and 2000 while immigrants accounted for a fifth of the increase. Of course, the two categories are not mutually exclusive. Some persons of color are also immigrants and vice versa. So, we cannot add their separate contributions to derive their combined effect on population growth. However, immigrants and persons of color together certainly accounted for something over half the total U.S. growth between 1960 and 2000. And, if that is the case, then, without their contribution, the U.S. growth rate during those forty years would have been no faster than Maine's. Indeed, the U.S. rate would probably have been slightly slower than Maine's. From this, we can infer that, without substantial numbers of immigrants and persons of color, Maine is unlikely to grow at anything near the U.S. rate – with important consequences for our economy.

For, a second potential consequence of Maine's sparse population of immigrants and persons of color is that their absence may well be a barrier to business recruitment and economic development. Iowa's racial and ethnic mix is very similar to Maine's. Several years ago The New York Times reported that major U.S. corporations were bypassing Iowa, choosing not to locate facilities there, because they had executives who were themselves persons of color and uncomfortable at the idea of living in an all white state. Since then, Iowa has begun recruiting overseas to encourage immigrants to move to the State.

James Tierney, the former Maine Attorney General, suggested in a Distinguished Honors Graduate Lecture at the University of Maine still other ways in which a lack of ethnic diversity slows population growth. His comments were prompted by the controversy in late 2001 over the migration of Somali refugees to Auburn and Lewiston. After noting Maine's slow population growth rate and the out-migration of youth, he said, "Many of our best Maine kids move away - perhaps for education or perhaps for work - and find a level of energy and excitement elsewhere - in places where diversity is the rule and not the exception. And they like it." Unstated, but implied is his conclusion that, because of the State's lack of diversity, many Mainers who leave and might one day return never will after experiencing the energy and excitement of a pluralistic culture.

Tierney points out that he, himself, has chosen to teach at Columbia University instead of the University of Maine Law School "in part because I cannot imagine teaching a class of all white students. It just wouldn't be as much fun for me." He goes on to cite examples among his family and friends of Mainers living out of state who would like to return, but who have married immigrants and persons of color who, because of our lack of diversity, don't want to live here.

He concluded saying we must recognize the importance of diversity to our future, talk about it and find ways to encourage immigration. Particularly important is changing the way we support newcomers; making state government responsible for resettlement costs rather than individual municipalities.

One wonders how readily Maine's culture will adapt to a flow of new immigrants, particularly persons of color from Africa, Latin America, and Asia. But then, Tierney suggests we begin not with recruiting immigrants, but by talking to each other about why it's necessary. And, the response by Mainers to attempts to stir up hate and resentment for the Somali immigrants was certainly reassuring in this regard.

4. Maine's Suburbanization

Over half of all Maine residents lived in urban areas in 1960; yet, ninety-five percent of the growth between then and 2000 took place in rural areas. However, this was no movement back to the farm. The farm population actually declined more than seventy-five percent between 1960 and 2000.

The State Planning Office in Economic Distress and the Changing Nature of Rural Maine, written almost twenty-five years ago, described the Maine population as an "urban labor force living in a dispersed rural settlement pattern;" and found that about half of the four hundred fifty towns identified by the U.S. Census as rural in 1970 were actually suburban in character with many residents commuting elsewhere to work. Census 2000 supports this observation, reporting that over three quarters of Maine workers living in rural areas commuted to jobs outside their towns of residence. Their livelihoods were obviously not rooted in the natural resources where they lived. There is a delicious irony here: people moving to rural areas in order to turn around and commute back to jobs in the cities.

The decennial census lacks a “suburban” category, classifying everything as either urban or rural. In Maine, half the towns identified by the census as rural are such only in the sense of having low residential densities. Speaking somewhat loosely, we shall use “rural” and “suburban” interchangeably here but, of course, that’s not strictly true. There are many rural communities whose residents do not commute and who make their livelihoods growing or harvesting the local natural resources. Also, in what follows, We shall use “urban” to include densely settled villages even though their populations may not be large enough to qualify them as cities. The village of Wiscasset, for example, has too few inhabitants to be a city but, its dense settlement pattern is still similar to the mixed use neighborhood found in cities.

We suspect everyone can visualize exactly what we mean by “suburbanization.” It is a house or mobile home located every hundred yards along the secondary roads of Maine. And, since 1960, there have been over 200,000 homes sited there. Contrast that with the 75,000 homes added to the urban housing stock during the same period. People have shown an overwhelming preference for quote – “rural” – unquote living.

We’re sure, too, that you have realized that another name for suburbanization as we have described it is “sprawl.” In the past half dozen years, the subject has become a major concern in both Maine and the nation. Although sprawl elsewhere means a five hundred home development every couple of miles on a major artery; not a new house every hundred yards down a back road.

In The Cost of Sprawl, the State Planning Office said,

“This outward movement has had unanticipated and unintended consequences.

“It has increased local and state taxes in three ways. First, it has required new and redundant infrastructure in remote areas; for example, state taxpayers have paid for over \$300 million in new rural school capacity, even though the student population statewide has declined. Second, it has required the lengthening of service routes for police, fire, emergency, road maintenance, and plowing; towns are losing economies of scale. Finally, it has left older city and town centers saddled with a declining population and an underused infrastructure. The ironic result is that even while rural taxpayers are pitching in to build new capacity, in-town residents are paying more (on a per-family basis) just to support the old capacity.

“The costs go beyond dollars and cents. Spreading out also creates more air pollution from automobiles, more lake degradation from development runoff, and more fragmentation of wildlife habitats. There are social costs, such as the isolation of the poor and elderly in cities, and the disruption of traditional farming and forestry activities in the countryside.”

We should add to this catalogue that the total statewide cost of K to 12 education is going up even as the school age population declines.

In a referendum in summer 2003, Scarborough voters rejected the construction of Dunstan Crossing, a development specifically designed to reduce sprawl by clustering buildings

in a compact settlement that included a mix of residences, offices, and stores. This suggests Mainers are not ready to return to a more dense, urban lifestyle.

The decrease in household size we discussed earlier has been an important source of sprawl. You will recall that, because of declining household size, it required a hundred more homes to house a thousand people in 2000 than it did in 1960. This is demand over and above that required to meet the one third increase in total population.

Since land in rural areas is sparsely settled and has low monetary value for economic activities, it is considerably cheaper than the densely settled urban land. This has made rural land attractive for siting the additional units needed to house the smaller households. There is also the bonus to the home owner of the initially lower rural tax rates. However, these lower rates do not derive from greater municipal efficiency, but fewer services. Generally, because of their densities, the urban areas deliver services more efficiently. Their higher tax rates result from their offering more services and an aging infrastructure.

When we look at who lives in the cities and who in the country, we find that young adults (people nineteen to twenty-four) and the elderly (people over eighty) are more likely to live in urban than in rural areas, while people twenty-five to seventy-nine are more likely to live in rural areas. This makes intuitive sense. The city, with its dense population, makes it easier for the young to meet one another and congregate. The sparse population of the suburbs works against this. Thus, young adults, until they have children, enjoy the urban life style, particularly its night life.

Seniors, on the other hand, value the city less for its social life, than for its convenience. They often have health problems requiring frequent visits to health care providers who are usually located in urban areas. Their health problems may, in addition, make impossible that quintessential suburban activity, driving. Moving from suburbia to the city at that point in life may make great sense. Medical and other services are closer at hand, and alternative means of transport more readily available. Furthermore, an important reason for the original move to the suburbs – cheap housing for raising a family – is no longer salient. Per square foot, urban housing will be more expensive than rural housing; but, with their children gone, the elderly can compensate for this by moving into smaller city apartments. They may even be able to rent subsidized senior housing.

The baby boomers will begin to turn eighty in 2026. Will large numbers of them leave the suburbs to move back to the cities after that date? Will there be enough one and two person urban apartments to accommodate them? Enough subsidized senior housing? Will the flow of the elderly baby boomers back to the cities depress suburban land and home values and drive up urban prices? Will that, in turn, encourage even more families in the middle years to flee urban life for the suburbs?

5. Maine's Geographic Divergence

Regional population trends diverged in Maine between 1960 and 2000. Eight of our sixteen counties increased their shares of the total State population, while the shares of the other eight either declined or remained constant.

Maine's southwestern coast has always been more densely settled than the rest of the State; but the disparity became even greater in the forty years from 1960 to 2000. Well over half the total statewide population increase during those years was concentrated in the two westernmost, coastal counties of York and Cumberland. Eighty percent of the statewide increase were concentrated in those counties and the five other southwestern coastal counties stretching from Sagadahoc to Hancock. Census Bureau estimates since 2000 show this concentration continuing, and projections by the State Planning Office out to 2015 forecast no slowing of the trend.

Among the coastal counties, only the easternmost one, Washington, failed to increase its share of the State population between 1960 and 2000; its share declined, instead. Among the inland counties, only Franklin in western Maine increased its share of the State population. Two inland counties - - Aroostook and Piscataquis - - had absolute population losses, although Piscataquis's was only a nominal 144 persons.

The increased concentration of the population along the coast continues a trend begun in the mid-nineteenth century, when agriculture in Maine had reached its greatest geographic extent. Settlement during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was largely confined to the coastal areas. After the Revolution, settlements rapidly expanded up-river and inland, as land was cleared for farming. However, the opening of the Erie Canal, the availability of land in the American West, and competition from those more productive western lands first slowed and then reversed the movement of the Maine population inland. Mechanization on the farm and in the woods during the twentieth century further reduced the demand for labor in inland Maine. (We noted when discussing suburbanization that Maine's farm population fell more than seventy-five percent in the forty years between 1960 and 2000.) Today, increasing productivity and competition from abroad continue to erode job opportunities in the factories of small town, inland Maine.

Besides participating in the long, slow decline in the demand for rural labor, the Aroostook and Penobscot County populations were also subjected to the closing of the Dow, and Presque Isle air bases in the nineteen-sixties and Loring air force base in the nineteen-nineties. When Loring closed, for example, the Federal Government packed up 8,000 military and their dependents plus civilian employees of the Defense Department, and moved them out of state. They were followed by additional residents who left in response to the downturn in the local economy caused by the base closing. Should the air station at Brunswick or the Naval shipyard in Kittery close, we can expect a slowing, at least, in the increasing concentration of population in York and Cumberland Counties. A cutback in Navy contracts at Bath Iron Works would have a similar effect on mid-coast and central Maine. Any slowing of growth in the southwestern coastal region, however, is likely to be comparatively short if we go by the example of the closing in the nineteen-eighties of Pease Air Force Base just across the line in coastal New Hampshire.

Kenneth Roberts, the novelist who chronicled early New England, claimed Maine does not begin until one crosses the Kennebec. He said everything west of there is an extension of Massachusetts. There is increasing merit in his observation, at least in regard to York County. In 1980 the U.S. Census Bureau documented the emergence of a new metropolitan statistical area centered on Portsmouth, Rochester and Dover, New Hampshire and identified five towns in southernmost York County as part of this area. Now, when the Bureau identifies a town as part of a metropolitan area, it is because the available economic information, particularly that on commuting patterns, indicates the town is economically integrated with the central city or cities. In other words, the Bureau was saying in 1980 that these five towns were no longer part of the Maine economy, but were aligned with an economic region centered on the three New Hampshire cities.

In the 2000 census, the Bureau reclassified the cities and towns making up this metropolitan area, including the five York County towns, as part of the Boston, Worcester, Lawrence, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, Connecticut Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area. The Boston metropolitan area has spread outward to include part of southern Maine. Are we going to find in the 2010 census that the Boston metropolitan area has crept further into Maine? Probably. When planning the 2000 census, the Census Bureau was prepared to extend the boundaries of the Boston metro all the way to Portland. After reviewing the data, however, it concluded that that hasn't happened. Yet.

Retirees have been an important source of the in-migration to Maine's coastal region. This agrees with the finding that most people, in moving or considering a move at retirement, want to settle near water. (The attraction of the Rangeley Lakes to retirees is one reason Franklin County increased its share of the State population. Other reasons are enrollment growth at the University of Maine at Farmington and employment growth at Franklin Memorial Hospital.)

We said earlier that for some fifty some years from 1910 to the mid-nineteen-sixties there was an almost continuous net outflow of people from Maine, the exception being a very small in-migration during the Great Depression. In the mid-sixties this changed and Maine since has had a net inflow. But, that's not true for the four northern counties – Aroostook, Piscataquis, Penobscot and Washington – which have continued to hemorrhage people: more than 20,000 a decade between 1960 and 2000. Population projections by the State Planning Office out to 2015 forecast no change in this.

Most of these out migrants were young. Between 1980 and 2000 a net outflow of 50,000 people between the ages of eighteen and thirty or thirty-one left the State. Furthermore, this flow accelerated from the earlier decade to the later. Most would have been from the four northern counties. The young are the ones who usually leave because they are the ones freest of ties and obligations. The middle aged own homes, have obligations to aging parents, and participate in a complex web of social relations.

Out-migration may be as hard or harder on those who stay as it is on those who leave. Those who go, after all, carry the hope their move will open doors and improve their circumstances. Those who stay wonder what's wrong with themselves that they remain behind. Do they lack "the right stuff?" They watch the social life of the community gradually atrophy

and the storefronts empty. Parents see their children leave. The young see their siblings and friends leave. None of this is peculiar to northern Maine. The same thing is happening throughout rural America, wherever increasing productivity and foreign competition are reducing the need for labor.

There has been talk since at least the late seventies about the existence of two Maines and how to make the economy of the second Maine viable. Despite all the talk, the situation remains essentially unchanged. The young continue to leave. Some states and provinces, Iowa and Pennsylvania among them, have programs to lure their out migrants back. But, what is the sense of that if the economy can't absorb them? Or are those correct who say if the labor force is there employers will come? Is Tierney's proposal to increase diversity a solution? How would one increase diversity in northern Maine? Should we follow Iowa's approach of recruiting immigrants from abroad? Would an east-west highway really boost the northern Maine economy as much as its proponents claim?

Closing Thoughts

Today, Maine's population is almost evenly divided between the southwestern coastal region and the rest of the State – just under fifty-one percent along the coast, just over forty-nine percent elsewhere. But, as the population concentrates more and more along the coast, it will become harder to muster either the political will or the electoral power to address conditions in the other Maine. And, with a declining share of the State's workforce and consumers, it will also become increasingly difficult to attract business investment there.

In 1960 Maine had three representatives in Congress. Today, we have two. If we remain a native, all white enclave, our slow population growth will continue to erode our influence in the nation. This may not take the form of another lost Congressional seat; at least not right away. It will mean decreasing national attention to those interests and issues--whether political, economic or social--that are peculiar to Maine and the other slow growth states.

Maine's average age increased ten years between 1960 and 2000. The Census Bureau projects it will increase another two years by 2010. Has this aging of the population made Maine less attractive to the young? Has it created a middle-aged society and culture they find dull? Is Jim Tierney right? Are we losing our young people and failing to attract others because Maine doesn't offer the energy and excitement they find elsewhere?

In 1960, one household in eight was a single person living alone. By 2000, that had doubled to one in four. If we widen our focus to include households with children, but only one adult, then one house in three had a single adult in 2000. The trend in the U.S. is similar. Should we be concerned about this? Can we afford the governmental and environmental costs of dispersing our population across so many homes? Are there implications for social cohesion? What, if anything, might reverse this trend?

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