

# Cultivating Modern America:

## 4-H Clubs and Rural Development in the Twentieth Century

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Finishing the dissertation away from one's home university compounds an already difficult task. The logistical issues of access to sources, library privileges, and—that elusive goal—a quiet place to work are so easily stripped away. The institutions and libraries that have so generously extended a welcome to me during my peregrinations deserve special recognition, for their kindnesses have enabled me to get work of scholarship done. The History Department at Wesleyan University generously extended to me their hospitality, an honorary title, and, most importantly, library privileges during my time in Middletown. The folks at Wesleyan's Center for the Humanities likewise tolerated my interloping at teas and other events. In Berlin, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science proved a fantastic place to think and write. Lorraine Daston and the staff of Department II not only gave me an office to work in, a key to come and go, and some very helpful German lessons, but also granted me access to the MPI's wonderful library, helpful librarians, and phenomenal inter-library loan services. Receiving a rare document I had ILL'ed from a U.S. library was like Christmas. *Danke schön.*

Unlike some of my colleagues, who work on topics that take them to tropical locations, major European cities, or the South African countryside, my research has brought me primarily to land-grant college towns across the continental U.S. In Bozeman, Michael Reidy welcomed me to town with burgers and beer. At Montana State's Special Collections, University Archivist Kim Allen Scott was both an excellent resource and a pleasure to chat with about issues ranging from Montana agriculture, the history of extension work, and the importance of information organization. Natalie Scheidler plied me with drinks at the close of my trip, and brought me safely to the airport in the snow.

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# Introduction

## Rural America and Ideas of Development

The year 1939 marked an important moment for thinking about rural life in America. A war broke out in Europe that would transform the nation's relationship to the world, its economists' thinking about agriculture and rural life, and its farmers' relationship to the landscapes, technologies, and markets upon which their livings depended. Two books also appeared that wrestled with the thorny and eternal American question of the relationship between farming, modernization and progress, and the democratic way of life.

The first was a small, wheat-colored volume called *Democracy Has Roots*. Although attributed to Undersecretary of Agriculture M. L. Wilson, the book was in fact a condensed and edited version of a series of lectures delivered by the leading academics and social thinkers of the day at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's headquarters during the previous year. Wilson, an agricultural economist by training, extension specialist by profession, and agrarian social theorist by vocation, had invited these men and women to speak on "the setting in which American democracy operates and the techniques through which it is currently expressed."<sup>1</sup> Over the first half of 1938, the historian Charles A. Beard, the legal scholar Thurman Arnold, the anthropologist Ruth Benedict, the ecologist Paul B. Sears, the pollster George H. Gallup, and a host of others traveled to Washington to discuss these matters with the USDA employees who, through New Deal programs, were attempting to put into practice a set of policies that would result in a more perfect adjustment

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1. M. L. Wilson, *Democracy Has Roots* (New York: Carrick & Evans, Inc., 1939), p. 16.

of rural people to the land, of citizens to their government, and of farming to the nation's economy. The goal, as Wilson put it at the end of the book, was to formulate, through discussion and the exchange of ideas, "the new, functioning, agricultural democracy of the future."<sup>2</sup>

The second book was a much thicker and in many ways more curious volume. *Agriculture in Modern Life* was written in three parts by three different people: USDA economist O. E. Baker, back-to-the-lander Ralph Borsodi, and M. L. Wilson. It also was the result of an academic gathering in the spring of 1938, this one held at Northwestern University on the subject of "distributive society and the possibilities of decentralization." The book's frontispiece offered a preview of the subjects at hand. Opposite the title page, two photographs appeared, one above the other. The top photo showed a line of mechanical disc plows, making their way across the flat expanse of a Great Plains wheat farm. The bottom photo depicted a very different scene: a modest farmhouse and a cluster of small farm buildings perched on a hillside, three old-fashioned haystacks in the foreground. From the outset, this juxtaposition posed the question: which image represents modern agriculture?<sup>3</sup>

To today's readers thinking about agriculture in modern life, these images appear to illustrate the industrial future and the traditional past of American agriculture as seen from the eve of World War II. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, their meaning seems unambiguous: this is where we are going; this is where we have been. The images may involve a set of positive and negative associations for today's viewer, or evoke particular emotions about the story they describe—optimism at the promise of technology, regret for a way of life lost, ambivalence about the state of agriculture and rural life in the present—but the narrative itself seems unassailable. This is where we have gotten to. This is what we left behind.

However, the curious reader, upon taking a closer look at the images' captions, will notice that the story

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2. Wilson, *Democracy Has Roots*, see n. 1, p. 198.

3. O. E. Baker, Ralph Borsodi, and M. L. Wilson, *Agriculture in Modern Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), frontispiece.

she has assumed was being told is in fact being turned on its head. The technologically advanced wheat farm, “typical of commercial agriculture,” was in fact quite atypical, the authors noted: only one in a thousand farmers possessed such machinery in 1939, and “how to prevent wind erosion when the soil has been depleted of its humus by continuous cultivation and when dry years come has become a problem.” Invoking for readers the specter of the Dust Bowl, which had within the past several years rendered large swaths of the American wheat belt uncultivable and uninhabitable, the authors immediately questioned whether mechanized commercial farming necessarily meant progress.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, the lower image, identified as “a scene in western North Carolina,” was, despite the absence of machinery, more indicative of progress for these authors. The caption offered a narrative for this farm not of stagnation or tradition-boundedness, but of advancement. “Twenty years ago this was an eroded, ‘worn out,’ mountain farm, with a miserable one-room shack of a house,” the text explained. “Now the streams run clear, even after storms, and the corn, grown in strips alternating with hay, is yielding 50 bushels per acre. The farm is almost self-sufficing. The modern home, built out of income from the farm, is surrounded with flower beds and a lawn, and the 7 children expect to go to college.” The inhabitants of this farm were, in the authors’ opinion, practicing a kind of rural modernization that would lead to the sort of prosperity all Americans desired: pleasant surroundings, contact with nature, modern amenities, economic prosperity, and the promise of a better life for their children. Through strip cropping, they had adopted technologies that conserved rather than depleted the soil, and the dividends could be seen all around them: the modern home, the flowerbeds, the trees and the streams. Although the people themselves were invisible, their presence seemed palpable in the landscape itself, in the human scale of the farm operation: daisies growing in the meadow, a dairy cow grazing on a distant hillside, waiting to be milked. The farm boy napping in the

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4. Baker, Borsodi, and Wilson, see n. 3, frontispiece.

haystack seemed almost inevitable.<sup>5</sup>

The narrative Baker, Borsodi, and Wilson sketched for their readers with these two images—even before reaching the table of contents—was powerful at the time because it asked readers to step back from the transformations of agriculture they were witnessing, to ask what it was they were seeing in the landscapes of rural America, to contemplate the different kinds of adaptations that were arising in response to the economic and technological changes of the 1930s, and to consider what was good and what was not so good among them. By inverting the narrative of progress from farm to factory to instead place “traditional” practices—like haystacks, manual labor, and diversified production—as an endpoint rather than a stepping stone, the authors of *Agriculture in Modern Life* were hoping to begin a broader discussion among Americans about the future of their country, its people, and its form of government. Today, their visual move is all the more striking because of where we now stand in relationship to the intertwined narratives of agriculture, democracy, and progress. It may require a bigger leap of imagination today for us to see the kinds of futures Baker, Borsodi, Wilson, and others were sketching out than it would have in 1939, but in doing so we uncover a critical part of our nation’s history.



This is a dissertation about the stories Americans have told about agriculture in modern life. It takes Baker, Borsodi, and Wilson’s pair of images as a starting point for thinking about the relationship between farming, government, and progress, and, like these images, it aims to trouble the narrative of linear progress from the agrarian to the industrial, the traditional to the modern, by pointing to the alternate paths agricultural reformers and rural people imagined over the course of the twentieth century. Its purpose is to take a closer look at how the narrative fabric that connects our ideas about agriculture, technology, science, progress, and

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5. Baker, Borsodi, and Wilson, see n. 3, frontispiece.

modernization has been woven, to perceive the patterns that have constituted it: not only those that are most apparent to us today, but also those that have guided its weave in the past.

In the United States over the course of the twentieth century, these aspects of progress have been consistently subsumed under the concept of development. Today, we are accustomed to thinking about modernization and development in economic and scientific terms: as an index of a nation's advancement, measured in figures such as gross domestic product, standard of living, and life expectancy. Indeed, it almost goes without saying that "development" is something that happens—or is done to—nation-states, and happens at the level of global politics and national markets. And we rarely question the notion that development is something that can be induced in one group of people by the actions of another: typically a "more developed" country doing so to a "less developed" country. Our notion of a hierarchy of national development is, furthermore, based on first-world nations such as those of North America and Western Europe, and their historical trajectory from agricultural to industrial to post-industrial economic activity. This is the path of modernization, and there appears to be only one.<sup>6</sup>

But this sense of development is a recent one, in many ways the product of the mid-twentieth century, in particular the political and economic reconstruction the U.S. government carried out around the globe after World War II, and the geopolitics of the subsequent Cold War.<sup>7</sup> The notions of development that prevailed at the turn of the twentieth century, and that shaped the thinking of people like Baker, Borsodi, and Wilson, were less wrapped up in international diplomacy and more grounded in the processes of growth innate in nature. This dissertation is an attempt to understand how the metaphor of development transformed over

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6. On this transitive notion of development, see Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 40.

7. Nick Cullather describes this modern idea of development as something that grew out of the particular histories of the United States and Asia, namely the former's intervention in the latter around issues of poverty and hunger; see *ibid.* Of course, notions of economic growth have a long history; for a brief overview, see Steven Stoll, *The Great Delusion: A Mad Inventor, Death in the Tropics, and the Utopian Origins of Economic Growth* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008). Lengthier treatments include: Richard Peet and Elaine Hartwick, *Theories of Development* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999); M. P. Cowen and R. W. Shenton, *Doctrines of Development* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

the course of the twentieth century from meaning a natural unfolding of innate capacities that happened at the level of the organism or the community, to connoting an almost exclusively economic and political set of transformations that occurred at the level of the nation.<sup>8</sup>

The story that unfolds in the pages that follow traces the changing fates of two different strains of thinking about development as it was carried out in rural landscapes over the course of the twentieth century: the means by which it would occur, the objects it sought to transform, and the goals towards which it aimed. One of these strains—which I will call the technicist strain—is the one most familiar to us today. It involves the active modernization of places and peoples seen as somehow lagging behind the curve of progress, and aims to compel them, sometimes forcibly, into changing their habits, often through the massive reordering of space, landscape, and social and economic relations. Its organizing discourse centers around engineering, building, remaking, and control. This technicist sense of development is most apparent in studies of “high modernist” development schemes, as well as many colonial projects to remake landscapes or engineer the environment on a large scale.<sup>9</sup>

But there is another sense of development—also modernizing and also progressive—that takes the biological senses of the term seriously, and which helps us tell a different set of stories about the modernization

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8. The literature on development is vast, yet much is confined to the post-World War II period. See, for example: Amy L. S. Staples, *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and World Health Organization Changed the World, 1945–1965* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2006); Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); David C. Engerman et al., eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Cullather, see n. 6. For a concise overview of the idea of development, see the entry in Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976), 102–104. The main histories of the term are Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Zed Books, 1997) and Cowen and Shenton, see n. 7.

9. The canonical work here is James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). See also: Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007); Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Michael Adas, *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America’s Civilizing Mission* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).



process. This cultivationist strain of development thinking centers on growth, guidance, and maturation, and aims to harness and channel the innate processes and tendencies of living things toward desired human ends. For most of history, agriculture has been situated firmly in this camp—indeed, one could fairly assert that this cultivationist strain has historically been the dominant way of conceptualizing improvement. Indeed, it was only around the turn of the twentieth century that the metaphor of development had become routinely borrowed from the biological sciences to apply to economics. While in the contemporary sense of the word, development is an active process, something that one nation can do to another, the earlier sense of this term was not transitive in the same way. People could shepherd development, perhaps even speed up or slow down processes of growth and change, but they could not initiate or create the developmental process.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of the United States in the twentieth century, the technicist strain of development has largely been associated with a particular developmental telos: settled, urban, industrial, capitalist modes of living. Indeed, the technicist strain betrays some of the assumptions we tend to make about what it means to be modern. It is associated more with cities than with the countryside, more with high technology than with simple tools, more with intellectual work than with physical labor—and, consequently, more with urban, industrial modes of life than with agrarian ones. By shifting our attention to the cultivationist strain, we see a different set of stories about modernization, stories that recognize the persistence of alternative forms of social and economic organization. Indeed, we see an entirely different kind of modernity, one that leaves room for things like rural places, old technology, manual labor, and farming. Studying rural development

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10. This conceptualization of development metaphors owes much to conversations with Paul Erickson, Dan Liu, and Eric Schatzberg, who suggested “technicist.” It is also influenced by recent work on agriculture and country life, most notably: Scott J. Peters and Paul A. Morgan, “The Country Life Commission: Reconsidering a Milestone in American Agricultural History,” *Agricultural History* 78, no. 3 (2004): 289–316; Randal S. Beeman and James A. Pritchard, *A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011). The cultivationist strain is no more confined to the twentieth century than are technicist projects or ideas of economic growth, and both strains often coexist in modernizing projects; see, for example: Suzanne Moon, *Technology and Ethical Idealism: A History of Development in the Netherlands East Indies* (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2007); Richard C. Keller, *Colonial Madness: Psychiatry in French North Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008).

as carried out in attempts to modernize agriculture over the course of the twentieth century allows us to see how these two strains of thinking interact, wax, and wane.<sup>11</sup>

This organismal, biological sense of development has been largely absent from the vast scholarly literature on development ideas and practices, and yet, I would argue, has been just as important to our modern ideas about development as its more economic and instrumentalist twin. The aim of this dissertation is to trace this cultivationist strand of thinking across the twentieth century by following one of the largest and most subtle development programs in American history: the USDA Extension Service's work with rural boys and girls, carried out in the context of the youth agricultural and home economics clubs known as 4-H. Beginning in 1914, the USDA deployed hundreds of thousands of agents to counties across America, as part of an ongoing effort to bring the fruits of science and technology to bear on the practice of producing food and fiber. Extension work with the youngest members of the farm populace offered from its outset a cultivationist vision for the development of rural places, which involved husbanding the growth and maturation of crops, livestock, and children simultaneously. In following 4-H from its roots in the turn-of-the-century Country Life Movement to its late-twentieth-century expressions in farm fields around the world and cities as home, this dissertation will show how a set of practices for the concurrent improvement of rural landscapes, plants, animals, children, communities, and livelihoods—formulated in the fields and farmhouses of the American countryside in the first half of the twentieth century—profoundly shaped the activities that came to be known as development in the wake of the Second World War, both at home and on the international stage.

Extension workers often touted 4-H as the most successful and important of their activities, as they saw club work with boys and girls achieving two ends at once: the immediate improvement of rural conditions through the teaching of new practices to young people in the context of the farm home, where other

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11. On this narrative of persistence, see David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

members of the family would take notice and follow their lead; and the long-term future development of agriculture that would result from children learning and internalizing these methods as they grew into adults with their own farms and children. From its beginnings in the early decades of the twentieth century, 4-H rapidly became both extremely widespread and wildly popular—by page eleven of *Agriculture in Modern Life*, O. E. Baker had mentioned 4-H clubs no less than five times—and an important element in rural social life and recreation.

In addition to being an example of a development program in the cultivationist mold, 4-H was also an agent of modernization that sought solutions for rural places to the problems and challenges of modernity in rural landscapes and livelihoods themselves. Rather than looking to the city, or to the factory, as the model for what the rural future would look like, 4-H and the Extension Service attempted to formulate ways of adjusting rural life to the conditions of modernity that were distinct from the adjustments made by urban people in an industrial context. In other words, these programs represented an attempt by turn-of-the-century reformers to imagine a rural form of modernity that did not simply mimic the urban industrial route, but instead tried to imagine what the best rural future might look like. This rural modernity would be rooted in farming as a way of life, and enacted not by outside forces but by farm people themselves, using the native resources of the countryside toward locally determined ends. In charting these alternate paths, agrarian reformers and rural people were endeavoring to reconcile old ways of getting a living with new conditions, to harmonize modernity and tradition in ways that would benefit the people on the land. Through a highly distributed form of organization, rooted in the needs of local people as they defined them, extension and 4-H club work sought to be both a means of attaining rural modernity, and an instrument for negotiating its goals and priorities on an ongoing basis.



A cultivationist approach to thinking about development, and 4-H clubs and extension work more specifically, offer a window on a number of issues of interest to historians of science, technology, agriculture, and the environment. The first involves the relationships among science, technology, modernity, and progress, particularly as they are expressed in places that are seen to be lacking in them, or lagging behind. Over the course of the twentieth century, rural places have figured prominently in modernizers' views of decline, stagnation, and tradition; thus they have been central to the emergence of that distinctly twentieth-century concept, underdevelopment. But, as some historians of technology and economics have pointed out, the world we live in consists of many forms of organization, production, and livelihood, both old and new, which coexist and intermingle. This "modernity of tradition," or "shock of the old," as some scholars have described it, forces us to reconsider the narratives of progress and innovation that structure the way we often think about the advance of science and civilization. By demonstrating the nonlinearity of progress, and the contingency of the paths historical actors have followed along the way, such histories turn our attention to different moments, different people, different places. By considering the contributions of rural people and agrarian reformers to ideas about modernity as well as underdevelopment, this project constitutes a similar attempt to recast the progress narrative.<sup>12</sup>

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12. The phrase "the modernity of tradition" is from Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, eds., *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization* (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1997), p. 35. Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old*, see n. 11. See also: Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel, eds., *Americanization and Its Limits: Reworking U.S. Technology and Management in Post-War Europe and Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Philip Scranton, *Endless Novelty: Specialty Production and American Industrialization, 1865–1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Arwen Mohun, *Steam Laundries: Gender, Technology, and Work in the United States and Great Britain, 1880–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor J. Pinch, *How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Users and Technologies* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); David Edgerton, "From innovation to use: Ten eclectic theses on the historiography of technology," *History and Technology* 16 (1999): 111; Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992); Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). A parallel move has been made by some historians of agriculture and the environment, who have focused on moments and people previously seen as outside the major currents of history, reconsidered the motives and aims of actors we thought we understood, and offered visions of agricultural possibility; see: Hal S. Barron, *Those Who Stayed*

When, in thinking about development, we shift our gaze away from technocratic planners, scientific experts, and the largely urban centers in which they tend to work, toward the landscapes they have sought to manipulate, we begin to perceive how important on-the-ground interactions among people and between humans and nature have been to the formulation of developmental ideas and projects. The second set of issues this project grapples with relates to the production of knowledge about nature as it has occurred in the middle landscape of agriculture. By paying attention to the activities of young people learning new scientific ideas about farming, and practicing a mix of new and old methods in the landscapes they called home, we can see the modernity of tradition in action. 4-H club youth, through their physical activities and their descriptions of their work, constitute a set of voices we have not trained our ear towards, but who have a great deal to say. The records they kept, the information they gathered, and the ways in which they both benefited from and contributed to the practice and formulation of agricultural science in the land-grant colleges and federal government, offer a fertile site for investigating the relations between what is often called local and expert knowledge, in ways that force us to question that boundary. The result is not only a history of agriculture that evinces a more nuanced understanding of science, but a history of science that moves more easily beyond the laboratory as well.<sup>13</sup>

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*Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); David Vaught, *Cultivating California: Growers, Specialty Crops, and Labor, 1875–1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

13. The importance of local knowledge about and labor in nature has been amply demonstrated by historians of science and the environment: Daniel Schneider, “Local Knowledge, Environmental Politics, and the Founding of Ecology in the United States: Stephen Forbes and the ‘Lake as a Microcosm,’” *Isis* 91 (2000): 681–705; Richard White, “‘Are You An Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?’: Work and Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1996); Richard W. Judd, *Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Louis Warren, *The Hunter’s Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Jeremy Vetter, “Cowboys, Scientists, and Fossils: The Field Site and Local Collaboration in the American West,” *Isis* 99, no. 2 (June 2008): 273–303. The literature on the field sciences has done much to broaden the definition of science and expertise; see: Henrika Kuklick and Robert E. Kohler, eds., *Science in the Field* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Robert E. Kohler, *Landscapes and Labscapes: Exploring the Lab-Field Border in Biology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Jeremy Vetter, ed., *Knowing Global Environments: New Historical Perspectives on the Field Sciences* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010). The scholarship on science and practice is also germane here; for a good agricultural example, see Kathy J. Cooke, “From Science to Practice, or Practice to Science?”

Of course, scientific knowledge about life processes has long been turned toward purposes that travel far from the lab. Thinking about nature and thinking about society have never been far apart; the historiography is replete with examples of the connections between natural history and social thought. In the United States, agriculture has always enjoyed a special status with respect to the national character and form of government. This project demonstrates just some of the ways in which biological, ecological, and agricultural ideas have profoundly shaped Americans' attempts to improve their landscape and their people through parallel—and often identical—means.<sup>14</sup> Finally, by studying the movement of developmental ideas among different contexts and scales—science and custom, theory and practice, nature and society, local and global—as they are produced, contested, enacted, and revised, we can better understand the profound and often unseen ways in which Americans' ideas about the landscapes they inhabit—shaped by work, thought, livelihoods—are nearly always ideas about themselves.<sup>15</sup>

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Chickens and Eggs in Raymond Pearl's Agricultural Breeding Research, 1907–1916,” *Isis* 88, no. 1 (Mar. 1997): 62–86. For more narrowly defined histories of agricultural science, see: Margaret W. Rossiter, *The Emergence of Agricultural Science: Justus Liebig and the Americans, 1840–1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975); Charles E. Rosenberg, *No Other Gods: On Science and American Social Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

14. On the connections between biology and society, see: Emanuel Gaziano, “Ecological Metaphors as Scientific Boundary Work: Innovation and Authority in Interwar Sociology and Biology,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 101 (1996): 874–907; Gregg Mitman, “Defining the Organism in the Welfare State: The Politics of Individuality in American Culture, 1890–1950,” in *Biology as Society, Society as Biology: Metaphors*, ed. Sabine Maasen, Everett Mendelsohn, and Peter Weingart (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995); Gregg Mitman, *The State of Nature: Ecology, Community, and American Social Thought, 1900–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Denis R. Alexander and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *Biology and Ideology from Descartes to Dawkins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Jake Kosek, *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Philip J. Pauly, *Biologists and the Promise of American Life: From Meriwether Lewis to Alfred Kinsey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Philip J. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

15. There has been some excellent work in this vein of late; see, especially: Cullather, see n. 6; Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). Recent scholarship has also pointed to the international provenance and context of American ideas; see: Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2000); David C. Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).



The story I tell here is divided into three parts, which trace the related careers of cultivationist ideas of development and rural modernity. The first two chapters focus on the creation of rural modernity: how reformers, government experts, and rural people came to envision a rural future, and how this vision was encapsulated in the modernizing program of the Extension Service and 4-H. Chapter one offers an overview of the developmental ideas that came to shape 4-H, showing how concepts from the biological and social sciences centering on the growth and maturation of living things and groups of organisms made their way into a set of rural reform programs that emerged in different regional contexts and that eventually were combined in 4-H club work with the creation of the Extension Service in 1914. Chapter two outlines 4-H's project for rural America in the years surrounding the First World War: its implementation of a model of modernization that involved both the dissemination of scientific knowledge and practices from land-grant colleges and agricultural experiment stations to farm families on the land, the gathering of information about rural conditions, and the overall standardization of club work under a nationalized program that was increasingly focused on boosting farm production. This was not so much a "high modernist" project of surveillance and legibility as it was a "low modernist" effort to enact federal policy in a distributed fashion that relied heavily on local input and administration at the state and county levels.<sup>16</sup>

The middle of the dissertation introduces an important shift in how rural modernity was imagined and negotiated in the interwar period. Chapter three explores the ways in which educational reformers, agricultural scientists, extension officials, 4-H leaders, rural families, club youth, and others used 4-H's now-established system for rural modernization to discuss, question, and reshape what modern farming should entail. During the Great Depression, club leaders drew heavily on ideas from the budding disciplines of ecology and rural

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16. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, see n. 9; Jess Gilbert, "Low Modernism and the Agrarian New Deal: A Different Kind of State," in *Fighting for the Farm: Rural America Transformed*, ed. Jane Adams (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

sociology to advocate an approach to farming, rural life, and land that saw rural communities as organismal, natural-social entities whose health needed to be conserved. This holistic approach to development offered a vision of rural modernity that stood in stark contrast to the production-focused schemes that characterized the World War I era, and was most clearly expressed in two new aspects of 4-H programs that emerged during this time: conservation and health. Although the Second World War transformed these programs in important ways, the communitarian visions for rural life expressed during the 1930s endured in certain aspects of 4-H through the 1950s.

The last section of the dissertation chronicles how rural modernization became a part of a new elaboration of the development narrative after World War II, as 4-H and extension work moved into two new places: rural areas abroad, and cities and suburbs at home. Chapter four examines how World War II and its aftermath changed the locus of developmental efforts away from the rural community toward the farm family, the nation-state, and the market, as increasing agricultural consumption to meet expanding farm production became a primary goal of both agricultural and foreign policy. To show how these shifts occurred, it follows the career of one of 4-H's international efforts, the International Farm Youth Exchange, as well as the emergence of international extension work aimed at developing countries in the third world. Chapter five traces the return of these developmental ideas to the United States in the form of extension programs targeted at urban areas. While the first three chapters chart the ascent and revision of rural modernity as an important way of thinking about development, these last two chapters document its eclipse, as extension's program for rural development was recast as a universal model for national development in the postwar era.



The narrative of this dissertation should be both familiar and new to readers. In one sense, it is an oft-told tale: the story of how farming in America changed over the course of the twentieth century, from a way of



life that would have been recognizable to the nation's founders, to a set of practices that today share little more with their antecedents than their rural setting. But in another it is a very strange story, one that asks us to consider why it is that, despite this enormous transformation and, yes, industrialization of rural places across the globe, we persist in seeing the telos of development as located somewhere else: somewhere urban, somewhere *more* industrial, somewhere other than a farm field. In the words of Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, I wish to offer not so much a counternarrative as an alternative dramaturgy, a different staging that can help breathe new life into well-worn lines and actions.<sup>17</sup> This may be a set of scenes we've rehearsed many times over, but the play is ready for a revival.

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17. Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, "Stories, Strategies, Structures: Rethinking Historical Alternatives to Mass Production," in *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization*, ed. Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1997), p. 31.

# 1

## “The Country’s Best Crop”:

### 4-H, Development, and Rural Modernity

The farm boy develops slowly and naturally. He has time to grow and mature. His youth is long, in a time when our rapid civilization tends to eliminate youth. What schooling he gets has time to soak in and to become a part of him. He comes to manhood fresh and with something to learn. He is in the midst of things that are not forced beyond their time, for trees and birds and the grass grow naturally and in their seasons. The constant contact with farm animals develops a kind of direct and intrinsic naturalness that can scarcely be acquired in any other way.<sup>1</sup>

—*Liberty Hyde Bailey, 1905*

As time goes on in its endless and ceaseless course, environment must crystallize the American nation; its varying elements will become unified, and the weeding-out process will... by selection and environmental influences, leave the finest human product ever known. The transcendent qualities which are placed in plants will have their analogies in the noble composite, the American of the future.<sup>2</sup>

—*Luther Burbank, 1907*

#### INTRODUCTION: CULTIVATING CROPS AND CHILDREN

In 1939, journalist Fred L. Holmes sang the praises of a man he called “A Burbank of Men and Fields.” Ransom Asa Moore, the subject of his piece, was a prominent Wisconsin agriculturist and educator who had risen to prominence in the Badger State through his work improving Wisconsin’s farms. Moore had done this through two main avenues: by developing improved strains of the major grain crops, such as corn, oats, and barley, that were specially adapted to the growing conditions of the different regions of the

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1. Liberty Hyde Bailey, “The School of the Future,” chap. 3, in *The Outlook to Nature* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905), p. 166.

2. Luther Burbank, *The Training of the Human Plant* (New York: The Century Co., 1907), pp. 74–75.

state; and by working with young people to disseminate these crop varieties and teach scientific methods of cultivation that would make for better yields, improved seed selection, and more attractive life on the farm. “For forty years he stirred the ambition to high endeavor among the agricultural youth of Wisconsin,” Holmes rhapsodized. “He became the Burbank of the harvest field who gave the restless farm lad hope and finally made him king of his acres. Moore is a peak on the skyline of growing crops.”<sup>3</sup>

Holmes’s invocation of plant breeder Luther Burbank to lionize Moore would have carried a particular set of associations for readers in the early decades of the twentieth century. As the world’s foremost producer of novel plants and varieties, and one of the most well-known scientist-entrepreneur-inventors of the age, Burbank represented a cluster of ideas about improvement, science, and modernity—in particular, the connections between the improvement of plants and the improvement of human beings and society. By placing Moore within the Burbank mold, Holmes was suggesting that Moore’s activities as a plant breeder and educator were part and parcel of the same process. This was the man who, by developing Wisconsin crop varieties, founding the corn-growing contests for Wisconsin boys and girls, and inviting farmers to the College of Agriculture in Madison for a “Short Course” in scientific farming methods, not only “gave barley a college education,” but educated young people as well. Moore’s “educated crops multiplied the people’s food supply,” while his educated students disseminated better seeds, better methods, and better living far and wide. Emphasizing his pioneer upbringing in Kewaunee County, his youth trapping and selling furs at trading posts, and his skill with the rifle, Holmes placed Moore in the lineage of Daniel Boone and other American frontiersmen who had witnessed the transformation of the midwest from wilderness to settled agriculture. Both a Burbank and a Boone, Moore was, according to Holmes, heir to the nation’s most

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3. “A Burbank of Men and Fields: Ransom A. Moore,” chapter 25 in Fred L. Holmes, *Badger Saints and Sinners*, with a foreword by Hamlin Garland (Milwaukee: E. M. Hale and Company, 1939), pp. 397–409; here, p. 397; Marjorie L. Gleason and William E. Gleason, *The Father of Wisconsin 4-H: The Ransom Asa Moore Story* (Battle Lake, MN: Accurate Publishing and Printing, Inc., 1989).

important progressive traditions: in science, cultivation, and the American landscape.<sup>4</sup>

In Holmes's telling, the life of Ransom Asa Moore was the story of Wisconsin's progress from frontier territory to civilized state. The aspect of this improvement that he saw as most significant, though—Moore's "real work in life"—was not his plant breeding, but the "youth movement" he inspired through his work setting up crop-growing contests among the state's boys and girls. These grew into 4-H clubs, "a movement that in a national field has grown into the largest youth activity in the world," Holmes enthused. This was a legacy at least as important as his horticultural achievements—indeed, his work on crops would hardly have caught hold had it not been enabled by his youth work. "Through young folk clubs Moore took the findings of scientists to the farm," Holmes wrote, "there to spiritualize rural practice." Indeed, the "father of Wisconsin 4-H" is to this day known and memorialized on the University of Wisconsin campus at two sites just across the street from one another: in the name of Moore Hall, housing the Department of Horticulture, and in a tree planted on the occasion of his death in 1941 by Wisconsin 4-H club members in what is still known as "4-H Knoll," a small copse of trees tucked next to Agriculture Hall. In death as in life, Moore's improvement of crops and of children were never far apart.<sup>5</sup>

Holmes' paean to Moore, and the physical monuments that remain to him on the agricultural campus at Madison, point to one of the most important ways in which agricultural experts, schoolteachers, and rural reformers sought to improve life in the American countryside during the early decades of the twentieth century. By teaching boys and girls about the natural world through the cultivation of plants, both children and nature would be improved. The innate processes of growth and development—inherent in all living, growing things—meant that children, plants, and animals shared an important bond which, when fostered, would

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4. Holmes, see n. 3, pp. 397–409. On Burbank, see Jane S. Smith, *The Garden of Invention: Luther Burbank and the Business of Breeding Plants* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009). On the stories that circulated about his accomplishments in the first half of the twentieth century, see Katherine Pandora, "Knowledge Held in Common: Tales of Luther Burbank and Science in the American Vernacular," *Isis* 92 (2001): 484–516.

5. Holmes, see n. 3, pp. 403, 397–398; Gleason and Gleason, see n. 3, p. 223.

result in better, proper, healthier development towards maturity for all of them. Guiding these processes of development simultaneously, in conversation with one another, would lead to better crops, better livestock, better children. These better stock—human and non-human—would contribute, both materially and spiritually, to the renewal of rural life, the process of agrarian democracy, and the fulfillment of America's promise.

The youth activities today known as 4-H clubs were one of the main thrusts of a broad rural improvement campaign that swept the nation at the dawn of the twentieth century. The efforts of Moore, and a host of other schoolteachers, educators, horticulturists, and agricultural experts, to channel the processes of growth and life toward improving ends grew out of a set of turn-of-the-century concerns about the consequences of urbanization, industrialization, and scientific and technological change. These were profoundly transforming not only the practice of farming but the rural United States itself—and thereby the national character and political system. America's farmers had long been seen as the foundation of democracy, but their way of life appeared to be at risk. With the closing of the frontier, the growth of industry, and the global economic connections that put American farmers into contact with—and often at the mercy of—world markets, people, particularly young people, were leaving the countryside in droves, putting the future of the entire nation at risk. Country life in the U.S. became the center of a new crusade to preserve the American people, landscape, and nation—and rural youth were the ground troops reformers most sought to enlist. The 4-H club “movement” Moore initiated in Wisconsin was one phase of this larger effort, which culminated in the founding of the Cooperative Extension Service in 1914, and the institutionalization of 4-H as a national program.

This chapter takes 1914 as its endpoint in order to explore the rural problem at the turn of the twentieth century: how a set of educators, agricultural specialists, government officials, and public-minded reformers defined, characterized, and explained it; the ways in which they sought to address it; and the institutions

and techniques they advanced in order to do so. At the root of their efforts was an understanding of the rural problem as problem of *development*, whereby a natural process of growth had occurred in an uneven manner, resulting in social and economic problems for the parts that lagged behind—specifically, America’s agricultural landscapes and people. As a result, the rural problem could only be solved by developmental means. This meant manipulating the agricultural environment—its material conditions, its culture, its institutions—in such a way as to get development back on track, reshaping rural livelihoods, communities, and institutions in ways that would reconcile them with the conditions of modernity. This was not an attempt to urbanize or industrialize the countryside; rather, it was an effort to harmonize the farming way of life and the new industrial capitalist order, to develop a distinct modernity by and for the countryside: a *rural modernity* that would be progressive, scientific, and modern, but rooted in the cultivation of the land as both an individual means of making a living and as a social system and way of life.

Consequently, reformers in government, education, and agriculture set about implementing this rural form of modernization through rural processes carried out by rural people in cooperation with rural specialists. In order to foster “the development of a real rural society that shall rest directly on the land,” they focused their efforts around cultivation: of plants, of animals, of landscapes, of people, of communities. This was not simply a convenient metaphor, but reflected a contemporary understanding of culture that had as much to do with manipulating the life processes of plants, animals, and people as it did with intellectual improvement. This cultivationist approach to development was central to rural reform at the turn of the twentieth century, and was institutionalized in a system of country life education that positioned rural youth as the nation’s most important objects of development and guidance—a system that would eventually be known as 4-H.<sup>6</sup>

Americans have tended to frame the story of rural modernization in the twentieth century primarily

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6. The quote is from *Report of the Commission on Country Life* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909), 16. For more on the cultural significance of cultivation and developmentalism, see Philip J. Pauly, *Biologists and the Promise of American Life: From Meriwether Lewis to Alfred Kinsey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Peter J. Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

in terms of technological and economic change, orchestrated by scientific experts, government agents, and commercial interests. Two narratives tend to follow: one triumphal, one tragic. The triumphal narrative is most familiar in institutional and economic histories of American agriculture and the writings of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). It also pervades popular accounts of agricultural progress—not to mention the advertising campaigns of agribusiness—and informs current debates around food production, farming, population, and the environment. It tends to emphasize the march of progress in terms of increasing yields, technological advances, and economic measures at the level of national farm output, and sees the modernization of agriculture as a mostly good thing. The triumphalist narrative expresses a conviction that the twentieth-century transformation of farming and rural life has been largely for the benefit of humanity.<sup>7</sup>

Historians of science, agriculture, rural life, and the environment have tended to be more critical in their assessment. According to their view, a set of urban-minded reformers, profit-minded businessmen, and upwardly mobile bureaucrats attempted to remake rural life in the image of the city, the farm in the image of the factory, the agricultural livelihood in the image of the industrial capitalist business. These reformers were at worst contemptuous of farmers and their ways, and at best merely tolerant of their “backwardness”—but to a man, the stories suggest, their relationship to farmers was inherently oppositional, and they were largely uninterested in and unsympathetic to farmers’ expressions of their needs. In the most cynical version of this story, professionalizing scientists and bureaucrats used the American countryside as a means to attain a higher social standing by ensuring their own relevance and continued employment as arbiters of rural affairs, and exploit agricultural problems to further more sinister aims, such as a social-Darwinist purification of the rural

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7. For triumphalist and modernization-friendly accounts, see: Wayne D. Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-Five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989); Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Souther Agriculture, 1865–1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984); A. C. True, *A History of Agricultural Education in the United States, 1785–1925*, United States Department of Agriculture, Miscellaneous Publication No. 36 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929); A. C. True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States, 1785–1923*, United States Department of Agriculture, Miscellaneous Publication No. 15 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1928); Lincoln David Kelsey and Cannon Chiles Hearne, *Cooperative Extension Work* (Ithaca: Comstock Publishing Associates, 1963).

“stock,” while capitalism lay waste to the countryside. The outcome was disastrous for the rural community and the family farm, and virtually assured the expansion of the environmentally destructive, capital intensive, industrial mono-cash-crop agriculture that today dominates the American countryside.<sup>8</sup>

While the overarching assessment is certainly correct, what these tragic accounts tend to share is an unexamined assumption about the nature of economic and technological change. Specifically, they have failed to sufficiently historicize the *visions* of improvement and advancement their reformers described; as a result, they see economic development as an instrumentalist process, inherently based upon the machine as a guiding principle, and inevitably heading toward capitalist consolidation. But the language people like Roosevelt, Knapp, and Bailey used to describe and diagnose the rural problem, and the means by which they sought to address it, beg a slightly different interpretation, one that places the cultivationist paradigm of “growthy” development alongside the more mechanical processes of technological change and economic

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8. The classic account here is David B. Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900–1930* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979). For other examples, see: Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Donald J. Pisani, *From the Family Farm to Agribusiness: The Irrigation Crusade in California and the West, 1850–1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). For variations on this narrative, see: Debra A. Reid, *Reaping a Greater Harvest: African Americans, the Extension Service, and Rural Reform in Jim Crow Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007); Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures Since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920–1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Deborah Fink, *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line: Workers and Change in the Rural Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). For environmental historians’ take, see: Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Steven Stoll, *The Fruits of Natural Advantage: Making the Industrial Countryside in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Douglas Cazaux Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Andrew P. Duffin, “Vanishing Earth: Soil Erosion in the Palouse, 1930–1945,” *Agricultural History* 79, no. 2 (2005): 173–192. For the eugenic strain, see: Nancy L. Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999); Laura Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890–1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Alexandra Minna Stern, “‘We Cannot Make a Silk Purse Out of a Sow’s Ear’: Eugenics in the Hoosier Heartland,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 103 (Mar. 2007): 3–38; Steven Selden, “Transforming Better Babies into Fitter Families: Archival Resources and the History of the American Eugenics Movement, 1908–1930,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, no. 2 (June 2005): 199–225; Samuel A. McReynolds, “Eugenics and Rural Development: The Vermont Commission on Country Life’s Program for the Future,” *Agricultural History* 71, no. 3 (1997): 300–329; Barbara Kimmelman, “The American Breeders’ Association: Genetics and Eugenics in an Agricultural Context, 1903–13,” *Social Studies of Science* 13 (1983): 163–204. Today this narrative appears most prominently in debates over food: see, most notably, Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).



modernization.<sup>9</sup> Taking this sense of development seriously helps us see the processes of organismal, human, and social change that were part and parcel of the progressive modernizing project—and that, in rural areas, allowed reformers and local people alike to articulate and pursue place-based versions of modernization that did not end in urbanization or industrialization, but were rural in character. In 4-H youth programs, this impetus had its most lasting expression. 4-H and extension work were not projects of massive rural technocratic social engineering, as many accounts suggest. Rather, they were attempts to create *rural modernities* akin to the (agri)cultural processes of farming itself: attempts to grow, on a highly distributed basis, a great new crop of farmers.<sup>10</sup>

To fully understand the emergence of 4-H and extension work, we must first get at how their promoters understood development, and its relationship to modernity, progress, and the American nation. This chapter begins with a discussion of the meaning of development at the turn of the twentieth century, focusing on this metaphor of growth and maturation as it was elaborated in theories of life and society that often shaded into one another, and that had a powerful influence on Progressive social, educational, and agricultural policy. These culminated in the 1909 report of Roosevelt’s Commission on Country Life, which shaped subsequent attempts to define and address the rural problem. It then turns to reformers’ efforts to direct the

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9. This phrase appeared in many 4-H materials, including: Miriam Birdseye, *Growth Work with 4-H Clubs*, Extension Service Circular 14 (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, Extension Service, October 1926); “Young Folks: Do Something and Be Somebody,” 1930, New York State College of Agriculture Extension Service 4-H Club Records, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #21-24-692 (henceforth cited as NYS4H), Box 131, p. 31.

10. For versions that better recognize the contradictions in the modernizing project, that attempt to unpack the motivations of the modernizers, that emphasize the agency of local people and the land, and that explore the alternative visions held by many reformers, rural and urban, lay and expert alike, see: Jess Gilbert, “Low Modernism and the Agrarian New Deal: A Different Kind of State,” in *Fighting for the Farm: Rural America Transformed*, ed. Jane Adams (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); David Vaught, *Cultivating California: Growers, Specialty Crops, and Labor, 1875–1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999). This analysis is influenced by the “historical alternatives” approach to the history of industrialization; see: Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, eds., *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization* (Paris: Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1997); Philip Scranton, *Endless Novelty: Specialty Production and American Industrialization, 1865–1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

development of rural places by guiding the proper development of rural youth. Three distinct strains of rural youth work proved particularly influential: clubs and contests conceived by rural school superintendents in the midwestern states, nature study and junior extension activities spearheaded by Liberty Hyde Bailey in New York State, and the Farmer's Cooperative Demonstration work in the South under the direction of Seaman Knapp. All emerged at the same time, and all grew out of efforts to improve public education in the rural districts by gearing it more directly to farm life, thereby raising farm incomes, and making both school instruction and farm practices more scientific through the study of nature. Despite these similarities, each approach encapsulated a distinct view of rural life that was rooted in its geographic region. These midwestern, northeastern, and southern approaches to the rural problem were thus woven into the fabric of extension work as it emerged over the first decade of the twentieth century. Finally, this chapter examines the combination of these efforts in a system of education that would eventually become the Cooperative Extension Service of the USDA. In the process, a developmental vision of rural improvement was institutionalized in the federal government, one that would continue to exert an influence over the course of the twentieth century.

### **AGRICULTURE, MODERNITY, AND AMERICAN PROGRESS**

In the summer of 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote to Liberty Hyde Bailey, Dean of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell, asking him to chair a commission to survey the conditions of rural life in the United States, and identify ways in which it might be improved. "We Americans are making great progress in the development of our agricultural resources," Roosevelt wrote, pointing to the increases in agricultural production that were resulting from agricultural science and technology: new labor-saving equipment, improved varieties, and a better understanding of soil chemistry and plant and animal nutrition. "But it is equally true that the social and economic institutions of the open country are not keeping pace with

the development of the nation as a whole.” Furthermore, the business of farming itself was “not the whole of country life. The great rural interests are human interests, and good crops are of little value to the farmer unless they open the door to a good kind of life on the farm.” If agriculture ceased to be a good way of making a living, rural life would experience a precipitous decline. What, then, would be the fate of a nation whose character and democratic way of life was rooted, as Roosevelt believed, in its country stock? “The problem of country life,” he declared, “is in the truest sense a national problem.... With the single exception of the conservation of our natural resources, which underlies the problem of rural life, there is no other material question of greater importance now before the American people.”<sup>11</sup>

Roosevelt’s creation of the Commission on Country Life marked the resurgence of rural and agricultural issues on the national political stage. The Commission’s report, issued the following December, became the most succinct expression of what by the late 1800s had come to be known as the “rural problem”—a host of issues relating to farm incomes, agricultural markets, industrial capital, and rural health, but which manifested itself most alarmingly for men like Roosevelt, who believed in the agrarian font of democracy, in rural depopulation and decline. The American countryside at the dawn of the twentieth century was by and large a poor, unhealthy, and unpleasant place to live, populated by downtrodden people, many of them tenants, eking out a meager living on exhausted soil, and buffeted by the whims of distant markets.<sup>12</sup>

Roosevelt’s concerns about the future of rural life, and, consequently, the future of the American nation, were hardly unusual. At the dawn of the twentieth century, a host of reformers in all sections of the

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11. Theodore Roosevelt to Liberty Hyde Bailey, August 10, 1908. Reprinted in *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, see n. 6, pp. 22–24.

12. For earlier articulations of the rural problem, see I. P. Roberts, “The Exodus from the Farm: What are its Causes and what can the Colleges of Agriculture do to Nourish a Hearty Sentiment for Rural Life?” *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations* 10 (1896): 80–82; E. Davenport, “The Exodus from the Farm: What are its Causes and what can the Colleges of Agriculture do to Nourish a Hearty Sentiment for Rural Life?” *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations* 10 (1896): 82–87. A good summary of the rural question and the Country Life Commission is in Todd Dresser, “Nightmares of Rural Life: Fearing the Future in the Transition from Country Life to the Family Farm, 1890–1960” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2011), chapters 1 and 2.

country articulated similar worries about social, economic, and environmental decline in America's farming communities and landscapes, and advanced ideas on how to remedy these problems. Many of these reformers—Roosevelt and Bailey included—had arrived at their views on rural improvement through experiences acquired in the more recently broken lands west of the Mississippi. They tended to share a belief that small, family-owned and -operated farms would be key to the improvement of rural life, for the small farm was the crucible of the American character, of the civilization of the United States, the republic, and the sovereignty of the people. Moreover, *how* people farmed—how they inhabited and transformed the land on which they lived—was an important ingredient in this recipe for national improvement. Government, the reformers agreed, had an important role to play in fostering the conditions whereby this developmental process could unfold in a proper and healthy manner, particularly for the young people of the countryside. As USDA special agent Seaman A. Knapp asserted, “One of the greatest problems before the American people has been how to interest in rural life and attach to the farm the young man who has acquired a liberal education and displayed a capacity for leadership.” The ongoing flight of the best and brightest rural youth to the cities, and to trades other than farming, was, according to him, “one of the most serious retrogressive factors in our whole civilization.” If allowed to continue, it could turn the entire countryside into a place of degradation and decline—something that, for turn-of-the-century Americans like Knapp, posed a serious problem for American democracy. If the independent yeoman farmer became extinct, the republican project of self-governance would surely be in jeopardy.<sup>13</sup>

#### FRAMING THE RURAL PROBLEM: PROGRESSIVE IDEAS OF DEVELOPMENT

As Roosevelt and Knapp's convictions indicate, approaches to the rural problem at the turn of the twentieth century were profoundly shaped by a set of ideas about progress, its manifestations in the American land-

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13. Seaman A. Knapp, “The Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work,” in *Yearbook of the Department of Agriculture for 1909* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), p. 158.

scape and its people, and its relationship to democracy. These were expressed most famously by Wisconsin historian Frederick Jackson Turner in “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” In this 1893 paper, delivered to the American Historical Association, Turner sought to “explain American development” by chronicling the processes of environmental, economic, and social change that accompanied westward expansion, and tying them to what was distinctive in the national character. For Turner, it was the physical act of transforming the frontier wilderness into a settled landscape of agriculture and commerce that created the American: “a new product” who was individualistic, self-reliant, distinct from his European forebears, and, most importantly, democratic. This process played out over and over again, in space and time, as the leading edge of civilization marched west. But this process, so central to the creation and maintenance of the American nation, its people, and its political system, was at its end: the frontier had vanished, and with it the assurance that these characteristics would be continually renewed.<sup>14</sup>

Turner was hardly the only observer to comment on the connections between the development of the American landscape and the improvement of its crops, animals, people, and way of life, or to express ambivalence about the end of this “first period of American history.” At the close of the nineteenth century, a host of social commentators from a range of disciplines and backgrounds articulated a set of theories—and attendant worries—about what American progress entailed, and its potential consequences, both good and bad. Though their specific prescriptions varied, what these ideas shared was a developmental view of people, organisms, landscapes, and societies, rooted in contemporary biological thinking about growth. At the same time, they operated as jeremiads, warning people of the potential downfall of American civilization, and alerting them to what was necessary for them to save it. These agrarian Jeremiahs, as we might call them, sought to reconcile the biological basis of rural life with the more mechanical conditions of industrial

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14. On the Turner thesis, see: Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921); William Coleman, “Science and Symbol in the Turner Frontier Hypothesis,” *The American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (Oct. 1966): 22–49; William Cronon, “Revisiting the Vanishing Frontier: The Legacy of Frederick Jackson Turner,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Apr. 1987): 157–176.

modernity in order to save both. In the process, they articulated a rural vision of modernization.<sup>15</sup>

Just as Turner was concerned about the future of American democracy on a rapidly settled and civilizing continent, men like Roosevelt, Knapp, and Bailey were worried about the effects of population changes on the health of the nation. Although Turner was concerned by the increasing number of people on the land, which represented, at least demographically, the closing of the frontier, Roosevelt and the members of his Commission on Country Life were alarmed by their distribution: specifically, the flight of people from the farms and rural areas and toward the teeming cities. This diagnosis reflected a pervasive developmental strain in Progressive thinking about a number of social issues, as well as the interrelation of biological and social themes. Indeed, as historians of science have observed, Turner's developmental thesis was deeply indebted to concepts drawn from biology and geography, in particular the idea of the social organism, which saw society as "a living, self-perpetuating integral and adaptable totality."<sup>16</sup> For agricultural fundamentalists like Roosevelt, who saw agriculture as the basis of all economic life, maintaining the proper balance between country and city was a central part of regulating the social organism.<sup>17</sup>

Roosevelt, Knapp, and Bailey were not alone in seeing the problem of growth and maturation as one that spanned the natural and social worlds. As many scholars have argued, a developmentalist strain pervaded both biological and social thinking in the nineteenth century, from child study and education to economic reform and citizenship. This viewpoint was related to scientific thinking about the evolution of species, the development of individual organisms, and the progress of races and human types, and spanned fields from

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15. Turner, see n. 14, p. 38.

16. Coleman, see n. 14, p. 25.

17. On agricultural fundamentalism and agrarianism, see: Joseph Stancliffe Davis, "Agricultural Fundamentalism," in *Economics, Sociology, and the Modern World: Essays in Honor of T. N. Carver*, ed. Norman E. Himes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935); Gilbert C. Fite, "The Historical Development of Agricultural Fundamentalism in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Farm Economics* 44, no. 5 (Dec. 1962): 1203–1211; Wayne C. Rohrer, "Agrarianism and the Social Organization of U.S. Agriculture: The Concomitance of Stability and Change," *Rural Sociology* 35, no. 1 (Mar. 1970): 5–14; Anne B. W. Effland, "Agrarianism and Child Labor Policy for Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 79 (3 2005): 281–297; Anne B. W. Effland, "Small Farms, Cash Crops, Agrarian Ideals, and International Development," *Agricultural History* 84 (1 2010): 1–13.

embryology to paleontology to anthropology. Generally speaking, this developmental perspective saw the innate processes of growth and maturation as the defining features of organic life, and what was true for individual organisms was true for society as a whole. Just as the life of a plant, animal, or amoeba consisted of a natural unfolding of innate processes along a series of predetermined stages, society itself passed through discernible phases. These were conditioned by the environment, and could be influenced by changing that environment. Development at the close of the nineteenth century thus entailed an unfolding or unrolling, and was intimately connected to a view of organisms and society that saw them as defined in relation to their environment in the broadest sense.<sup>18</sup>

Development did not always proceed properly, however. It could be arrested, or hastened, or perverted, in ways that could have pernicious consequences. Should development proceed too slowly, the organism or group in question might never reach maturity, and become stuck in an earlier, incomplete stage of its growth. If development unfolded too quickly, the consequences could also be bad: advancing to a later stage before the completion or the fulfillment of the previous one could result in stunted growth. Finally, development could be steered in unnatural ways that would result in the thing in question never fulfilling its innate promise. Ensuring the proper sequence of development, at the proper rate, was thus essential.

Of course, development was not beyond human manipulation. As contemporary research in biology, embryology, and zoology demonstrated, changes in the environment could influence the course of growth. The work of biologist Jacques Loeb on artificial parthenogenesis, whereby he induced the embryonic development of unfertilized sea urchin eggs by manipulating the chemical composition of the seawater in which they were kept, was indicative of this growing belief that humans could guide development towards improv-

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18. Pauly, *Biologists and the Promise of American Life*, see n. 6; Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Ronald L. Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution*, see n. 6; Ronald Rainger, *An Agenda for Antiquity: Henry Fairfield Osborn and Vertebrate Paleontology at the American Museum of Natural History, 1890–1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991).

ing ends.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the entire Progressive project consisted in one way or another of regulating development: of plants, animals, people, groups, children, society, institutions, markets... the list goes on. That regulation was directed at ensuring the best possible outcome for the whole. Development thus had a set of moral valences, and the hallmark of Progressivism consisted in ensuring the correct and proper unfolding of the development process under ideal conditions, such that the outcome was the best possible. This was the nature of improvement.<sup>20</sup>

Central to these notions of the joint improvement of crops, landscapes, people, and communities was the metaphor and practice of horticulture.<sup>21</sup> Many of the rural reformers were themselves practicing horticulturalists, Liberty Hyde Bailey being the most notable. It is no accident that this was a period during which analogies between human beings and plants were extremely common—for example, the experimental horticulturist Luther Burbank's book on child-rearing, entitled *The Training of the Human Plant*. For specialists like Burbank, the act of cultivating and improving plants was replete with lessons for the improvement of humankind through education. "What we should do," he wrote, "is to strengthen the weak, cultivate them as we cultivate plants, build them up, make them the very best they are capable of becoming."<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the work of educators was replete with a parallel set of analogies between the vegetable and the human realms. The German educational reformer Friedrich Froebel, whose work formed the foundation of the nursery school and child study movements in the United States, coined perhaps the most common term linking plants and children: the kindergarten, a place where children would be cultivated according to their proper develop-

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19. Philip J. Pauly, *Controlling Life: Jacques Loeb and the Engineering Ideal in Biology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

20. An excellent discussion of the American idea of improvement is Mark Fiege, "Nature's Nobleman: Abraham Lincoln and the Improvement of America," chap. 4, in *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012). See also: Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, see n. 10.

21. See, especially: Vaught, see n. 10; Philip J. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

22. Burbank, see n. 2, p. 23. See also Smith, *The Garden of Invention*, see n. 4.



ment. The word “nursery,” likewise, reflected a set of elisions between a place for tending plant seedlings and one for nurturing infants and toddlers. The combination of the nursery and the school into a new method for early childhood education reflected the power of the cultivationist metaphor in how Progressives thought about the youngest and most impressionable members of the social body.<sup>23</sup>

As Burbank and Froebel’s treatises suggest, a great deal of Progressive-Era concerns about development were directed at children and carried out through educational and social reform. The turn of the twentieth century witnessed a surge in popular concern over children’s issues. This was when child labor statutes were first proposed, when pure food laws to ensure a healthy milk supply came into existence, when infant and maternal health became national political causes. Protecting children from exploitation, abuse, and conditions that would essentially cause them to enter the adult world too early became a new cause for many reformers. This notion of childhood as a separate time worthy of preservation and conservation was in many ways quite new. It led to a flurry of concern over the place of children in the new industrial order, and the effects of modern life on this sensitive period of development.<sup>24</sup>

The urban environment seemed to be particularly harmful to young people, as did wage labor in factories. The conditions of industrial life in the teeming cities were damaging not only to bodily health, but to spiritual and mental health as well. The kinds of labor children performed in factories came to be seen in the late nineteenth century as dangerous and damaging, and thus subject to special regulation. Likewise, juvenile

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23. Friedrich Froebel, *Friedrich Froebel’s Pedagogics of the Kindergarten, or, his ideas concerning the play and playthings of the child*, ed. Translated by Josephine Jarvis (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899); Friedrich Froebel, *Friedrich Froebel’s Education by Development, the second part of the Pedagogics of the Kindergarten*, ed. Translated by Josephine Jarvis (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903); Anna Botsford Comstock, ed., *Boys and Girls: A Nature Study Magazine* (1902–1907).

24. Ellwood Patterson Cubberley, *Rural Life and Education: A Study of the Rural-School Problem as a Phase of the Rural-Life Problem* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1914); Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Training of Farmers* (New York: The Century Co., 1909); Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893–1958*, third ed. (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004); Herbert M. Kliebard, *Schooled to Work: Vocationalism and the American Curriculum, 1876–1946* (New York: Columbia Teachers College Press, 1999); Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890–1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Alexandra Minna Stern and Howard Markel, eds., *Formative Years: Children’s Health in the United States, 1880–2000* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

offenders came to be seen as worthy of a distinct form of justice, one focused on reform rather than punishment and incarceration. The emergence of juvenile delinquency as a category, and of special juvenile courts for young offenders, reflected these ideas that children were different from adults, both developmentally and legally, and should be treated as such by the state. Rehabilitation and guidance became the watchwords of the day.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to childhood itself being thought of in new ways, periods within childhood were also being newly defined. Clark University psychologist and child-study advocate G. Stanley Hall defined the period of adolescence as a separate and distinct part of the maturation process, and linked its defining characteristics to the conditions of modernity. His work caught on in educational and reform circles, spawning a flurry of writing on adolescence in the first half of the twentieth century. For these authors, the teenage years constituted a distinct phase of human development, marked by storm and stress as the child attained sexual maturity, transitioned to adulthood, and gained independence from parents. This “adjustment” needed to be shepherded and guided properly during this fragile period. Problems of adjustment—whether sexual, social, familial, moral, or vocational—could lead to stunted growth and permanent immaturity.<sup>26</sup>

Early twentieth-century theories of adolescence held that the demarcation of the period itself was an artifact of civilization, and especially urban-industrial modernity. “Savage” peoples, without highly developed economies, industry, science, technology, or complex divisions of labor could teach their young all the skills they would need to become productive members of the group; as a result, they attained sexual maturity

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25. My understanding of these ideas owes much to the recollections of home economists; see New York State College of Home Economics Project, Oral Histories, 1963–1964, #47–2-O.H. (Henceforth cited as NYSCHPOH). See also: Effland, “Agrarianism and Child Labor,” see n. 17; Benjamin Barr Lindsey, *The Problem of the Children and How the State of Colorado Cares for Them* (Denver: The Merchants Publishing Co., 1904); Sharon Carroll, “Elizabeth Lee Vincent Oral History Transcript,” 1964, NYSCHPOH, O.H. 108.

26. Granville Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904); Granville Stanley Hall, *Youth: Its Education, Regimen, and Hygiene* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1907); Leta S. Hollingsworth, *The Psychology of the Adolescent* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1928); Grace Loucks Elliott, *Understanding the Adolescent Girl* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930); E. DeAlton Partridge, *Social Psychology of Adolescence* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1938); Bert I. Beverly, *In Defense of Children* (New York: The John Day Company, 1941).

around the same time that they became integrated or apprenticed into the community economy. Children in industrial societies, by contrast, needed to acquire a host of specialized skills, as well as a formal education, in order to become productive citizens; this process took much longer, and required youth to remain in the home, dependent upon their families for their well-being, long beyond the time that humans would “naturally” gain independence. This lag between biological readiness for adulthood and the attainment of economic independence led to special stress for the adolescent in an industrialized society. In urban areas, the problem was even more severe: while rural youth generally could lend a hand with farm chores, the city’s sharp separation between home and work life meant that children had little opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the family’s livelihood. This could lead to severe frustrations and problems of adjustment.<sup>27</sup>

Hall’s two-volume treatise on adolescence illustrates the ways in which the development of the individual and the group—or, more pertinently, the race—were theorized as essentially the same process. He moved from a series of chapters on the properties of adolescence, sexual development, juvenile crime, adolescent love, adolescent feelings towards nature and religion, intellectual development, and education, and ended, without skipping a beat, with a chapter on “adolescent races and their treatment.” Although Hall’s attitude about these “adolescent races” was thoroughly paternalistic, the moral stance he adopted with respect to their treatment was an excellent expression of the Progressive emphasis on proper, in-due-time development, and the aversion to disruptions in the natural course of things. Essentially claiming that these groups of people were akin to children, Hall argued that making war against them, or forcing them to adopt Western, developed ways, would be the moral equivalent of warring against children, sullyng their innocence. “Primitive peoples have the same right to linger in the paradise of childhood,” he wrote.<sup>28</sup> They should be allowed to grow up in their own due course. Furthermore, he argued, it would be folly to simply see the Anglo-Saxon race as the ultimate

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27. Hollingsworth, see n. 26; Elliott, see n. 26; Partridge, see n. 26.

28. Granville Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, vol. II (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904), p. 649.

heir to progress and civilization. “If history has any lesson larger and more impressive than all others, it is that both races and national types of culture have their day, grow old, and die.”<sup>29</sup> Death, as much as growth, was a defining feature of development, and what was now ascendant would not always be so. “[E]very vigorous race, however rude and undeveloped, is, like childhood, worthy of the maximum of reverence and care and study, and may become the chosen organ of a new dispensation of culture and civilization.”<sup>30</sup> Western culture might be the pinnacle of civilization at the time Hall was writing, but failing to properly cultivate human development would lead to decadence or descent.<sup>31</sup>

Hall’s preoccupation with race, progress, and degeneration was hardly singular: Progressive ideas of development had an avowedly racial cast, one that was wrapped up in an understanding of progress as a cycle, not necessarily one of endless growth. At a time when immigration threatened the social body of white Anglo-Americans, and prominent politicians, scientists, and commentators—including President Roosevelt himself—warned of “race suicide,” fostering the development of particular children and particular groups of people became a national priority. Policies promoting a pronatalist agenda reflected a nationwide concern with both preserving and reproducing white, middle-class American culture, both biologically, in terms of bodies, and socially, in terms of relationships. The developmentalist paradigm linked these processes to the American landscape. As Laura Lovett has argued, Roosevelt’s conservation and rural life policies were intended to promote the reproduction of white Americans on the land. By shaping the countryside, politicians could shape the human products of the countryside as well as the vegetable and animal ones. Thus, the shaping of rural landscapes and livelihoods was a project of both biological and social development.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Hall, *Adolescence*, vol. II, see n. 28, pp. 717–718.

30. Ibid., p. 748.

31. Rainger, see n. 18.

32. Lovett, see n. 8; Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

## DIAGNOSING THE RURAL PROBLEM: THE COMMISSION ON COUNTRY LIFE

When Roosevelt assembled the Country Life Commission to address these issues of rural life and national progress, he brought together a set of experts from different fields. This reflected the nature of his legislative agenda, but it also influenced the way in which the Commission framed the problem of country life. All of these ideas—the belief in developmental processes as the key to organic and social life, the understanding that development could be shaped and guided by human agency, the importance of the environment in conditioning the developmental process, the centrality of youth in providing the proper foundation for future development, the special threats modernity posed for young people, and the moral responsibility of leaders in both science and government to use their knowledge and expertise to direct development towards natural and proper ends for the good of both the individual and society—were reflected clearly in the Country Life Commission’s 1909 report.

The Commission diagnosed the rural problem as a lag in adjustment to the conditions of modernity, a case of development gone awry. Modern life was characterized by a new web of social and economic relationships, but farming, despite its position as the foundation of all wealth and economic activity, still stood apart. Likewise, the farmer himself remained “separate,” unintegrated into systems of capital and credit, he was a solitary figure trying to make his way against “organized interests;” thus, he suffered most from the economic dislocations of modernity. “In all the great series of farm occupations the readjustment has been the most tardy, because the whole structure of a traditional and fundamental system has been involved,” the Commission reported. “It is not strange, therefore, that development is still arrested in certain respects; that marked inequalities have arisen; or that positive injustice may prevail even to a very marked and widespread extent. All these difficulties are the results of the unequal development of our contemporary civilization.”<sup>33</sup>

It was thus not that rural places hadn’t developed at all—quite the contrary. Farm incomes were ris-

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33. *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, see n. 6, p. 21; Dresser, see n. 12.

ing, and agricultural production was increasing. Rates of rural depopulation had slowed. Rather, it was the *contrast* between the rapid progress and adjustment of cities and businesses to industrial capitalism, and the slower pace of change and adjustment of rural areas and agriculture to these new conditions, that constituted the root of the problem. The nation's development suffered from a schism: it was proceeding in an uncoordinated fashion, and one-half of the citizenry—the mythologically most important half—was at risk of becoming alienated from the national body. The measure of rural life, the Commission argued, should be taken not in terms of the past, but in terms of what was possible; and in these terms, rural America was not measuring up.<sup>34</sup>

The Country Life Commission was not the first group to articulate these concerns about modernization and rural America in terms of a problem of development and adjustment. Many observers beginning in the late nineteenth century were alarmed by the effects that America's economic and technological boom was having in the countryside. "We have overdone the matter of development," remarked the director of the Illinois Experiment Station at an 1895 gathering, "and the wonder is that American agriculture has endured so well."<sup>35</sup> Compounding this problem of adjustment was what several contemporary observers termed the "modern exodus:" the flight of rural people from the farms to the towns and cities. They moved for many reasons: to retire from farm work, to provide their children with access to better schooling, to start a business, because of soil exhaustion, or because of general failure to make a living. Whatever the reasons, the result was that the land they had occupied was often rented out. This rise in absentee ownership and tenancy was of grave concern for agrarian thinkers and politicians who believed that the yeoman farmer was the wellspring of American life and democracy.

Furthermore, the proliferation of tenant farming was associated in most agriculturists' minds with a

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34. *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, see n. 6; Scott J. Peters and Paul A. Morgan, "The Country Life Commission: Reconsidering a Milestone in American Agricultural History," *Agricultural History* 78, no. 3 (2004): 289–316.

35. Davenport, see n. 12, p. 83.

general lowering of class as well as income. If this continued, farming as a vocation was at risk of being thoroughly degraded. “The calling must be fairly profitable or a cultured people will not develop on the land or remain if they do develop.”<sup>36</sup> These remarks echoed the familiar strain of worries about the decline and degradation that marked the end of a people’s ascendancy to the mantle of civilization. The rural problem was thus a concern for all Americans who believed their nation was on the brink of fulfilling its inherent promise. What was required was to coordinate the development of the nation as a whole, to make sure that the parts that were lagging did not lag for long. Otherwise, they might compromise the total development of the whole.

The solution the Commission put forth in its report was likewise developmental in nature, and took a holistic view of rural issues. It called for a three-pronged approach based on knowledge, education, and organization, promoted by the government as well as a broad-based popular “campaign for rural progress,” and carried out in a coordinated manner by the federal government, the states, communities, voluntary organizations, and, most importantly, rural people themselves. This campaign would not be focused simply on making agriculture more productive or profitable, but on making rural life more pleasant, attractive, healthy, wholesome, and fulfilling, not only financially but intellectually, spiritually, and socially. The government’s responsibility would be to provide “some means or agency for the guidance of public opinion toward the development of a real rural society that shall rest directly on the land.”<sup>37</sup> This could be carried out through a national system of extension work, connecting the institutions of agricultural science and policy—the USDA, the land-grant colleges, and the experiment stations—with local groups, community institutions, and farm families on the land.

The Commission’s plan reflected a developmentalist view of rural and national progress in three impor-

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36. Davenport, see n. 12, 85.

37. *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, see n. 6, p. 16.

tant ways. First, it consistently articulated both the nature of the rural problem and the strategies to remedy it in the language of development, growth, and cultivation. The report was replete with such phrases as “the development of ... rural society,” “the gradual rebuilding of a new agriculture and new rural life,” and “developed from the strong resident forces of the open country,” as well as repeated references to the development and improvement of soil, agricultural methods, people, communities, natural resources, and the American nation—processes which the Commission represented as inextricable from one another.<sup>38</sup>

Second, the Commission’s strategy was premised on the collective action of local people and initiative, guided and shepherded by the state, but carried out using native resources, both human and natural. The role played by experts in this process of “rural reconstruction” was not to direct or to actually carry out any of the work itself. All this would be done by local people. Experts would play an advisory and catalytic role, in which they would help stimulate and guide the development of native leadership, organization, and knowledge. The development of local resources—both human and natural—formed the heart of the Commission’s plan. They wanted to ensure that the improvement of rural life would not only be rurally determined, but also enduring; thus, it needed to be led, carried out, and reproduced by “the strong resident forces of the countryside.” Government could shepherd this process, but could not by definition guarantee its success. That could only be done by local people organizing for local needs in place, using local leadership and local resources. This type of organization was necessary because it was aimed at developing not just leaders, but *democratic* leaders, and democratic rural citizens. Involving people in local decision-making was one way of preserving the importance of the individual in an increasingly integrated society. By building institutions that would foster democratic planning, encourage citizen participation, and cultivate leaders, the Commission was aiming development towards democratic ends.<sup>39</sup>

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38. *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, see n. 6.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 19.



Third, and most importantly, the Commission's report described a path to modernization for rural America that was necessarily related to *but distinct from* urban and industrial processes of modernization. Nowhere did it suggest that rural people, places, and livelihoods should follow the model of cities and industry on their path to adjustment and development. Roosevelt and the Commission both pointed to certain aspects of industrial reform that they hoped might be helpful to rural reconstruction—such as organizing for financial and business purposes—but these were analogies made on a very general level. At every juncture, they assumed that rural problems demanded rural remedies, which could potentially be similar to, but would always be different from, the solutions arrived at by cities and industry. When the Country Life Commission invoked “the development of this distinctively rural civilization,” they were advocating a rurally negotiated modernization process: articulating and imagining a rural modernity. The institution they were describing for coordinating these processes was in essence a proto-Extension Service.<sup>40</sup>

The reproduction of this process is where youth came in. In order for this “new and permanent rural civilization” to take root, the institutions for its development would need to become a valued part of rural community life. While the Commission pointed to several community institutions that would be central in carrying out a reform agenda—including churches, farmers' organizations, cooperatives, and extension offices—the rural school figured prominently. The project of reorienting the rural schools toward pedagogy and subject matter that was more relevant to their pupils and to the community at large had been for many decades been an object of rural reformers and agricultural leaders, from the Farmers' Institutes to the land-grant colleges, the USDA to the experiment stations. The general feeling among these groups was not only that the rural schools themselves tended to be poorly funded, poorly staffed, and thus poorly supported by the community; but also that public schooling itself was educating young people away from the farm. Overhauling instruction in the rural districts so as to put it into closer correspondence—a more vital

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40. *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, see n. 6, p.120.

relationship—with the conditions of farm life was therefore a top priority.<sup>41</sup>

The Commission took this notion of educational reform one step further. Its report indicated that a new approach to education itself was necessary. Rather than thinking of it as the province of youth alone, education should be reconceptualized and vitalized, so as to become a part of the daily life of every man, woman, and child in the country. This was a view that was in keeping with the mission of the land-grant colleges established by the Morrill Act of 1862, and which would be well addressed by extension work, as per the Commission's recommendations. However, it was not through government effort alone, but through a partnership between public organization and private philanthropy that 4-H and extension work became institutionalized as a part of the USDA/land-grant-college complex.

#### ADDRESSING THE RURAL PROBLEM: CULTIVATING RURAL MODERNITIES

Although early twentieth century commentators tended to diagnose the rural problem as a matter of differential development nationwide, the particularities of reformers' visions and solutions varied depending on their location, and the agricultural and social conditions that pertained there. Rural modernity was thus not a unified whole, but a set of prescriptions for different parts of the country, a set of local rural modernities. This section focuses on three of these regions in turn, identifying the most salient features of their vision (or visions) of rural modernity, and the most important programs they put forth that contributed to the creation of extension work with young people. The Midwest, the Northeast, and the South each had different

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41. For more on turn-of-the-century debates about public and rural education, see: A. C. True and H. H. Goodell, *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Convention of the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations, 1896* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1897); A. A. Johnson, *County Schools of Agriculture and Domestic Economy in Wisconsin (USDA Office of Experiment Stations Bulletin 242)* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1911); C. J. Owens, *Secondary Agricultural Education in Alabama (USDA Office of Experiment Stations Bulletin 220)* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1909); Benjamin Marshall Davis, *Agricultural Education in the Public Schools: A Study of Its Development with Particular Reference to the Agencies Concerned* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1912); Benjamin Marshall Davis, "Agricultural Education: Boys' Agricultural Clubs," *The Elementary School Teacher* 11, no. 7 (Mar. 1911): 371–380; John Hamilton and J. M. Stedman, *Farmers' Institutes for Young People* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910); Garrard Harris, *Joe, the Book Farmer: Making Good on the Land* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1913); Garrard Harris, *The Treasure of the Land: How Alice Won Her Way* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917); Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, see n. 24.

patterns of land tenure, different landscapes and environments, different agricultural economies, different populations. Indeed, each region was at a different “stage” in the development of the American landscape. As a result, the region that a reformer hailed from, and the place he or she tried to apply reform efforts, shaped the kinds of institutions and practices these efforts entailed.

In addition to varying by region, ideas about how to solve the rural problem differed along racial and class lines. Just as midwesterners tended to have different priorities than did southerners, sharecroppers and plantation owners had different notions of what the most pressing rural issues were, as did small farmers and large growers, blacks and whites, farm women and farm men, Native Americans and immigrants. While outlining all the particulars of these viewpoints is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that the ultimate shape of rural reform rarely benefitted all of these groups equally. As we turn to each of these regions in turn, it is well to keep these inequalities in mind.

#### MIDWESTERN MODERNITIES: REFORMING THE RURAL SCHOOL

It is no accident that the earliest instances of youth agricultural clubs were promulgated independently by a set of rural school superintendents in Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin. At the dawn of the twentieth century, these midwestern states were relatively prosperous, with steady populations, solid diversified agriculture, and decent farm incomes that ensured consistent funding for education. Country schools across the nation had become a flashpoint in debates about the rural problem. Many contemporary observers felt that the school was playing a major role in educating children away from the farm. The Country Life Commission identified the school as one of the most important institutions that could be used to improve the conditions of rural life, and cultivate rural engagement. This could only be done by making the schools—their curricula, their surroundings, their teachers—relevant to and in sympathy with farm life.<sup>42</sup>

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42. R. Douglas Hurt, *American Agriculture: A Brief History* (Ames: Iowa State University, 1994); Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Mary

The new approach to education envisioned by the Country Life Commission was by 1909 already being attempted in a piecemeal way in rural localities across the country. As early as the 1890s, the rural gatherings known as Farmers' Institutes had introduced programs specifically for young people, usually held concurrently with the adult meetings. These institutes would usually involve lectures by agricultural experts or successful farmers on new or successful practices, and offered an opportunity for farmers to share ideas among themselves, as well as to learn about the latest scientific developments. The Young People's Institutes were well received, and encouraged officials involved with the Farmers' Institutes in the various states—which were often closely tied to the agricultural colleges and experiment stations—to focus more of their attentions on youth.<sup>43</sup>

But it was in the rural district schools themselves that the mission of country life education took its most characteristic form. By 1901, country school officials working primarily in the Midwest began using co-curricular instruction in the form of clubs to enliven the instruction in their districts, as well as to improve the relationship between the school and the community. Jessie Field, a country schoolteacher-turned-county-superintendent working in Page County, Iowa, used activities relating to the main agricultural staple in her area—corn—to make schoolwork more interesting to children, as well as to convince their parents that the school was educating their sons and daughters in practical affairs, and that it was also a place where they might come to learn a thing or two of economic and community interest. To help teach pupils the principles of scientific agriculture, her county purchased a Babcock milk tester, which it not only passed around from

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Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, see n. 24; Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, see n. 24; Cubberley, see n. 24; Bailey, “The School of the Future,” see n. 1; Frederick T. Gates, *The Country School of To-Morrow, in which young and old will be taught in practicable ways how to make rural life beautiful, intelligent, fruitful, recreative, healthful, and joyous.*, Occasional Papers 1 (New York: General Education Board, 1913).

43. For more on Farmers' Institutes, see: Jeffrey W. Moss and Cynthia B. Lass, “A History of Farmers Institutes,” *Agricultural History* 62, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 150–163; Fred H. Rankin, “Exercises for Young People's Institutes,” *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Farmers' Institute Workers* 15, USDA Office of Experiment Stations Bulletin 328 (1910): 19–21; Hamilton and Stedman, see n. 41; John Hamilton, “The Farmers' Institutes,” in *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture for 1908* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909).

school to school for use in classroom instruction and experiments, but also lent out to area farmers so that they might test the butterfat content of their own milk and improve their dairy herds. Under Field's direction, schoolhouses in Page county served as distribution centers for the latest agricultural bulletins issued by the Iowa Experiment Station, as well as gathering places for community events and the object of community pride. Field believed strongly that her school could play an important role in enriching the social life of the community, as well as its agricultural and educational well-being. What rural districts like hers needed were "country schools for country people."<sup>44</sup>

Ohio school superintendent A. B. Graham framed his district's program in terms of scientific endeavor and local agricultural uplift. In January of 1903, he organized a "Boys' and Girls' Experiment Club" designed to capitalize on young people's impressionability in order to spread more systematic crop-raising methods. With the help of Ohio State University's college of agriculture and domestic science, his pupils were provided with four different varieties of seed corn, which they then planted according to the college's recommendations, and observed the results. The club proved so popular among the children and their parents that Graham organized experimental gardening clubs and soil testing clubs as well. The Dean of the college was also impressed. "For country schools," he observed, "the early study of elementary Agriculture fixes the cardinal facts at a period of life when the mind is most impressionable." Children appeared much more willing than their parents to adopt the "modern" agricultural practices advocated by the college. The Experiment Club work could be a more effective means of furthering these goals than experiment station bulletins.<sup>45</sup>

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44. Jessie Field, "The District Schools in a County as Educational and Social Centers," in *The Tenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II: The Rural School as a Community Center*, by B. H. Crocheron et al., ed. Benjamin Marshall Davis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1911), 17. For Field's account of her work, see Jessie Field, *The Corn Lady: The Story of a Country Teacher's Work* (Chicago: A. Flanagan Company, 1911), which was later reissued as Jessie Field, *A Real Country Teacher: The Story of Her Work* (Chicago: A. Flanagan Company, 1922).

45. Thomas F. Hunt, "Rural School Agriculture: The Boys' and Girls' Experiment Club and the Agricultural Student Union of Ohio," *Ohio State University Bulletin* 4, no. 22 (1903); Homer C. Price, "Agricultural Clubs in Rural Schools: Some Suggestions for Organizing Agricultural Clubs in the Rural Schools for the Study of Agriculture under the direction of the College of Agriculture of the Ohio State University," *Ohio State University Bulletin* 8, no. 10 (Mar. 1904): 12-13.

In addition to making the one-room schoolhouse into a social center for the community, a laboratory for land-grant research, and a disseminating outpost of experiment station science, midwestern reformers transformed it into an exhibition space on the model of the agricultural fair. The heart of these efforts was usually a contest, centered around a particular farm product—more often than not, that quintessentially midwestern crop, corn—and it brought to bear a set of commercial interests not present in school reform efforts elsewhere. Seed companies, fertilizer concerns, agricultural implement manufacturers, and farm publications sponsored corn-yield contests across the Midwest, in which local merchants, banks, and businessmen would put up money for prizes. For example, in the late 1890s, Will B. Otwell, editor of a magazine called *Otwell's Farmer Boy*, began offering premiums to Illinois boys who had the highest corn yields on their acre plots. In Iowa, the progressive agricultural paper *Wallace's Farmer* sponsored corn-growing contests beginning in 1902. Other efforts tended along similar lines.<sup>46</sup>

The corn contests involved measuring off an acre of the family property, and preparing and planting it according to the directions given by the contest authority. This often meant plowing and harrowing the field under with vegetable matter the previous fall, to ensure a good humus content in the soil. Children—both boys and girls in most states—were encouraged to test their seed before planting, to verify its quality. Frequently the county or state agricultural concerns provided them with certified seed, or new varieties that had not been proven in the district. Contestants were required to keep careful records of everything they did, including expenditures, their labor and others', and observations as the season proceeded. In addition to a visit from the contest authority, these records would provide the evidence upon which their entry would be judged. The ultimate object of the contest was initially to produce the greatest yield on the acre at the least expense; by the 1910s, most of the contests had settled on a judging system that involved points for yield per acre, exhibits of 10 sample ears, essays on the history of the crop, and profits gained. Local "farm experts" and

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46. For a concise overview of these efforts, see Davis, "Boys' Agricultural Clubs," see n. 41.

school officials or teachers did the judging. The prizes were usually offered in cash: by the 1910s, amounts in the hundreds of dollars, sometimes even up to a thousand, were set aside for competitors. As the contests grew in popularity, new prizes were offered, including trips to the state capital, the agricultural college, or to Washington, D.C., and, later, college scholarships. In 1911, one Michigan contest had as its grand prize “a one-thousand-dollar five-passenger touring car offered by a Lansing automobile company for the best ten ears of corn exhibited by any competitor under twenty years of age.” This was an attractive enticement for any farm family to get behind the work.<sup>47</sup>

The corn clubs and contests met with such success and fanfare that they quickly spawned other work along the same lines. To promote advancement in the farm home as well as in the field, schoolteachers organized their female pupils into domestic science clubs just as they had organized their boys into agricultural clubs. The most common girls’ analogue of the corn club was the tomato club, in which contestants would raise a plot of tomatoes according to the recommendations of the farm bulletins, and then can their crop according to the latest domestic science practices. Club girls kept similar records, wrote similar essays, displayed their handiwork at the same local exhibits, and received similar prizes and community encouragement. Tomato clubs—or, as some localities called them, “home culture clubs”—usually expanded to include other activities, such as sewing, baking, cooking, and broader gardening and food preservation work. If the corn contests

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47. For a good overview of the corn contests, including the Michigan story, see F. W. Howe, “Rural-School Extension through Boys’ and Girls’ Agricultural Clubs,” in *The Tenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II: The Rural School as a Community Center*, by B. H. Crocheron et al., ed. Benjamin Marshall Davis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1911). The quote is from p. 28. For examples of corn club bulletins and guidelines, see: *Suggestions to Corn Growers in Boys’ Club Contests*, Cooperative Extension Circular No. 1 (Bozeman: Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 25 January 1915); E. E. Hupp, *Boys’ and Girls’ Corn Club for Montana*, Montana Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics, Circular No. 38 (Bozeman: Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, April 1919); Robert M. Adams, *Corn Growing for Boys and Girls: A Manual for Junior Extension Workers*, Cornell Junior Extension Bulletin 8, with a forew. by A. R. Mann (Ithaca: New York State College of Agriculture, June 1920); E. D. Holden, *Corn Growing*, Special Circular (Madison: Extension Service of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin, May 1928). Gleason and Gleason, see n. 3; Virginia E. McCormick and Robert W. McCormick, *A. B. Graham: Country Schoolmaster and Extension Pioneer* (Worthington, OH: Cottonwood Publications, 1984); O. B. Martin, *The Demonstration Work: Dr. Seaman A. Knapp’s Contribution to Civilization* (Boston: The Stratford Co., 1921), chapter 3. For more on seed corn testing, see F. W. Howe, *How to Test Seed Corn in School* (USDA Office of Experiment Stations Circular 96) (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1910). For fictional accounts of the corn club work targeted at contemporary young readers, see Harris, *Joe, the Book Farmer*, see n. 41, esp. p. 29; Harris, *The Treasure of the Land*, see n. 41.

aimed generally at higher yields, greater profits, and improved efficiency on the farm as measured by the market, the gardening and canning contests promoted greater home self-sufficiency through the raising of family foodstuffs. The corn club work also furthered self-reliance in many areas where corn was grown not as a cash crop, but as livestock fodder. Growing one's own feed could mean a greater degree of economic independence if one were less reliant on a local feed merchant.<sup>48</sup>

Of course, the results club members attained in corn-yield and tomato-canning contests were hardly a fair representation of what was possible everywhere. Winning entries were in fact a highly skewed and artificial rendering of what an individual could do, aided by the subsidies of local men of affairs, and the assistance of merchants who stood to profit handsomely should their products become necessities in a new farming and gardening regime. The endless fascination of the press and the public with mind-blowing corn yields achieved by young boys across the country led to a virtual iconography of the corn club: ten-year-olds standing in their fields, dwarfed by massive stalks; overall-clad youngsters seated atop towering mounds of corncobs raised on their acre plots. Many of these youngsters achieved national fame, perhaps none so much as Jerry Moore of South Carolina, whose record-busting yields exceeding 200 bushels on the acre astonished youth and adults the country over. The "champion boy corn-grower of the world" became something of a household name in rural circles, and newspapers covered the trips and travels he made as a part of his contest prizes. Many adults as well as children found in his story both an inspiration and a personal challenge to improve their efforts, and match the "boy wonder."<sup>49</sup>

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48. For a contemporary fictional account of the tomato club work targeted at rural girls, see Harris, *The Treasure of the Land*, see n. 41. Field, *The Corn Lady*, see n. 44; Martin, *The Demonstration Work: Dr. Seaman A. Knapp's Contribution to Civilization*, see n. 47, chapter 4. For examples of gardening and canning club bulletins, see: *Suggestions for Home Gardening in Boys' and Girls' Club Contests*, Cooperative Extension Circular No. 3 (Bozeman: Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 25 January 1915); Augusta D. Evans, *Girls' Gardening or Canning Clubs: Directions for Canning Fruits and Vegetables*, Cooperative Agricultural Extension Circular No. 7 (Bozeman: Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 15 June 1915); *Records of Potato, Corn, Garden, Canning Clubs*, Montana Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics, Circular No. 36 (Bozeman: Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, April 1919); *Records of Potato, Corn, Garden, Canning Clubs*, Montana Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics, Circular No. 41 (Bozeman: Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, January 1920).

49. For an example of typical news coverage of Moore, see "Boy Wonder Going with Ad Men: Jerry Moore, champion corn



Moore's yields were something of an aberration—most improved yields tended to level off around 180 bushels to the acre—but the effect they had the country over demonstrates how riveting work with rural youth could be for the community at large. While schoolteachers' priorities generally centered on their students, superintendents like Jessie Field, O. J. Kern, R. A. Moore, and A. B. Graham were positioning the rural school as a tool for rural transformation more broadly. In addition to helping develop its pupils, the truly vital district school could be an agent of change in the entire community, working its magic on children and parents alike, inspiring pride and accomplishment in local products, fostering a movement for community betterment, and providing a social outlet that also led toward local improvements. Club work was designed to further these aims by moving the work of the school outward into the homes of the students, and thus into the everyday lives of people who were otherwise unaffiliated with the school. When schoolchildren used an acre of the family field, or a corner of the front yard to plant a new crop or to try out new methods, the influence of their work could be seen by any passerby, and could serve as a demonstration of an otherwise untested regime. Club work's co-curricular model not only put schoolwork in touch with local agriculture, but put the entire community in touch with the school—and thereby a larger set of institutions focused on agricultural improvement, such as the land-grant colleges and the experiment stations.

In addition, work with rural young people had distinct advantages beyond the improvement of the school. In spreading new methods of farming and homemaking, farm boys and girls were in essence the low-hanging fruit: they were not yet set in their ways, they were not solely responsible for the family livelihood, had less at stake and less to risk in trying a new crop or a new method, and they were ready to strive for the kind of distinction and approbation that winning a contest could bestow. At an even deeper level, children were eager to be treated in a serious fashion, to partake in some way in the world of adults, and to have a responsibility of their own, in which they would make the primary decisions. The club work model—part competition,

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grower, here for trip," *The News and Courier* (July 29, 1911): 10. The quote is from "Boy Wonder Going with Ad Men," see n. 49.

part collective undertaking, part individual initiative—harnessed these youthful desires to be of importance in the world of adult things, and directed them in ways that would improve the child and the farming simultaneously.<sup>50</sup>

The final genius of work with boys and girls was that it literally put adults to shame. When a father saw that his son was having better results on his contest plot, he was usually ready to pay attention to the advice of the county agent. Likewise, when farmers learned that a boy in their community was getting twice the average yield for the county, they generally took notice. If a boy of less than fifteen years of age could raise over 200 bushels of corn on an acre of land, what, precisely, was he doing—and how might they do something similar? The spirit of friendly competition club work fostered was not confined to the contestants alone. It was, in effect, a challenge to the wider community: to take notice, take charge, take action.

The concept of children as little agricultural experimenters, carrying out en masse the work of the experiment station at the high resolution of the local level, was developmental in both an educational and an agricultural sense. It fit with the pedagogical paradigm of having children reenact the processes of knowledge-creation as an integral part of their education. This would infuse them with the developmental influence of science, while also contributing knowledge back to the experiment station or land-grant college about the success of different crops—varieties of corn, for instance, and their yields in different local environs—in a more dispersed way than the station or college could discover on its own. This would help improve local agriculture, by demonstrating to local farmers which crops fared better in their locality, and showing that the institutions of agricultural research were interested in their problems. Finally, club work would inculcate a spirit of experimentation, discovery, and investigation among the next generation of rural folk, which would

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50. This idea about the plasticity of youth was a recurring theme in club bulletins and early program discussions. Many bulletins referred to the proverb “as the twig is bent, the tree is inclined.” See, for example: *The 4-H Handbook, Part I: The Purpose and the Plan of 4-H Club Work*, Cornell Junior Extension Bulletin 30 (Ithaca: New York State College of Agriculture, September 1928), back cover.

enrich not only farming, but the broader lives of those children as they matured.<sup>51</sup>

The corn and canning club work in rural schools in the Midwest represented a particularly business- and science-oriented approach to rural development, one that brought public and private institutions together to enlarge the work of the agricultural colleges and experiment stations. This was in keeping with the comparatively prosperous conditions of places like Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana, the strength of family farming in these areas, and the presence of economic incentives and urban markets linked by rail. It was this agricultural prosperity, in fact, that had led to the decline of farming in the older regions, such as the Northeast, where farmers cultivating older soils could not compete with the products of the newly broken prairies, now cheaply available in eastern markets. In New York State, while farmers were not suffering as much as those in New England, there was great concern about the effects of western producers on local farmers, and a growing will to use agricultural research and education to improve rural schools and rural life—one with a less explicitly commercial bent.<sup>52</sup>

#### NORTHEASTERN MODERNITIES: NATURE STUDY AND JUNIOR EXTENSION

In January of 1905, the Cornell horticulturalist Liberty Hyde Bailey delivered a lecture at the Colonial Theatre in Boston on “The School of the Future.” In it, he outlined what he called industrial education, “an education that uses the native objects and affairs of the community as means of training in scholarship..., that the home and school and daily work are only different phases of his own normal development.”<sup>53</sup> To illustrate what this education would look like, he took the example of a boy growing up on a farm. The boy’s

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51. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, see n. 24; Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, see n. 24; Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: The Psychologist as Prophet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Hall, *Adolescence*, see n. 26; Hall, *Youth*, see n. 26; Bailey, *The Training of Farmers*, see n. 24; John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922); David Fott, *John Dewey: America’s Philosopher of Democracy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998); Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

52. Hal S. Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Barron, *Mixed Harvest*, see n. 42.

53. Bailey, “The School of the Future,” see n. 1, pp. 181–182.

surroundings, Bailey argued, put him in direct contact with the things of life. He became industrious and steady through work, and interested in affairs through the constant variety of tasks he was called upon to do. His existence was simple and uncluttered, fostered self-reliance and thrift, and made him democratically minded and family-oriented. Most importantly, farm life allowed the boy to mature at the proper pace, unhurried by external stimuli. “[T]he child is a developing animal,” Bailey observed, and needed the proper environment in which to mature.<sup>54</sup> To foster this, his “education should be supremely natural, and it can be natural only when it makes use of the forces and objects in the neighborhood....Even the farm and the shop may be made means of education.”<sup>55</sup> The only institution that could do this was the local public school. “What the Land Grant Act has accomplished for... college... the public schools must now establish for the masses of the people,” he declared. “this will constitute the School of the Future.”<sup>56</sup>

In making these claims, Bailey was drawing on his experience at one of the nation’s foremost land-grant colleges. Under his leadership at Cornell, and in New York State more broadly, two movements dovetailed felicitously to produce a forerunner of 4-H club activities: the nature-study method of teaching science through direct contact with and observation of the local environment, and efforts to include practical agricultural instruction in the common schools. For reformers interested in rural life, nature-study offered an ideal vehicle for interesting boys and girls in farming in the classroom, while simultaneously working to improve it on the farmstead. What linked these practices was the new method of co-curricular instruction we saw in the Midwest, club work, which offered pupils the opportunity to apply the scientific ideas that they learned to practical farm and home projects that could supplement the family living. The Junior Home Project or Junior Extension Work, established by Cornell University alongside its nature-study curriculum

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54. Bailey, “The School of the Future,” see n. 1, p. 174.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 177–178.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

for rural schools, illustrates how club work with young people combined the developmental approach of turn-of-the-century natural history instruction with economic activities in nature to address the rural problem in a way that was consonant with the Country Life Commission's recommendations. In New York State, club work put forth a less explicitly commercial, and more moral and spiritual agrarianism, in keeping with the outlook of Liberty Hyde Bailey.

The College of Agriculture at Cornell University was an early leader in land-grant outreach to farmers. In 1894, the New York State legislature passed the Nixon Bill, which provided the experiment station, located at the college, with \$8,000 to develop a horticultural extension program in 16 counties in the rural western portion of the state. Liberty Hyde Bailey became the program's first director, and, as with his later work on the Country Life Commission, his vision of rural life was reflected in the course he charted for Cornell Extension. As Scott Peters has argued, under Bailey, the Cornell extension program "was not mainly a mechanism to disseminate knowledge for material and economic development. Rather, it was a means of education; the primary purpose of education was human rather than material development."<sup>57</sup> In order to develop rural people alongside rural livelihoods, Bailey and his colleagues trained their sights on the farm's most important crop: children.<sup>58</sup>

As they did so, the leaders of Cornell's new extension efforts had ample resources at hand, for the college was already becoming a national leader in rural school reform through its work in nature study—also a personal project of Bailey's. This pedagogical movement sought to reorient public school instruction around the natural intellectual development of the child, moving from things to ideas, rather than the other way around. It arose not only in reaction to the predominant educational paradigm of the day, a dulling routine

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57. For an overview of New York state's early extension efforts, and Bailey's formative role in shaping them, see Scott J. Peters, "Every Farmer Should Be Awakened': Liberty Hyde Bailey's Vision of Agricultural Extension Work," *Agricultural History* 80, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 190–219. The quote is from p. 192.

58. *The 4-H Handbook, Part I*, see n. 50, back cover.

of rote memorization and recitation of facts, but also as a means of putting schooling in harmony with the child's instincts to learn, and the means by which they automatically did so. Encountering objects, observing them, manipulating them: this was how humans had come to know the world and its ways, and each child recreated this process anew. This recapitulationist view, in which the individual reenacted the growth processes of the species or the race, was in accord with the broader developmentalist framework in biological and social thought. Nature study was premised on the idea that putting children into direct contact with nature was inherently a learning process, one that would provide a foundation for lifelong learning and interest in the world around them.<sup>59</sup>

As recent scholarship has demonstrated, nature study had a variety of promoters, flavors, and objectives, including incorporating more science into the public-school curriculum, helping instructors teach more effectively, and making education more enjoyable by bringing it more in line with children's native interests. In cities, nature study was a way to put urban children back into regular contact with the natural world; in rural areas, it was a means for revitalizing country life by interesting young people in the workings of nature that formed the basis of agricultural livelihoods. Common to nature study in all its incarnations was a belief that direct and frequent contact with nature fostered in children a crucial sympathy with living things, which would protect them from the stresses of modern life and better fit them for happy lives in which they drew fulfillment from the world around them. Nature study was also suffused with a progressive faith in the improving power of science, and of scientific ways of looking at the world. This was not to say that its goal was to create a new generation of little scientists, nor was it aimed at arming children with a reductionist view of things. Rather, the nature-study view of science was premised on observation: learning to see carefully, thoughtfully, attentively, in ways that made the child notice things that might otherwise go unremarked.

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59. For an explanation of nature-study's things-to-ideas approach, see Liberty Hyde Bailey, "What Is Nature-Study?" In *Cornell Nature-Study Leaflets: being a selection, with revision, from the Teachers' leaflets, Home nature-study lessons, Junior naturalist monthlies, and other publications from the College of Agriculture* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1904), p. 12. For more on recapitulation, see: Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution*, see n. 6.

This was where fulfillment would come from: taking pleasure in the everyday wonders of the world.<sup>60</sup>

The central pedagogical tool for doing this was the life-history: having a child observe, study, and collect examples of an organism as it passed through different stages of its development. By studying organisms' growth from birth through maturation, not only in books but in nature, rural boys and girls would gain a sympathetic understanding of nature and all its living creatures. They would also develop powers of observation that were conducive to modern, scientific ways of thinking and being. And they would come to better understand the natural world around them, its cycles of growth and change and season. Agriculture, after all, was nothing more than the harnessing and channeling of these developmental energies innate in living things, so if youth could get excited about learning natural history, they could also get excited about farming as livelihood and way of life. By studying growth and development in the natural world, children themselves would develop properly, and rural life would be enriched and improved.<sup>61</sup>

At Cornell, agricultural extension work and nature study grew up alongside one another, with frequent contact and cross-pollination, represented most obviously in the person of Bailey himself, who was a leader figure in both efforts. Through publications like the *Cornell Rural School Leaflet*, *Junior Naturalist Monthly*, *Boys and Girls*, and the *Home Nature-Study Course*, Bailey and his colleagues in the Nature Study Bureau engaged in the process of interesting schoolchildren in the workings of nature, offering a fresh perspective on familiar surroundings. At the same time, the College of Agriculture—of which Bailey became dean in 1903—was advancing research and experimentation, publications, and teaching activities designed to bring

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60. For recent work on the history of nature study, see: Pamela Henson, "'Through Books to Nature': Anna Botsford Comstock and the Nature Study Movement," in *Natural Eloquence: Women Reinscribe Science*, ed. B. T. Gates and A. B. Shteir (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, "Nature, Not Books: Scientists and the Origins of the Nature-Study Movement in the 1890s," *Isis* 96, no. 3 (2005): 324–352; Kevin C. Armitage, *The Nature Study Movement: The Forgotten Popularizer of America's Conservation Ethic* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009); Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, *Teaching Children Science: Hands-On Nature Study in North America, 1890–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). For the importance of seeing, see Bailey, "Cornell Nature-Study Leaflets," see n. 59, pp. 13–14.

61. Edward M. Tuttle and Alice G. McCloskey, eds., *Cornell Rural School Leaflet: Teacher's Number 10*, no. 1 (Sept. 1916); Armitage, see n. 60; Kohlstedt, *Teaching Children Science*, see n. 60.

the university into a closer relationship with the people. These two activities—nature study and extension work—thus constituted a two-pronged approach to educational reform, one focused on the public school, the other on the college and university. Together, they were part of a single mission to broaden education in the United States.<sup>62</sup>

Bailey's view of nature study and extension had important implications for the practice of science. As he saw it, extension was not so much the diffusion of scientific results, or the application of academic research to practical problems, but the broadening of research activities themselves to include citizens in their execution. "Every good farm is, in an important sense, an experiment station," he wrote, for there were researches that in a vital sense could only be carried out on individual farms. Because of the extreme local variation of agricultural conditions, "An experiment station... cannot touch many of the most vital problems of farming. The only ideal station is that which adds the farm of every one of its constituents to its own resources." In this sense, Bailey imagined the institutions of agricultural research as a collaboration of scientists and farmers, one that included farmers' own knowledge and experience in the creation of knowledge.<sup>63</sup>

What Bailey was advocating—and, in an important sense, actually carrying out in his work at Cornell—was an inversion of the trend to distinguish science by setting it apart from everyday affairs. For Bailey, the highest form of learning was pedagogy, not abstract knowledge divorced from the conditions of living. He imagined a future in which "all subjects with which men engage will be put in form for teaching and be made the means of training the mind." Lowly things could be as enlightening and uplifting as the pursuit of pure ideas, and their incorporation into the educational mission of schools and colleges alike would be a sign of the evolution of those institutions. "The old subjects will not be banished, but rather extended; but the range of subjects will be immensely increased because we must reach all the people in terms of their

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62. Peters, "Every Farmer Should Be Awakened," see n. 57; Kohlstedt, *Teaching Children Science*, see n. 60.

63. Liberty Hyde Bailey, *Extension Work in Horticulture*, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 110 (January 1896), pp. 130–131.



daily experience.”<sup>64</sup> This democratization of science and education was central to how Bailey envisioned the work of extension.

As many contemporary observers remarked—and as Bailey himself admitted—the kinds of publications issuing forth from the experiment stations were not always furthering the goal of changing the viewpoint and practices of the average farmer. “The complete or ideal leaflet may have little influence,” he observed, until it was popularized in the right way. This was extension’s great challenge: to transform the results of college and experiment-station research into something that would meet the rural people on their own terms, in a manner that was directly applicable to their lives. Implicit in Bailey’s remarks about the “ideal leaflet” was a critique of any academic scholarship or scientific research that held itself at great remove from the affairs of common people. The mission of a land-grant school was to educate the people—and its campus did not end at the college gates. Rather, it extended to the borders of the state, along with its responsibility to be a force for civic improvement. Educational institutions, both at the elementary and the collegiate level, needed to update their methods and their subject matter to reflect their centrality as a point of contact between individual and community, between state and citizen, between science and everyday practice. If the colleges and experiment stations were failing to achieve this, then they needed to change their ways.<sup>65</sup>

Bailey pointed to one person in particular who had been instrumental in transforming comprehensive but inert leaflets into effective and popular educational tools: John W. Spencer, a grape grower from western New York, former legislator, and state Grange leader, who had been one of the main proponents of the Nixon Bill, and who had remained in close contact with the College of Agriculture after the legislation was

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64. Liberty Hyde Bailey, “An Appeal to the Teachers of New York State,” *Home Nature-Study Course* 5, no. 5 (Mar. 1904), p. 1.

65. Bailey, “Cornell Nature-Study Leaflets,” see n. 59, p. 15. This idea was articulated perhaps most famously as the “Wisconsin Idea”; see: Charles McCarthy, *The Wisconsin Idea* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912); Frederick C. Howe, *Wisconsin: Experiment in Democracy* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912); Vernon Carstensen, “The Origin and Early Development of the Wisconsin Idea,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 1956): 181–188; J. David Hoeveler Jr., “The University and the Social Gospel: The Intellectual Origins of the ‘Wisconsin Idea,’” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 59, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 282–298.

passed. He was better known to New York State schoolchildren as “Uncle John,” the pen name he used for the short, lively lessons he published in a succession of Cornell nature-study and extension publications. Bailey had hired Spencer in 1896 to help with outreach programs to farmers, and Spencer had asked to work with children, as he felt this would be the most effective way of reaching the public. As his colleague Anna Botsford Comstock would later recall, “He it was who first saw clearly that the first step in the great work was to help the teacher through simply written leaflets; and later he originated the great plan of organizing the children in the schools of the State into Junior Naturalist Clubs, which developed a remarkable phase of the movement.” A few years later, Spencer “organized the children’s garden movement by forming the children of the State into junior gardeners...” At the high point of his work, he was reaching 30,000 junior naturalists and 25,000 apprentice gardeners each year.<sup>66</sup>

One of the outcomes of the close contact between nature study and extension at Cornell was that children came to play a central role in the New York extension program. By the 1890s, Cornell was promoting the organization of club activities in nature study, gardening, and agriculture in rural schools across the state, as well as encouraging schoolchildren to take charge of improving their school grounds and planting school gardens. Through correspondence with people like Uncle John Spencer, pupils could share their observations about the natural history specimens they collected, ask questions of college staff, and demonstrate their best work in nature study to schools across the state. They could join or form “experiment clubs” and “junior naturalist clubs” with their fellow students, or become “garden apprentices” by planting a garden of their very own. Teachers could receive help in lesson planning and curricula from the staff at Cornell. And parents could feel that their children’s education was equipping them for a more productive and rewarding

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66. For an overview of the development of nature study at Cornell, including Spencer’s contributions, see the preface to Anna Botsford Comstock, *Handbook of Nature-Study for Teachers and Parents: Based on the Cornell Nature-Study Leaflets, with Much Additional Material and Many New Illustrations* (Ithaca: Comstock Publishing Company, 1911), esp. p. vi. The book itself was dedicated to Bailey and Spencer. See also Kohlstedt, *Teaching Children Science*, see n. 60, p. 91.

life, whether on or off the farm.<sup>67</sup>

Spencer's focus on children reflected Bailey's comprehensive view of education, and the role it should play in promoting the betterment of rural life. "[W]hy is the College of Agriculture... interesting itself in this work?" Bailey asked in an explanation of nature study. "It is trying to help the farmer," he responded, "and it begins with the most teachable point—the child. The district school ... can interest the child in nature and in rural problems, and thereby join his sympathies to the country at the same time that his mind is trained to efficient thinking." The result would be not only the production but the reproduction of rural betterment. "The child will teach the parent. The coming generation will see the result."<sup>68</sup> The developmentalist view—integral to the nature-study approach as well as the practice of extension in New York State—saw the evolution of rural life as a reproductive process, both literally and metaphorically. Cornell's vision of extension work was disseminationist in the true, etymological sense of the word: scattering seed, spreading it abroad, in order that it might take root, and reproduce itself in fertile soil. By educating youth in nature and rural life, Bailey and his colleagues were preparing the field for sowing.<sup>69</sup>

The key difference between club work and the natural-historical variety of nature study scholars have emphasized hinged on ownership. A natural history specimen collection or a school garden were matters of personal and scientific interest, but rarely were they economic endeavors in their own right. Club work put the child in charge of something on his own, made him the responsible party, and engaged him in the market to a limited degree. There was an opportunity to make money, to net a profit from the endeavor, and this was central to developing the kind of responsibility that came from private ownership. Having an ownership stake in one's efforts was also conducive to democratic ways of thinking and being. Cultivating in children

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67. Comstock, *Boys and Girls*, see n. 23; Bailey, "An Appeal to the Teachers of New York State," see n. 64.

68. Bailey, "Cornell Nature-Study Leaflets," see n. 59, p. 15.

69. "Disseminate, v.". OED Online. March 2012. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/55400> (accessed April 27, 2012).

a respect for private property, both one's own and that of others, was central to maintaining the balance between individuality and group engagement upon which Bailey's rural modernity rested. Junior extension work was a means of planting economic and social democracy in the rural communities of the future.<sup>70</sup>

Bailey's vision of rural modernity involved a developmental view of children, rural communities, and the process of education itself. To forge the school of the future, teachers, farmers, children, and experts needed to come together to put public education in step with the child's own development, and to create conditions whereby the school would become an extension of the home and the farm, both for the education of children and for the betterment of the community. The school of the future encompassed more than the one-room schoolhouse: it was a way of life, suited to and in sympathy with the locality. In New York's agricultural landscapes, the rural school of the future and the farm of the future would perish or prosper together.

#### SOUTHERN MODERNITIES: THE FARMERS' COOPERATIVE DEMONSTRATION WORK

In 1908, an article appeared in a New York magazine about a bold new program for American agriculture. Seaman A. Knapp, special agent with the USDA, was in Texas, "making men out of debt-ridden tenant farmers, whose condition has been little better than that of slaves, if not, indeed, worse." Knapp was accomplishing this, the article explained, through the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work (FCDW), a program that taught by object-lessons and on-farm demonstrations of cotton cultivation and farm diversification in Texas and other states of the cotton belt. It was a public-private partnership, supported by the USDA, Rockefeller philanthropy, and local businessmen, and was, the article claimed, effecting all manner of miracles, such as lifting struggling black tenants out of dire poverty, keeping black labor in the South, keeping farmers on the land, and enabling cotton production to continue despite the continued march of the boll weevil across the southern states. In Knapp's project, the article's author implied, lay a potential solution

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70. Kohlstedt, *Teaching Children Science*, see n. 60; Armitage, see n. 60.

to nearly every rural ill.<sup>71</sup>

The story of Knapp, the boll weevil, and the Farmer's Cooperative Demonstration Work has long since passed into the realm of southern myth and national agricultural legend, having been told and retold not only in the early years of the twentieth century, but subsequently in the halls of the USDA and the ranks of the Extension Service, and in annals of agricultural history. Most accounts have tended hagiographic: Knapp has been extolled as the "schoolmaster of American agriculture," his program a "contribution to civilization." However, this canonization of a carpetbagger (to paraphrase James Giesen) has obscured more than it has revealed. Revisiting the story of Knapp and the demonstration work in light of the developmentalist paradigm reveals an important southern cast to the activities that became cooperative extension in 1914. Specifically, it points to a set of ideas about development that were profoundly shaped by the process of settlement, the midwestern landscape, and preoccupations with racial progress and the color line that were inscribed not only upon the agriculture of the New South, but on the United States' presence overseas. As the 1908 article described it, Knapp's activities "raising a crop of men" were primarily targeted not so much at turning farm boys into successful agriculturalists, but turning lesser-developed ranks of farmers—including tenants, sharecroppers, and laborers, almost all assumed to be black—into higher forms of rural humanity modeled on the white landowning class. These intersecting views of development—racial, landscape, and otherwise—found important expression in Knapp's legacy.<sup>72</sup>

The problems of American rural life at the turn of the twentieth century—economic, environmental, and social—were nowhere so starkly displayed as in the southern states. The same year that Roosevelt assembled

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71. Everett W. Smith, "Raising a Crop of Men," *Outlook* 89, no. 12 (July 18, 1908): 603–608. The quote is from p. 603.

72. Joseph Cannon Bailey, *Seaman A. Knapp: Schoolmaster of American Agriculture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945); Martin, *The Demonstration Work: Dr. Seaman A. Knapp's Contribution to Civilization*, see n. 47; Rodney Cline, *The Life and Work of Seaman A. Knapp* (Nashville: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1936); Russell Lord, *The Agrarian Revival: A Study of Agricultural Extension* (New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1939). James C. Giesen, *Boll Weevil Blues: Cotton, Myth, and Power in the American South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 16. Smith, "Raising a Crop of Men," see n. 71, p. 603.

the Country Life Commission, USDA special agent Seaman A. Knapp contemplated what had occurred to bring about these conditions of privation and poverty in the midst of apparent natural abundance. “[T]he South Atlantic and the South Central States of our Union were designed by nature to be the seat of great activities along broad lines,” he wrote. They had an excellent climate, abundant natural resources, navigable rivers; and they were settled by Anglo-Saxons, “one of the most virile races that ever touched foot on western shores. Why, then,” he asked, “did many of the results which appeared certain to follow fail to materialize?” The reason Knapp pointed to was a series of “economic errors that crept into the civilization of the South at an early period, and shows the far-reaching effect of even slight deviations from the fundamental laws that govern civilization.” These “errors” included slavery, the one-crop system of farming, consolidated land ownership, and a failure to develop natural resources in realms other than agriculture, leading to an undiversified and therefore dependent regional economy that was focused almost exclusively on cash-crop farming, that exhausted the soil, and that neglected education and other social and internal improvements. The Civil War and period of Reconstruction were disasters that compounded, rather than remedied, these problems. Plantation agriculture, carelessness and waste, unfree labor, leading to poverty, degradation, and unpleasant surroundings: these were perversions of a natural process of growth that shepherded landscapes from wilderness to frontier to farm and civilization, and that constituted the American course of progress. Despite all its promise and natural advantages, the South had failed to develop its potential.<sup>73</sup>

While the emergence of extension work with young people was the result of efforts that played out in several parts of the country, its reproduction and institutionalization as a part of federal agricultural programs was intimately related to the particular problems of the rural American South—or, perhaps more accurately, outsiders’ experiences and views of it. The form 4-H ultimately took in the USDA was profoundly shaped by

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73. Seaman A. Knapp, “Causes of Southern Rural Conditions and the Small Farm as an Important Remedy,” in *Yearbook of the Department of Agriculture for 1908* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909), pp. 311–313.

the experiences of northern and midwestern agriculturalists, philanthropists, and reformers as they encountered southern problems. The first of these was the South's sheer ruralness: its economic dependence upon agriculture, its lack of industry and infrastructure, its consequent isolation from the broader national life, economically, politically, and socially. Compounding these problems were a set of historical legacies related to land tenure and labor: the one-crop plantation system, the vast consolidated landholdings, the existence of a small white elite who controlled economic and political life, the huge numbers of poor farmers, eking a living out of exhausted soil they did not own but to which they were tied. Of all the parts of the country, the South was the most rural, the most backward, the least "developed." To outside observers, it appeared almost feudal: sharecroppers and tenants working the land like peasants for their landlords, with little hope of ever scraping together more than the barest of livings, and an equally bleak future for their children. All of these economic problems were inscribed with the tendentious social politics of the color line. The reassertion of white supremacy in the decades following Reconstruction had undercut attempts at land reform and agricultural and social uplift for black freedmen and their descendants, and solidified white control in the region. In essence, the southern problem was the American rural problem, encapsulated and pushed to all its extremes.

Against this backdrop of poverty, racial and economic stratification, agricultural practices that were as abusive of the land as they were of laborers, and depressed commodity prices appeared a further threat. The boll weevil, an insect that devoured the fruit of the cotton plant before it was usually harvested, had appeared in Texas in 1892, and was rapidly spreading across the cotton belt that stretched all the way to Georgia. The boll weevil was a serious menace, not only to farmers' livelihoods but to the entire southern economy, and even the nation's economy as a whole. The USDA declared a state of emergency, and quickly implemented programs to check the spread of the insect, and to help farmers protect their crops. Seaman A. Knapp, who lamented Southern decline at the beginning of this chapter, found a means of enlisting local farmers in the

government's program, despite their reluctance to try new methods or adopt a set of unfamiliar practices. The result was the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work, the most immediate predecessor to nationally organized extension work in the United States, and the means by which boys' and girls' club work found a home in the USDA.<sup>74</sup>

Although best known for his work with southern farmers in the first decade of the twentieth century, Knapp was not a southerner himself. In fact, he had been born and raised in northern New York, where his family had first eked out a living in the Adirondacks at Schroon Lake, and later farmed a homestead at Crown Point. After graduating college in 1856, he and his wife Maria took up teaching positions at an academy in Fort Edward, New York, just south of Lake Champlain. They would likely have stayed had Knapp not suffered an accident in 1866 that nearly crippled him for life. His doctor prescribed an "outdoor life" to aid with his recovery, and his wife promptly moved the family to a farm on the newly broken Iowa prairies near Vinton. Knapp took up duties as village pastor, and also taught at the Iowa school for the blind, while all the time keeping up on the latest agricultural practices and contributing his writings and editorial skills to farm periodicals, despite his immobility. When his health returned, he took up farming again in earnest, and was a vocal advocate for the state experiment station. In 1879, he became a professor of agriculture at the State Agricultural College at Ames, and soon after was named as its president. It was only in 1886, when he had reached the ripe age of 53, that Knapp first set foot in the South.<sup>75</sup>

From the "wilderness clearing" in which he was born, to the Lake Champlain farm at Crown Point, to the agricultural paradise of Iowa, Knapp himself had passed within his lifetime through the successive stages

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74. For more on the boll weevil, see Daniel, see n. 8; Giesen, see n. 72. For information on Knapp, see Martin, *The Demonstration Work: Dr. Seaman A. Knapp's Contribution to Civilization*, see n. 47; Bailey, *Seaman A. Knapp*, see n. 72; Cline, see n. 72. Probably the best critical assessment of Knapp and the FCDW is Giesen, see n. 72, chapters 1–3.

75. For a concise biography of Knapp, see Edward Jerome Dies, *Titans of the Soil: Great Builders of Agriculture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), pp. 113–121. For a more detailed account of Knapp's experiences and his development of extension work, see Lord, see n. 72, pp. 54–72. The best critical appraisal of the Knapp story is Giesen, see n. 72, chapters 1 and 2.



of Turnerian American landscape development.<sup>76</sup> When he arrived in Lake Charles, Louisiana, in 1886, he was by both trade and experience something of an expert in shepherding places from one stage to the next. Fresh from overseeing the maturation of Ames into a nationally respected school of agriculture, Knapp brought his northern and midwestern perspective to bear on the landscapes and peoples of the Gulf Plain. He had come to the South in the employ of a company that had acquired over three million acres of land along the Texas-Louisiana border, where the agriculture was mostly subsistence-based and carried out by Acadians, who were, in the words of one chronicler of Knapp's affairs, "fonder of chattering in their village coffeehouses than of heavy pioneer toil." The land company, seeking a return on its investment, wanted to "colonize" the area with what it felt would be a better class of farmers, preferably drawn from the Midwest, and sell off the parcels at a profit. Knapp's job was essentially to recruit settlers for this improvement scheme.<sup>77</sup>

In order to do so, Knapp needed to prove to his potential farmers that the land was cultivable, that the conditions for making a good living were favorable, and that there was a promising life to be had, not just in farming, but in the realm of society as well. Unfortunately for him, there were few of the visual cues that most late-nineteenth-century farmers took to be evidence of prosperity and potential in the existing landscape, the agriculture practiced there being largely non-commercial, the people being culturally distinct, and the incomes generally low. The first trainload of settlers were deeply unimpressed by what they saw, and turned right around, never to return. After having little luck trying to convince his Midwesterners through his assertions and proclamations alone, Knapp changed his tactics. He decided that what his potential settlers needed was more concrete evidence that the land was not only fertile, but realistically improvable, and that the place itself was conducive to the development of a prosperous middle-class, white, Anglo-Saxon, agrarian society; and he set about creating that proof.

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76. Turner, see n. 14. The quote is from Dies, see n. 75, p. 116.

77. Lord, see n. 72, 59.

Knapp's solution was to import a few groups of settlers, who agreed to stay and work the land for several years in exchange for pay. After establishing their operations on a more Midwestern basis—diversified but market-oriented smallholder farming, with pleasant homesteads and well tended grounds—these agricultural ringers offered prospective settlers a far more enticing prospect, and midwesterners began buying up the parcels in droves. Accounts of Knapp's achievements for the land company are silent on what happened to the previous residents, the Acadians; they simply pass out of view entirely, like a conquered people. Their time, most accounts imply, was over; they had been superseded by a higher class of farmer, a better style of farming, an improved landscape, the next stage of development.<sup>78</sup>

It was still more than a decade before Knapp's method of local farm demonstration became a part of the USDA toolkit. In the intervening years, Knapp had further opportunities to hone his developmental sensibilities and tactics in rural areas that were socially, culturally, and agriculturally different from the northern and midwestern landscapes of his youth and middle age. After clothing the Gulf Plain with farms, as one hagiographer had it, he remained in the South, where he worked to improve upland rice cultivation along the Texas-Louisiana border. His work garnered the attention of an old friend from Ames, James Wilson, who was by then serving as the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. Wilson hired Knapp as one of the Department's first "plant explorers," and sent him to Asia to find varieties of rice that might be suitable for adaptation to the United States.<sup>79</sup>

Knapp's plant expedition was part of a larger turn-of-the-century project aimed at enhancing the American stock of plants by two means: bettering existing varieties through horticultural improvement, and naturalizing selected foreign species by adapting them to American conditions. These introduced plants might be successfully bred with American stock, creating new, hardier, more productive varieties and hybrids. As

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78. Lord, see n. 72, pp. 59–60.

79. Bailey, *Seaman A. Knapp*, see n. 72; Martin, *The Demonstration Work: Dr. Seaman A. Knapp's Contribution to Civilization*, see n. 47; Lord, see n. 72; Cline, see n. 72.

historian Philip Pauly has shown, this cosmopolitan effort for the improvement of the nation by means of horticulture had distinct racial overtones, which were not limited to the metaphors of “native” and “foreign,” but which also made important elisions between foreign plants and and pests and foreign people. Some varieties had the potential for incorporation into the social as well as the horticultural body, while others did not.<sup>80</sup>

These ideas about native stock, foreign plants and peoples, and the question of whether they should become a part of the nation or not would have been at the forefront of Knapp’s mind as he set off on his journey. The U.S.’s growing imperialist presence in the recently acquired Philippines, as well as in other territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific, was a hot-button political issue, and had forced Americans to consider their role as an emerging global power and subduer of native peoples beyond the country’s borders. What should be done with these mostly tropical places, inhabited by darker-skinned peoples? Should they have the potential to become states in the Union? Or should they have a different relationship to the American government? These questions were extremely tendentious, not only for voters in the United States, but for residents of the territories themselves. Plants, as much as peoples, were a subject of intense debate: not only a screen on which a series of overlapping political issues—race, colonialism, imperialism, immigration, settlement, agriculture, and development—were projected and worked out, but key players in those issues and debates in their own right.

It was only after these experiences—of internal colonization through the settlement of southern landscapes by midwestern farmers, and of imperial importation of desirable foreign plant varieties—that Knapp began to work directly with Southern farmers, as opposed to merely remaking southern landscapes in the image of the Midwest. Though this remained a part of his mission, this time his work dealt with an undesirable foreign import, the boll weevil, and its economic consequences for cotton growers as well as the

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80. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains*, see n. 21.

southern and national economies.

The boll weevil campaign was not primarily an campaign of eradication, but of adaptation. The insect was advancing so quickly and successfully that the USDA held out little hope of actually containing or destroying it. Rather, the government's aim was to slow the spread of the pest on the one hand, and to help farmers adapt cotton production to weevil conditions on the other. The department's main means of doing so were getting farmers to adopt new methods of cotton cultivation that would reduce the impact of the weevil, and inducing them to diversify their operations and plant fewer fields in cotton overall. Beginning in 1902, Knapp led the campaign to carry these policies to farmers in Texas, the first state of the infestation.

It was not easy to convince cotton growers—who had spent their entire farming lives wedded to the cotton crop—to change either their cultivation practices or the amount of land they planted in cotton. Farmers had every good reason to be skeptical of the government's recommendations, for the same reason that Knapp's midwestern settlers were hesitant to take on parcels in an unfamiliar landscape worked by unfamiliar people in unfamiliar ways. There was simply too much at stake economically for the average cotton grower to try a new, unproven way of doing things in place of established methods that were common to the community. These had been developed over generations, and worked out in the local environment; they were reliable and produced a known set of results. While these practices were being upset by the arrival of the weevil, farmers were understandably cautious about casting them aside completely.

Knapp decided that he needed to demonstrate to Texas cotton growers that the methods he was advocating were sound, that they were an improvement on the traditional way of doing things, and that they would not bankrupt the family—in the same way that he had shown his midwestern settlers that a good living could be made on the Gulf Plain. He knew that farmers were naturally conservative about their farming practices, and he understood why. When the government came in recommending a set of practices to farmers, it was not the government that assumed the risk, but the farmers themselves. This was what caused the most sus-

picion on the part of farmers: the USDA was essentially asking them to gamble their livelihoods on a set of methods developed elsewhere by experts who were not financially dependent upon the results. Unless they could see with their own eyes that these methods would ensure an equally good or improved living for them and their families, no farmers would take up the new practices. The stakes were simply too high.

Knapp's solution—his only real innovation—was to shoulder the risk associated with trying the new methods, and thereby induce a respected farmer in the district to conduct a local demonstration of the new practices that other growers would see. As insurance, he put himself into the proposition personally, as well as local investment. Knapp would go into a community, and ask around at the shops and banks to see who were the most respected growers, whom they would be willing to sponsor and insure against loss in following a government-approved program of weevil-adapted farming. He would then visit these growers personally on their farms, and propose the following arrangement. The farmer would agree to plant a portion of his cotton acreage in the manner Knapp advised, and would follow his instructions exactly. Knapp would work the land alongside the farmer, and be on hand to answer questions when curious neighbors visited to see how the project was progressing. He would also arrange for significant publicity, working with the local press to advertise the farmer's new undertaking, and making sure everyone in town was informed about its progress. Finally, the farmer would receive what amounted to adjustment payments and crop insurance in the event of a loss or other disaster, moneys which Knapp had raised on his behalf with the local businessmen at the outset. The farmer was much more inclined to agree to such a prospect now that he was protected against risk, and would have help with the endeavor. Through this agreement, the farmer would become a cooperator, and his farm would become a much-discussed demonstration throughout the community.<sup>81</sup>

Knapp's task was complicated by the relationships between growers and tenants in cotton country. As the 1908 magazine article demonstrated, and as James Giesen has shown, the people actually carrying out the

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81. Lord, see n. 72, p. 64.

government's instructions were not the white planters themselves, but their usually black tenants. Despite all the praise, Knapp's program in reality did little to improve the lives of most sharecroppers, tenants, and laborers. Indeed, Knapp believed that he knew what was best for the South's black farmers, and often used his program as a means of transforming their practices through coercion, applied by the real power brokers of the southern cotton economy: white landlords, white bankers, white store owners. The article cited this "compulsion" as a "very effective... form of cooperation," whereby "Negro farmers" were being more effectively civilized. In the context of the Jim Crow South, extension could easily be wielded as a form of power over farmers with little power of their own. Rather than being a means by which development could be negotiated locally, the extreme power gradients of segregated southern society meant that the FCDW was easily captured by and incorporated into existing white structures of control.<sup>82</sup>

The Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work, as Knapp dubbed his program as it spread across East Texas, was enormously successful, partly as a result of the fact that it promised to capitulate to the white planters. Soon, Knapp had more cooperators than he could assist himself, so he hired another agent to lend a hand. He also found that the sons of cotton growers proved to be excellent allies in furthering the demonstration work, precisely because they were not in so risky a position when it came to trying out new ideas. Drawing on the ideas of club work being taken up in the North and Midwest, Knapp quickly added corn and clubs to his demonstration toolkit to encourage cotton-growing families to diversify their operations by growing feed corn for their livestock and kitchen gardens for themselves. In addition to developing skills of their own, Knapp's club boys and girls—junior demonstrators—were demonstrating to their parents, and working for the improvement of their entire communities. The Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work thus took the club idea as it emerged from the Northeast and Midwest, and turned it into a government program for shaping agricultural practices in local communities through individual and group effort.

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82. Smith, "Raising a Crop of Men," see n. 71, p. 608; Giesen, see n. 72, chapter 2.

Perhaps most importantly, Knapp framed his solution developmentally, in terms of crops, people, and the race. Like Bailey, Knapp often articulated his aims in terms of the joint cultivation of farm products and farm people. Speaking of one of his more successful farmers, he observed that “He made a great crop, but the man grew faster than the crop. There can be no reform until the man begins to grow, and the only possible way for him to grow is by achievement—doing something of which he is proud.” For “common farmers” like the men Knapp was working with, those achievements must occur within the confines of the farm itself. This would lead his gaze outward into the community. “As soon as the man begins to grow he will work for every rural betterment.” This vision was, unsurprisingly, a white vision, one that left little room for black farmers to negotiate their own paths to betterment, for themselves or their communities.<sup>83</sup>

The idea of demonstration was that the cultivator and the cultivar were cultivated concurrently: the actions operating on the one operated on the other as well. “The working system is based upon the doer rather than upon the thing done,” one of Knapp’s colleagues observed. “The human element is more important than crops, soils or farm animals. It is active, vital and animate.”<sup>84</sup> By raising an acre of corn, by building up the soil—these activities had a good effect on the doer as well. And demonstration work, like club work in the Midwest, expanded out into the community. All of this happened through a chain of seeing, witnessing, partaking, doing. It was a chain of knowledge that reproduced itself through the interactions of people and the farm environment within the locality.

Like Bailey and the midwesterners, Knapp saw the demonstration work as a system of education more broadly, one that greatly improved upon previous methods of instruction. Indeed, he felt it was the next step in a natural progression of education, one that was “destined ultimately to be adopted by most civilized

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83. Seaman A. Knapp, quoted in Martin, *The Demonstration Work: Dr. Seaman A. Knapp’s Contribution to Civilization*, see n. 47, pp. 19-20.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

nations as a part of a great system of rural education” for farmers everywhere.<sup>85</sup> Thus, in addition to being a force of improvement acting on farm products, farm people, and farms themselves, demonstration also fostered, or was at the very least a marker of, the development of nations themselves.

Knapp’s program, successful though it was, might have remained confined to the South, or simply languished after the passing of the weevil emergency, had not another group of northern experts interested in improving southern rural life—and, in particular, Knapp’s broadening view of education—gotten involved. The General Education Board, a philanthropic effort of Standard Oil magnate John D. Rockefeller, had set as its mission the improvement of education in the South. While the Board originally imagined this to relate directly to educational institutions themselves, a survey of southern conditions caused them to take a slightly different tack. The extreme poverty, ill health, unsanitary conditions, and lack of infrastructure convinced them that, in order to tackle education, they would first need to address some of the more basic problems of existence. Improving instruction in the public schools would serve little purpose if the children weren’t healthy enough to attend, or their family’s desperate need for their labor prevented them from going, or the tax base that supported the school was so meager that there was no possibility of the locality shouldering the burden of its care after the Board’s contributions had ended. The problem of education in the South, they realized, was a much larger, much more serious problem of southern life—and southern life was overwhelmingly rural. The GEB quickly turned its attention to rural improvement more broadly.

After achieving enormous success in the sphere of public health—particularly for rural children—through its anti-hookworm campaign, the Board set its sights on agricultural development. Their representative, traveling in Texas to get program ideas, was introduced to Seaman A. Knapp, and was immediately drawn to the demonstration work as a project that seemed directly in line with the GEB’s goals for the South. When the representative returned to New York, he proposed that the Board sponsor the enlargement of Knapp’s

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85. Knapp, “The Farmers’ Cooperative Demonstration Work,” see n. 13, p. 160.



activities to include the rest of the southern states. The GEB drafted an agreement with the USDA, and by 1906, within months of learning of Knapp's work, the Board had become the demonstration work's main financial supporter.

The GEB's involvement marked a turning point for Knapp's demonstration program. Rockefeller money was crucial to the expansion of the Farmer's Cooperative Demonstration Work, for reasons that were directly related to the constitutional terms whereby a federal agency—in this case, the USDA—could intervene in state matters like agriculture. Under normal circumstances, the federal Department of Agriculture would not have had jurisdiction in the agricultural affairs and policies of individual states. But the boll weevil infestation, as an emergency of national import, invoked the interstate commerce clause: Knapp's program was thus allowable, but only in the states affected by the pest. Despite its success, the Farmer's Cooperative Demonstration Work had come into being because of an agricultural emergency, and was seen by the USDA as a temporary measure, to end when cotton farmers in the affected states had successfully made the transition to a type of farming that would allow them to coexist with the pest. The GEB's support meant that no congressional appropriation would be necessary to enlarge the demonstration area beyond that of the emergency; thus, the Board would fund work in states unaffected by the weevil, and the USDA would support the work in states that fell in the emergency zone. As the boll weevil spread, so did USDA-supported demonstration; and before it, the non-emergency work funded by the GEB. The result was that the demonstration work expanded to include the entire South in its purview, and even states as far away as New Hampshire and Maine.<sup>86</sup>

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86. The story of the GEB's movement into rural affairs is told in: *The General Education Board: An Account of Its Activities, 1902–1914* (New York: General Education Board, 1915); Raymond B. Fosdick, *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989 (1952)), esp. chapters 2, 3, and 15; Raymond B. Fosdick, Henry F. Pringle, and Katherine Douglas Pringle, *Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board, A Foundation Established by John D. Rockefeller* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), esp. chapters 4 and 5. See also Lucille McGhee, "The Origin and Development of Black Extension Work in Mississippi, 1906–1933," n.d., Robert and Sadye Wier Papers, Special Collections, Manuscripts Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, Accession No. 313 (henceforth cited as Wier Papers), Wier Family: Sadye Wier: African-American History: Reports on early education and extension work, undated. For analysis of the boll weevil emergency as an opening wedge for all sorts of southern reform programs, see Giesen, see n. 72.

The alliance between Knapp and the USDA and the philanthropists of the GEB was what proved that demonstration work was relevant to a more general program of rural improvement, rather than simply to the problems posed by an isolated agricultural crisis. This, in turn, fostered a political climate that was conducive to authorizing the USDA to conduct extension work cooperatively in all the states on a continuing basis. The Farmer's Cooperative Demonstration Work thus became the template for what the Extension Service would look like, both institutionally and organizationally—in terms of county agents, demonstrations, and 4-H clubs—and ideologically. Built into the cooperative demonstration system was a vision of what American agriculture *should* look like. Specifically, it was the vision of a Northerner shaped by the diversified family farming culture of the Midwest, who had approached the South, its landscapes, its economy, and its people, and filtered them through the lens of international horticultural imperialism in Southeast Asia. It contained a developmental view of landscapes and peoples, inscribed with progressive theories of race, culture, nation, and civilization that would endure in the practice of extension work, and that were nowhere more apparent than in its programs for youth.<sup>87</sup>

The New South that arose in the years following Reconstruction was forged by both local forces and by non-southerners approaching the South and attempting to remake it. Indeed, modernity in the New South was negotiated against a set of national and international conversations about race, rural reform, regional economies, and the relationship between agriculture and industry. While people like Seaman Knapp approached the South with a Northeastern/Midwestern view of how the New South should look, there were plenty of southern-born agrarians putting forth their own vision of what modernity would look like in the southern states. Although there were many reformers seeking to improve rural life in the South, with many competing visions of what that improvement would look like in practice, they all put racial progress at the

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87. On these ideas, see, for example: Jack Temple Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning: Race and Reform in the Progressive South* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1972); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

center of their agendas. As Jack Temple Kirby has shown, progressive reform in the South was invariably focused on rural issues, and it was preoccupied with questions of race down to its very core. This shaped the development of the most immediate institutional predecessor to nationalized extension, the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work, which brought boys' and girls' club work into the USDA.<sup>88</sup>

#### LEGISLATING THE RURAL PROBLEM: TOWARD A COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

While a number of movements in different parts of the country were turning the extension idea into an on-the-ground reality, the push to make extension work a nationwide effort—and, in particular, to make federal funds available for its expansion through political action—became an important subject of debate in the halls of Washington almost as soon as the Country Life Commission issued its report in 1909. By then, Knapp's southern activities had attracted a great deal of national attention, due in no small part to their relationship to the boll weevil menace.<sup>89</sup> Kenyon L. Butterfield, Dean of the Massachusetts Agricultural College at Amherst, member of the Country Life Commission, and President of the American Association of Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations (AAACES), helped lead the movement for extension legislation. He first broached the subject at the Association's meeting in 1908, and the committee on extension work issued a set of recommendations on how such aid might be administered and to what ends. The main thrust was to offer federal money to help each of the states start extension work, and to assist the USDA in figuring out the best ways of disseminating agricultural information and training. Unsurprisingly, the AAACES plan

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88. On southern progressivism, see Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning*, see n. 87. On the New South, see: C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South: 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, 15th Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 2007); Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost*, see n. 8; Zimmerman, see n. 87.

89. Although, as James Giesen has shown, this is mostly hype: Knapp's first demonstrations were not done under boll weevil conditions, the weevil simply provided an opportunity for Knapp to get his program underway. Giesen, see n. 72.

recommended that the money to the states be administered through the land-grant colleges.<sup>90</sup>

By 1912, there were no fewer than 16 bills under consideration in Congress relating to federal aid to extension work. Butterfield helped to draft the initial “bill for increase of appropriation to agricultural colleges for extension work” that Michigan Congressman J. C. McLaughlin introduced on the floor of the House of Representatives in December of 1909. A month later, Iowa Senator Jonathan P. Dolliver introduced a similar bill in the Senate, and in February the House heard testimony on the proposed bills. At the same time, a movement for federal aid for vocational agricultural education in the public schools was gathering steam, and a series of bills was put forth to secure these funds as well, mostly through the efforts of Senator Dolliver and Senator Carroll S. Page of Vermont. While this movement was primarily initiated by educators working at the secondary level, its proponents saw potential common cause in the fight to secure federal aid for extension work, and sought to hitch their wagon to the already galloping team.<sup>91</sup>

The main questions in the halls of Congress, where agricultural education seemed a hot topic indeed, was whether the extension and vocational education measures should be combined into one bill allotting federal money for agricultural training more generally; and, more importantly, how federal aid for both kinds of education should be disbursed. Some of the proposals advocated allocating funds based on total farm acreage, while others maintained that the only fair way to distribute money for education was according to the agricultural population of each state. By 1912–1913, the various bills under consideration in the House and Senate had boiled down to two: the Smith-Lever bill—essentially a modified version of the original McLaughlin bill, reassembled by Congressman Asbury F. Lever of South Carolina and Senator Hoke Smith

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90. For accounts of the leadup to and passage of the Smith-Lever Act, see: Roy V. Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer: The Rise of Agricultural Extension to 1914* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1970), chapter 11; Rasmussen, see n. 7, chapter 3; Franklin M. Reck, *The 4-H Story: A History of 4-H Club Work* (Ames: Iowa State College Press, 1951), chapter 11; Kelsey and Hearne, see n. 7, chapter 3; Clarence Beaman Smith and Meredith Chester Wilson, *The Agricultural Extension System of the United States* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1930), pp. 40–42; Bailey, *Seaman A. Knapp*, see n. 72, chapter 12; Murray R. Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790–1950* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), pp. 153–154; True, *Agricultural Education in the United States*, see n. 7, pp. 288–290; True, *Agricultural Extension Work in the United States*, see n. 7, pp. 100–115.

91. *Ibid.*, pp. 101–105.

of Georgia—and the Page bill, a direct descendent of the Dolliver bill requesting funds for both extension and vocational education. AAACES continued to be the main lobbying organization for the Smith-Lever proposal, while the Page bill received support from a number of farmer and labor groups, including the Farmers' Union, the Grange, the American Federation of Labor, and the National Society for Industrial Education. What tipped the scales in favor of the Smith-Lever bill was essentially a bureaucratic technicality: the creation of a commission to study and report on the need for vocational agricultural education, which tabled the Page proposal for the time being, focusing legislators' attentions on the extension bill.<sup>92</sup>

A final important question about federal aid to extension work related to the fact that such funds were already being made available in one form or another through the GEB's support of Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work, which, by 1913, was not only well established in all the southern states, but was beginning to gain a foothold in the North as well. Would the provision of federal aid to all the states, without the support of the GEB, imperil the demonstration program? Officials within the USDA wanted to make sure that Smith-Lever proposal, which was looking to be the front-runner on the floors of Congress, would not interfere with their existing activities. In May of 1913, Congressman Lever and Senator Smith met with the Secretary of Agriculture and representatives of AAACES to discuss revisions to the bill that would ensure the continuance of the Knapp program in places where it was already established. The main modification to the proposal was to change language about the federal government providing money to an agricultural extension *department* within the land-grant college, to the more general direction that money would go simply to the college and be marked for extension *work*. This modified Smith-Lever bill, which was eventually passed in May of 1914, thus satisfied the most powerful interests within the USDA-land-grant complex: the Agriculture Department itself, the AAACES bureaucracy, and the GEB funders who

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92. True, *Agricultural Extension Work in the United States*, see n. 7, pp. 106–110. For the report on Smith-Lever, see *Congressional Record, Senate* (Jan. 31, 1914): 2649–2659. For the approval of the act, see *Congressional Record, House* (May 2, 1914): 7645–7646, 7658, 7691, 8103.

were eventually pushed out of the picture.<sup>93</sup>

In an interesting way, then, the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, which provided federal aid to the states to set up agricultural extension programs, marked a de-nationalization of extension work, at least in the places where the GEB had been operating, in that it took a program administered regionally by the USDA and turned it into a set of initiatives controlled by the states in cooperation and consultation with the federal government. Far from being “the institutionalization of an individual,” as Knapp’s biographer put it, the creation of federally supported extension work within the USDA and the state colleges of agriculture was an expression of a much broader movement—or, perhaps more accurately, set of movements—for agricultural improvement and rural development.<sup>94</sup> These took many forms—revamping instruction in the rural schools, enrolling farmers in the process of experimentation, itinerant instruction in new methods, clubs and competitions that furthered business and community goals, and other ideas too numerous to name—but they all evinced a belief in the developmental potential of rural people, their innate capacity for personal and community improvement, which would translate into improvement for their state and their nation. The focus of nearly all these efforts on educating and guiding youth through hands-on instruction in cultivating the things of domesticated nature speaks to a general understanding of development that was not mechanical in nature, but alive.

Despite these differences, what was key about Smith-Lever—or, more descriptively, “an act to provide for cooperative agricultural extension work between the agricultural colleges in the several States receiving the benefits of [the Morrill Act] ... and the United States Department of Agriculture”—was its breadth of potential. While the act itself represented only a thin cross-section of the many different ways educators, rural reformers, agricultural bureaucrats, philanthropists, and scientists had attempted to engage with farm

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93. True, *Agricultural Extension Work in the United States*, see n. 7, pp. 110–113.

94. Bailey, *Seaman A. Knapp*, see n. 72, p. 244.

life and rural improvement in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, it nonetheless gave the states wide discretion, not only in how to allocate and utilize the funds, but in what extension work could potentially entail. The bill defined these activities rather broadly, saying that “cooperative agricultural extension work shall consist of the giving of instruction and practical demonstrations in agricultural and home economics to persons not attending or resident in said colleges in the several communities, and imparting to such persons information on said subjects through field demonstrations, publications, and otherwise.”<sup>95</sup> As long as the plans of work were approved by the USDA, the states could pretty much conduct extension however they saw fit. This malleability was, for the bill’s framers, an asset: it could cover activities that ran the gamut from demonstration farms to youth clubs to assistance for farm women to credit for poor families. As Congressman Lever himself stated, “One of the main features of this bill is that it is so flexible as to provide for the inauguration of a system of itinerant teaching for boys and girls.”<sup>96</sup> It also included demonstration work in home economics under its definition of agricultural extension, placing rural women on a potentially equal footing with men. By broadly defining the bounds of extension, the Smith-Lever Act made a highly inclusive and diverse set of programs, suited to regional variations and needs, possible.

But this is not exactly what happened, and it is certainly not how extension work evolved in every place and at every moment. The discretion allowed the states meant that they could also be exclusive should they so choose, and the economics of agriculture and the exigencies of bureaucracy rarely directed the work toward the poorest, the neediest, the most downtrodden rural residents. Perhaps most notably, in the southern states, where the federal government had established a separate set of land-grant colleges for African Americans—the so-called “1890 institutions”—separate and not-at-all-equal “Negro extension” divisions were established, with fractions of the funding, staff, and attention given the dominant white extension program.

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95. *An act to provide for cooperative agricultural extension work between the agricultural colleges in the several States*, Act of Congress, ch. 79, 38 Stat. 372, 7 U.S.C. 341 et seq. (8 May 1914), hereafter, the Smith-Lever Act.

96. Quoted in True, *Agricultural Extension Work in the United States*, see n. 7, p. 112.

In the segregated South, state discretion in matters of race and administration meant that an enormous portion of the population remained deeply underserved by extension, and by the federal government that had pledged to help American citizens on the land.<sup>97</sup> The history of 4-H and extension work is thus not a story of revolution, or of radical change, despite the stark contrasts between American rural life at the dawn of the twentieth century and its close. Rather, it is a story of evolution, gradual change—a story of development, a word construed in many different ways, but with a host of meanings that coalesced around the processes of growth and improvement that formed the center of rural livelihoods, regardless of location.

### CONCLUSION: HOW TO GROW A FARMER

In the first decade of the twentieth century, these three strains of educational rural reform forged the ideological, practical, and institutional basis for 4-H club work and cooperative extension as it was established under the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. Although elaborated in three different regions of the country by three different groups of people with distinct aims, these efforts nonetheless shared an understanding of the rural problem as a problem of development, and sought to remedy it through the education of the most impressionable and least developed members of the social body. Midwestern reformers repositioned the country school as a catalyst for community growth as well as the development of young minds. Envisioning rural youth as the vanguard of farming practices, the corn and tomato clubs that spread throughout the region premised their work on theories of child development that emphasized young people's desire to be a part of the economic world, to contribute to and be recognized in adult affairs. Their work united the commercial interests of agricultural businesses, such as seed companies, farm periodicals, and machinery makers, with the research interests of the agricultural colleges and experiment stations by enfolded the country school into this network of methods and markets.

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97. Reid, see n. 8; Daniel, see n. 8.



At Cornell, Liberty Hyde Bailey and his colleagues were also interested in the role of the rural school in community development, but their programs emphasized the intimate relation between the spiritual aspects of hands-on work in nature and its material dimensions. Bailey, Spencer, Comstock, and others forged New York's extension work in the image of nature study, focusing on the simultaneous development of young people and their environments through both emotional and economic engagement with nature on the farm. The result was a highly influential vision of rurally negotiated modernization, one that gave pride of place to the scientific work farm boys and girls were *already* engaged in through their contributions to the family living, while also working to propagate scientific practices among them and their families.

Seaman Knapp found in the boll weevil emergency an opportunity to correct the errors that he believed had led to the failure of southern civilization by promoting the development of small, diversified, owner-operated farms. For the USDA, the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work was primarily a means of convincing farmers to adopt government methods based on scientific research; for the GEB it was a means of designing the "country school of to-morrow," putting agriculture on a more secure economic basis, and creating in every rural schoolhouse a microcosm of what its leaders saw as the ideal society.<sup>98</sup> Despite these differences in motivation, Knapp, USDA officials, and the GEB leadership diagnosed the boll weevil problem as the southern rural problem writ small, and used it as an opening wedge to implement a broader program of southern rural development, perhaps even reconstruction. Their prescription for a better South—and thus a better America—was shaped by developmental theories of nature, civilization, and nation that were intimately tied to the United States' emergence as a world power at the close of the nineteenth century, and that projected Turnerian notions of landscape and character development onto places seen as lagging behind the curve of progress. At the same time, they helped to reinforce the economic and racial hierarchies that hampered southern agricultural change in the first place.

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98. Gates, see n. 42.

The reason that all these different factions and people and reformers were able to get behind this one idea—4-H club work carried out through nationalized extension—is that it was about modernization *in place*. Its political organization as a local-state-federal cooperation meant that a host of different reform agendas could reasonably fall under its rubric. From rural school reform to cooperative experimentation to rural segregation to the promotion of irrigation, cooperatives, and markets, extension work would provide the governmental and scientific expertise that regional, state, and local interests could put to their own ends. Rural communities could negotiate their own paths of improvement, and receive assistance in doing so, in the form of government funding, personnel, expert advice, publications and information, and material items such as farm implements, canning setups, seeds, fertilizers, and livestock. Extension work—and 4-H in particular—became a means by which the local, state, and regional particularities of rural modernization were debated, enacted, and contested.

By the time Seaman Knapp died in 1911, his vision for a “great system of rural education” had not only spread far beyond the territory of the boll weevil, but also garnered a set of congressional boosters who were ready to carry the Country Life Commission’s recommendations for a “national system of extension work” into the legislative arena. The Smith-Lever Act was deemed “an epoch-making measure. It provides for teaching agriculture on the farms of the nation. It enlarges the work of the colleges; in fact, it makes every farm a classroom.”<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Knapp himself believed that “The world’s most important school is the home with the small farm.”<sup>100</sup>

In an article printed in the USDA’s *Yearbook of Agriculture* for 1909, Knapp included a set of photographs to illustrate the range and influence of his efforts. The images emphasized not only the material improvements to farm products, but the social aspects of the demonstration work as well. Farmers assembled in fields and

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99. Congressman Young of North Dakota, quoted in Martin, *The Demonstration Work: Dr. Seaman A. Knapp’s Contribution to Civilization*, see n. 47, p. 227.

100. Seaman A. Knapp, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 106.

selecting seed corn together at a community gathering accompanied images of fat, improved ears of corn alongside puny, unimproved ears. The last two plates depicted some of the young people Knapp had recruited into his programs. The first showed a group of about 20 boys standing in a cornfield that stretched out behind them in straight rows. This “real school of agriculture,” as the caption had it, was a boys’ corn club in Texas, showing off the results of their labors. The second photograph was simpler. It showed a small boy in overalls, standing with his hands on his hips between two towering rows of corn. “The boy who grew the corn shown is standing in his demonstration patch,” the caption read. Dwarfed by his crop, this young boy was clearly already doing man-sized work. This, the caption emphasized, was “how to make a farmer.”<sup>101</sup>

Knapp’s concern with growing better farmers alongside corn and cotton was shared by a host of reformers at the turn of the twentieth century. This chapter has outlined a set of efforts to improve American rural life during this period through programs that saw the growth of plants, people, and communities as part and parcel of the process of agricultural improvement. They were based in progressive ideas about the development of organisms, young people, and society that found particular expression in the different regions of the country, but that shared a belief in the importance of rural youth and of regional farming ways of life to the future of the American nation. As these visions were incorporated into the national program of 4-H in the second decade of the twentieth century, these local inflections, combined with the flexible nature of extension work, resulted in agency capture in many locations, leading to segregated institutions in the South, and extensive cooperation with the emerging agribusiness sector almost everywhere. Chapter two explores the fate of 4-H’s rural modernities as they transformed from a set of specific, locally negotiated vision for the future, into a coordinated program and means of exercising government power in the countryside.

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101. Knapp, “The Farmers’ Cooperative Demonstration Work,” see n. 13, plate IV.

## 2

## “A Better Nation Thru Agriculture”:

## Nationalizing 4-H

In conclusion may I urge upon you all the necessity of increasing the interest in every community in our *junior food soldiers* and in the building of adequate food fortifications, above all help us patriotically in the development of the four-square world citizens, boys and girls, achievement crowned, because of opportunities given them by a thoughtful and efficient leadership.<sup>1</sup>

—O.H. Benson, 1917

Raising pigs! And doing it as part of the school work primarily for the improvement (education) of boys and girls—much more this than merely for the improvement of pigs! How far we have come from the place where man began, when, in his primitive state, he possessed neither domesticated plants nor domesticated animals, and depended for his living entirely on what nature provided for him in her own way! ...we must remember that everything we raise on farms, all the plants and all the animals, have been slowly, very slowly, developed from the untamed things of nature. Boys and girls who take up pig raising are sharing in this process of making pigs more useful to man. And in doing so, as they learn how to choose a good pig, how to feed and care for it, and to keep careful records of every act until the pig is old or butchered, they are learning many of the secrets of all animal life; they are gaining knowledge. We improve ourselves by every act well done.<sup>2</sup>

—A.R. Mann, 1920

## INTRODUCTION: IN THE GARDEN

On April 26, 1924, thirteen-year-old Richard Whitcomb of Springfield, Vermont plowed up nearly seven thousand square feet of earth near his family's farmhouse, and prepared the ground for a vegetable garden. After plowing, he harrowed and raked his plot, and applied a couple of loads of barnyard manure and 1500

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1. O. H. Benson, “Accomplishments of Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs in Food Production and Conservation,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 74 (Nov. 1917): 147–157, p. 157. Emphasis in original.

2. Howard B. Allen, *Raising Pigs: A Manual for Junior Extension Workers in Pig Raising*, Cornell Junior Extension Bulletin 5, with a forew. by A. R. Mann (Ithaca: New York State College of Agriculture, January 1920), p. 3.

pounds of lime as fertilizer. He had purchased seeds for a variety of crops, from beans to carrots to chard, and had tested several of these for germination. He started most of his plants himself, but purchased a few tomato and cabbage seedlings in addition. “The season was late,” he wrote, so he didn’t get his plants in until later than he would have liked. In fact, “[t]he season was so late that all the vegetables did not get matured [*sic*].” His turnip crop never reached fruition that dry, short year. He ended up giving most of his radishes away to neighbors. But at the end of the season, Richard had turned a net profit of \$29.35—about \$374 in 2010 dollars. He harvested three quarters of a bushel of string beans, a little over two bushels of shell beans, a bushel and a half of beets, one eighth of a bushel of carrots, a quarter bushel of cabbages, two bushels of sweet corn, twelve pounds of cucumbers (plus three quarts of pickles), three quarters of a bushel of endive, 36 bunches of lettuce, a bushel of onions, one and three sixteenths of a bushel of chard, eighty pounds of winter squash, one fifth bushel of tomatoes, and seven bushels of peas. These last were his most profitable crop, which he harvested on Independence Day and sold for \$18.78—the equivalent of about \$240 today. Between the profits from his vegetable sales and the premiums he won at the fair, Richard put a total of \$35.50 in the bank that year—around \$450. This was real money for a farm boy just barely in his teens. As he put it, “In having a garden I can raise money to put in the bank or buy something I want.... Next year I ... plan to raise larger quantities of vegetables.”<sup>3</sup>

The reason we know so much about the sixth-of-an-acre garden this one boy planted in 1924—down to the seeds he sowed, the manure he applied, the depth and type of his soil, and the methods he used to cultivate it, not to mention the expenses and profits involved—is because the garden was a 4-H project, and, in order to be recognized for successful completion of his project, Richard had to keep a record. The previous winter, when he and the other members of the Spencer Hollow Hustlers 4-H Club would have met to plan

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3. Richard F. Whitcomb, “Home Garden Achievement Work,” 4-H project record, 1924, Whitcomb Family 4-H Materials, Personal collection of Ann Whitcomb, with permission of the owner, Springfield, VT (henceforth cited as Whitcomb Materials). Dollar conversions are based on purchasing power, obtained from <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/relativevalue.php>, using an end year of 2010 (accessed 06/18/2012).

their projects for the coming growing season, Richard would have received a record blank from his club leader. This was a form printed by the Office of Extension Work, North and West, States Relations Service, USDA, and distributed to garden club members across the northern and western states, in order to ensure uniform reporting and conscientious record-keeping by all club members and leaders. “Your State and nation will need to know how you handle your garden, what you raise, and the value of your products,” the form announced on its front page. And, on the last page, not only Richard, but his mother and father all signed their names to certify that the record was true, accurate, and the result of Richard’s own labor. Clearly there were many people interested in the success of Richard’s garden, at both the local and the national levels.<sup>4</sup>

Richard’s project record demonstrates the solidification of 4-H club work across the United States in the years following the Smith-Lever Act, and its ongoing negotiation between serving local needs and addressing national agricultural concerns. In the decade between the founding of the Extension Service and the planting of Richard’s garden, the United States saw both record farm profits and the onset of a major agricultural depression, a devastating war in Europe, and a national mobilization for victory that placed food production and conservation at the heart of American concerns. Amid these enormous changes in American rural and national life, 4-H and extension workers found themselves increasingly responsible for both carrying out federal agricultural policy at the local level, and dealing with community and county concerns. Richard’s garden project reflects all of these shifts and currents, from federal interest in on-the-farm practices and profits, to the promotion of gardening and canning for home consumption, to the emphasis on record-keeping and knowledge-gathering that grew out of wartime policies. In the period between the start of the Great War and the Great Depression, the meanings of rural modernity, and the cultivationist practices that would encourage development, were revised and reshaped around American, rather than local or regional, concerns.

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4. Whitcomb, “Home Garden Achievement Work,” 4-H project record, see n. 3, pp. 1, 8.

The Extension Service came into being the same year that Europe plunged into the bloody conflict of World War I. Although the United States remained out of direct combat until April 1917, its actions were strategically important from the start, as American farm products had become critical imports in many European nations. The outbreak of war in 1914 meant that demand for American grain, meat, and fiber rose sharply among the allied nations. Ramping up agricultural production thus became a national goal years before the U.S. entered the fight. Until it sent soldiers overseas, America's main weapon was food, and its farmers were its main combatants.<sup>5</sup>

The exigencies of the First World War thus became central to the establishment of extension work as a nationwide, federally funded endeavor in the years following the Smith-Lever Act. As a result, the visions of development and rural modernity that 4-H club work endeavored to create shifted, from a set of programs aimed at solving the "rural problem" through local and regional self-sufficiency, to a national program centered on increasing production for market while emphasizing thrift and conservation at home. Club work expanded to include not just projects, but demonstration teams and judging activities that would help young people reach an even larger audience of rural people with their developmental program for agriculture. At the same time, 4-H activities, like other extension work, began to demonstrate their usefulness in helping the states and the federal government gather, create, and circulate knowledge about agriculture, homemaking, and rural life more generally. 4-H emerged from the war with a coordinated national program and organization, an enlarged staff, and, most importantly, a proven record of direct contributions to American agricultural production and conservation that boosted its reputation and power in the countryside, as well as in Washington.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Murray R. Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790–1950* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), chapter 8.

6. Gladys Baker, *The County Agent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); A. C. True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States, 1785–1923*, United States Department of Agriculture, Miscellaneous Publication No. 15 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1928).

Making a better American nation was a cultural as well as an agricultural project, one that involved defining Americanness—and, consequently, the American rural citizen, and the American farm family—in ways that included some groups while excluding others. 4-H club work during this period demonstrates how the ideal rural family was constructed according to white, middle-class definitions of propriety and gendered labor: a male farmer as the head of the household, a female farm wife whose primary role was as a homemaker, and farm boys and girls with largely distinct roles that paralleled those of their parents. Attempts to instruct immigrants and nonwhite rural people in “farming like white men” reveal how this took place at the level of 4-H projects and activities.<sup>7</sup> The legacy of World War I, like the legacy of the southern context, thus became built into the structure and aims of extension and club work.

But the war had another set of consequences for extension, one which bespoke a comprehensive approach to rural problems, despite its work of exclusion and inclusion. The importance of food conservation activities during WWI—carried out mostly by women and girls in the context of domestic economy—helped to prove the importance of women and children alongside (the presumed-male) farmers, and thus made home demonstration and 4-H club work the equal of agricultural extension in crops and livestock. Indeed, one of the aspects of club work that set it apart from other youth programs of the time was its coeducational nature and gender-inclusiveness, which reflected a vision of the rural family as a coordinated producing unit. The consumption side and the production side thus gained a more equal emphasis in work directed at children, as the war proved that both aspects of rural life were important to national agricultural goals. Extension work emerged from the war a program capable of mobilizing not just food producers, but all members of rural communities, in coordinated action and effort. As the banner Richard Whitcomb and his fellow club member hung above their demonstration booth at the Vermont fair they attended at the end of the gardening

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7. This phrase is from Russell Lord, *The Agrarian Revival: A Study of Agricultural Extension* (New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1939), p. 18. For a visual representation of this process, see Ellwood Patterson Cubberley, *Rural Life and Education: A Study of the Rural-School Problem as a Phase of the Rural-Life Problem* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), plate opposite p. 59.



season proclaimed, 4-H hoped to create “A Better Nation Thru Agriculture” (figure 1).<sup>8</sup>



Figure 1: “A Better Nation Thru Agriculture”: Raymond Lawrence and Richard Whitcomb at 4-H fair booth, Camp Vail, Vermont, 1924. *Courtesy of Ann Whitcomb.*

This chapter explains how club worked sought to improve the American nation through agricultural work with young people like Richard. It has two goals: to describe the knowledge-making apparatus of 4-H club work as it emerged in the years following the creation of the extension service, and to suggest how the nationalizing forces of the Smith-Lever Act and the First World War transformed the local and regional reform programs described in chapter one into a coordinated national program for not just rural

8. Whitcomb Materials.

improvement, but *American* improvement, focused on producing better American farm goods, creating more pleasant American farm homes, and growing healthier American farm children. This can best be described as a project of national improvement carried out through a set of practices analogous to agricultural and growth processes, such as selection, breeding, cultivation, training, and guidance. In the process, it shows how a rural development program became a national development program.

### FROM BOYS' AND GIRLS' CLUBS TO 4-H

In 1911, O. H. Benson gave a speech to the South Carolina Improvement Association in which he identified the qualities essential to good rural leadership. Such a leader would be trained, not in the three R's, but the four H's: head, heart, hands, and hustle. "A leader, with head trained to think, plan, and reason; with heart trained to be true, kind, and sympathetic; and with hands trained to be useful, helpful, and skillful; and the hustle to render ready service, to develop health and vitality" was, he told the audience, what rural America needed. Benson, a school superintendent from Wright County, Iowa, had recently been appointed an agent for the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work, and was actively touring the South teaching canning methods to club girls, leaders, and communities. Like his fellow Iowan, Jessie Field, Benson had been running corn clubs in his schools, and both instructors had used three- and four-leaf clover pins as awards for students in their counties.

The four-leaf clover was more than a symbol of good luck. In addition to connoting the good life, clover itself—a leguminous plant that fixes nitrogen in the soil—was symbolic of a set of farming practices that people like Benson and Field saw as representative of modern, scientific agriculture. Clover was part of a system of crop rotation that restored fertility to the soil, combining grazing with field crops and allowing for better yields through enlightened practices. Clover was thus emblematic of progress in the countryside, the betterment that could come with proper cultivation. Combined with the positive uses of the term in

common speech, it became the perfect symbol for the club work underway across the country (figure 2).<sup>9</sup>



Figure 2: Head, Heart, Hands, and Health—the 4-H clover in 1918. (Source: O. H. Benson and Gertrude L. Warren, *Organization and Results of Boys' and Girls' Club Work*).

The four-leaf clover and Benson's idea about the "Four H's" of rural leadership came together in the 4-H emblem, which he implemented nationwide upon his appointment to the USDA post. As Benson explained, "The Boys' and Girls' Demonstration Work represents a 'Four-Square' training of the members of the 'Four-Square' needs of citizenship and home-life. The four H's represent the equal training of the head, heart, hands, and health of every child." The head would be trained to "think, plan, and reason," the heart to be "kind, true, and sympathetic," the hands to be "useful, helpful, and skillful," and health to "resist disease, enjoy life, and make for efficiency." All that was different was that "health" had replaced Benson's original "hustle" as the fourth H. "The emblem will be national in its use," Benson stressed, "and by this sign 'Ye shall

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9. On the origins of the 4-H emblem, see Franklin M. Reck, *The 4-H Story: A History of 4-H Club Work* (Ames: Iowa State College Press, 1951), pp. 96–100.

know them,' the real demonstrators.”<sup>10</sup>

Having an emblem was useful not simply for the purpose of awards. Club work was expanding, and it needed an identity to tie together all the work being done from state to state, community to community. Pins helped club members feel a part of a larger organization and a larger movement, but more than pins, boys and girls wanted to be able sell their goods. The cloverleaf thus became important first as a marketing tactic, branding club products such that individual club members could sell their products with the quality reputation of a larger organization behind them. This allowed otherwise unknown farm boys and girls to sell seed corn and potatoes, canned tomatoes, and a host of other canned goods under the imprimatur of a popular government program. “4-H Brand” products met certain standards of quality and uniformity: seeds were checked for germination, canned goods packed according to USDA guidelines, and all products were inspected and approved by club officials before they could carry the 4-H label. The 4-H brand was thus akin to a marketing cooperative for club youth. This is how the emblem spread at first, before boys’ and girls’ corn and canning clubs were grouped under the heading of 4-H.<sup>11</sup>

The original 4-H emblems varied somewhat for the different clubs. Corn club members received pins featuring a kernel of corn at the center of the 4-H clover; cotton club members had a boll in the center of theirs; canning club members’ clovers appeared in front of a large tomato, which “signifies the relation of the garden products to a happy and contented citizenship.” On special pins reserved for “all-star” club members—those who had achieved the best results in their state—not four but five H’s appeared, in the points of a star rather than on the leaves of the clover. The fifth H was for home. All of these were on a background meant to resemble the pages of an open book, which “signifies the need for education and definite

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10. O. H. Benson and O. B. Martin, *Story of the Demonstration Emblem* (Farmers’ Cooperative Demonstration Work, memorandum to the states, 1912). Reprinted in Reck, see n. 9, p. 99.

11. On 4-H brand labeling, see: “4-H Brand Label for Club Work: To Encourage the Boys and Girls to Standardize Their Products,” *The Spokesman-Review* (May 22, 1914): 7; Reck, see n. 9, pp. 97, 102.

knowledge on farm and home interests in order to make for better rural life.” Some pins also featured an oil lamp, presumably symbolizing the light of knowledge being spread through demonstrations.<sup>12</sup>

When club work became truly nationalized with the creation of the Cooperative Extension Service in 1914, the term “4-H club” had begun to replace the more specific terms “boys’ corn club” and “girls’ canning club,” as outreach efforts to rural youth were subsumed under the extension umbrella. But it was the First World War that truly unified club work into a coordinated national 4-H program. The Great War served to solidify extension’s place in American agriculture, particularly in rural communities where it had previously met with resistance. The war emergency, like the boll weevil emergency, paved the way for 4-H’s expansion, and allowed it to become embedded more pervasively in rural places across the nation, as a result of the increased government intervention the war brought with it. When the war was over, extension remained.

Indeed, the First World War was an important proving ground for the fledgling Extension Service, and for 4-H clubs in particular. The new system of county agents was greatly expanded during the war years, and utilized as a network for marshaling local resources in support of the war effort. Congress increased the appropriations for the Extension Service, allowing states to hire more staff. These county agents and home demonstration workers worked to increase agricultural production, promote food conservation, collect strategically important materials such as fats and metals, and other essential wartime services. While not on the front lines, extension work served an important purpose on the home front.

Alongside these increases in personnel, 4-H itself became an important means for extension workers

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12. Benson and Martin, see n. 10; Reck, see n. 9, p. 100. The lamp as source of illumination for farmers, symbolizing the intellectual and spiritual enlightenment of science, was a common visual trope in early extension work. See, for instance, the covers of: Liberty Hyde Bailey, *Extension Work in Horticulture*, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 110 (January 1896); Liberty Hyde Bailey, *Second Report upon Extension Work in Horticulture*, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 122 (December 1896); I. P. Roberts, *Fourth Report of Progress on Extension Work: Being a report of work done under Chapter 128, Laws of 1897, of the State of New York, otherwise known as the Nixon Bill*, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 146 (February 1898); I. P. Roberts, *An Effort to Help the Farmer: Being the Fifth Report to the Commissioner of Agriculture of Progress of Work done under Chapter 67, Laws of 1898 (the Nixon Bill), to Promote the Extension of Agricultural Knowledge*, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 159 (January 1899); John Craig, *Sixth Report of Extension Work*, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 206 (October 1902).

to enlarge their reach. Club members were a ready army to be enlisted in the pursuit of domestic wartime goals. 4-H boys and girls were already promoting home conservation through their work in home gardening, crop- and livestock-raising, canning, clothing, and general thrift; a quick stepping up of the intensity of their efforts was all that was needed to direct 4-H activities towards the patriotic purpose of Allied victory. Rather than redirecting club work, the war emergency merely served to ratchet up the urgency and importance of members' existing projects, and to connect their local activities to the national purpose. In war, as in peace, 4-H was a means for increasing the productivity and efficiency of American agriculture and rural life.

We can see this nationalization reflected in the growing set of club standards that joined the cloverleaf emblem during and after the war. The development of a national pledge was one legacy of the conflict. 4-H members attending a club gathering in the year 1917 would have begun their meeting by standing together and pledging aloud, in unison, "I consecrate my head, heart, hands, and health, through food production and food conservation, to help with the world war and world peace."<sup>13</sup> This affirmation reflected 4-H club work's increased orientation towards national goals related to U.S. involvement in World War I, as well as a more coherent national identity for 4-H itself.<sup>14</sup>

4-H club membership also increased rapidly during the war years, broadening its influence and growing its reputation. In 1914, there had been a total of 196,000 children enrolled nationwide. In 1916, the year before the U.S. entered the war, that number had climbed to 332,916. By the end of 1918, boys' and girls' clubs nationwide could count 929,689 regular members, plus 1,637,515 "emergency" club workers. These latter were not officially affiliated with a club, nor were they required to submit records of their projects, so perhaps it would be misleading to say that 4-H club enrollment increased by a factor of nearly 8 over the

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13. Benson, see n. 1, p. 147. The wartime oath would find new expression in a peacetime pledge, adopted nationally in 1927, that has remained, with some additions, to this day. See Reck, see n. 9, pp. 216–217.

14. For more on the 4-H emblem, pledge, and awards, see *The 4-H Handbook, Part I: The Purpose and the Plan of 4-H Club Work*, Cornell Junior Extension Bulletin 30 (Ithaca: New York State College of Agriculture, September 1928), pp. 19–21.

course of U.S. involvement in World War I; but, even without them, regular club membership nearly tripled in 1917–1918. While these numbers declined in the wake of the conflict—664,979 in 1919, 445,000 in 1920, 499,934 in 1921—they never fell as low as pre-war levels, and, indeed, continued a trend of steady growth for most of the 1920s.<sup>15</sup>

The Extension Service itself got an important boost as a result of U.S. entry into World War I. Section four of the Food Production Act of 1917 provided an emergency appropriation of over four million dollars for “the further development of the Extension Service,” an amount that was increased to over six million the following year. Before the war, there were 1,436 county agents employed nationwide; by the end of the conflict, that number had grown to 2,435.<sup>16</sup> During the war, in addition to their usual narrative and statistical reports, all county agents were required to submit special supplementary reports detailing their work “with special reference to conditions brought about by the war.” This included such activities as making

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15. The figures here come from: United States Department of Agriculture, *Report on Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Agricultural Extension Work in the United States for the Year Ended June 30, 1915: Part II: A Report on the Receipts, Expenditures and Results of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics in the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916); United States Department of Agriculture, *Report on Experiment Stations and Extension Work in the United States, 1916: Part II: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917); United States Department of Agriculture, *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, 1917*, Part II of Report on Experiment Stations and Extension Work in the United States (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919); United States Department of Agriculture, *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, 1918* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919); United States Department of Agriculture, *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, 1919* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921); United States Department of Agriculture, *Report on Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, 1920* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922); United States Department of Agriculture, States Relations Service, *Cooperative Extension Work, 1921* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923); United States Department of Agriculture, States Relations Service, *Cooperative Extension Work, 1922* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924); United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, *Cooperative Extension Work, 1923* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925); United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, *Cooperative Extension Work, 1924*, With 10-Year Review (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926); United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, *Cooperative Extension Work, 1925* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1927); United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, *Cooperative Extension Work, 1926* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929); United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, *Cooperative Extension Work, 1927* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929); United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, *Cooperative Extension Work, 1928* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1930); United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, *Cooperative Extension Work, 1929* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931); George E. Farrell, *Boys' and Girls' 4-H Club Work under the Smith-Lever Act, 1914–1924*, United States Department of Agriculture, Miscellaneous Circular 85 (Washington: Government Printing Office, December 1926); Benson, see n. 1, p. 155.

16. See: Baker, see n. 6, p. 41; True, *Agricultural Extension Work in the United States*, see n. 6, pp. 134–138.

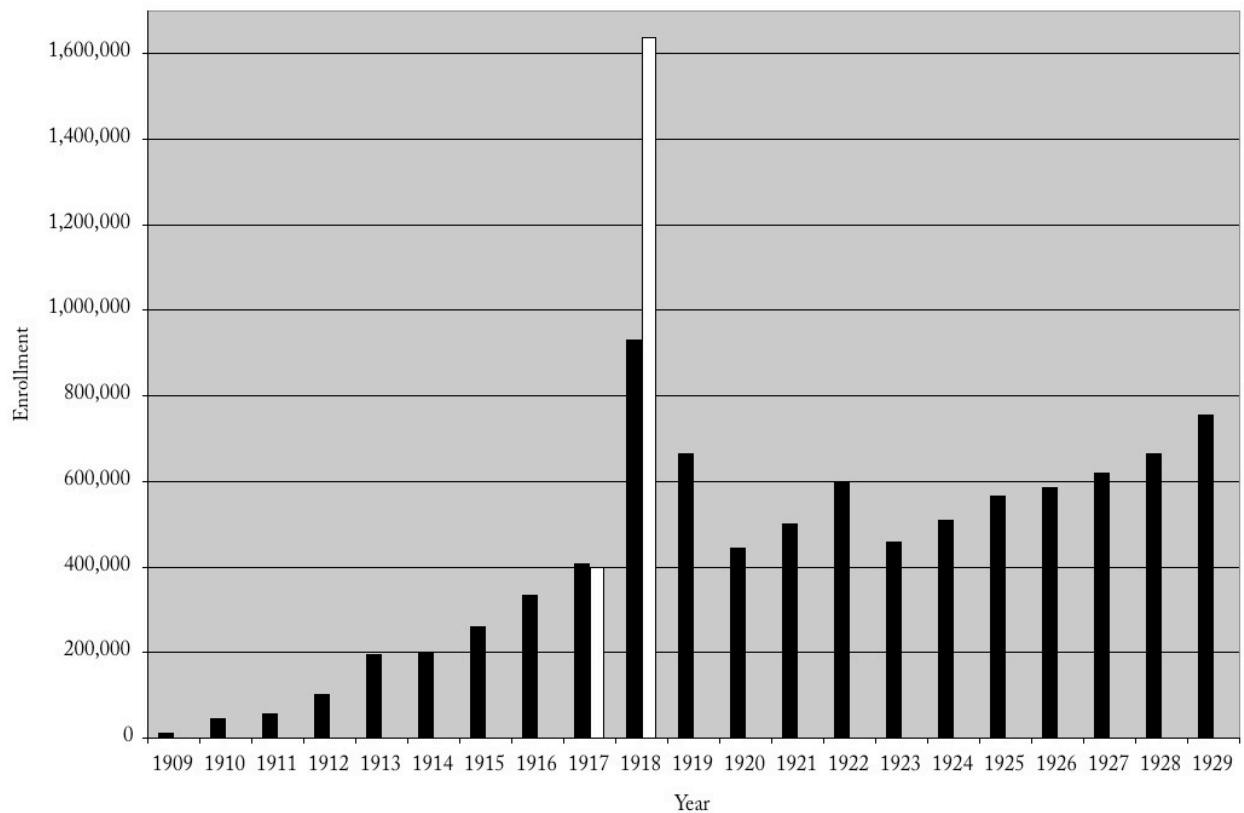


Figure 3: 4-H Club Enrollment, 1909–1929. Regular enrollment appears in black, emergency wartime enrollment in white. *Source: USDA Extension Service Annual Reports, 1915–1929.*

agricultural surveys, assessing and addressing the need for farm labor, supplying farm power and promoting farm machinery, food production and conservation campaigns, helping farmers secure credit to expand their operations, aiding other government agencies engaged in emergency war work, and defining and addressing local agricultural problems that were a result of the war.<sup>17</sup>

We can see how the war strengthened extension's presence at the local level by examining its growth in a state with comparatively little extension activity prior to 1917. At the start of U.S. involvement, only nine

17. The passage of the Smith-Hughes vocation education act in 1917, which gave federal money to local schools to institute educational programs relating to agriculture and the trades, also contributed to the growth of 4-H, but there were as many conflicts over funding and jurisdiction between Smith-Lever and Smith-Hughes as there were symbioses. See: Herbert M. Kliebard, *Schooled to Work: Vocationalism and the American Curriculum, 1876–1946* (New York: Columbia Teachers College Press, 1999); Gertrude L. Warren, *Boys and Girls' Club Work: Relation of Boys and Girls' Club Work to Smith-Hughes Home Project Work* (An address delivered before the Home Economics Section of the Association of Land-Grant Colleges, Springfield, MA, 1920).



counties in Montana were engaged in extension work. The emergency appropriations added 24 counties to this list, bringing agents to nearly half the counties in the state. In Big Horn County, where extension work began as a direct result of the war, county agent F. E. McSpadden met with members of the local Defense Council to coordinate plans of work, traveled across the county to meet with farmers' clubs and discuss organizing a county farm bureau, conducted a survey of labor conditions and needs in cooperation with the Bureau of Labor and organized communities to help address those needs, distributed 1,500 bushels of seed to local farmers to help them grow more wheat, potatoes, oats, and barley, rented tractors to farmers so that they could break new land for planting, aided farmers in getting credit to purchase horses and other equipment for expanding their operations, held "patriotic meetings" with a total attendance of 1,400 farm people at which he stressed the importance of increasing food production and conservation (complete with canning demonstrations), worked with local banks to help farmers apply for federal loans totaling \$48,000, and made weekly crop reports to the state extension department. In addition, he helped start three potato clubs for boys and girls in cooperation with schools in three communities.<sup>18</sup>

By 1918, USDA publications about club work featured a host of new guidelines and regulations, not just for individual 4-H projects, but for 4-H clubs themselves. This "standardization of the club group" included prescriptions such as a minimum club size (five members working on the same project), club charters and constitutions, oversight by local leaders and farm bureaus, holding public demonstrations and exhibits during the year, and record-keeping practices. It also involved new contests and recognitions of achievement for clubs and their members, which were designed to encourage consistent improvement in keeping with the national club motto, "To make the best better." From regular meetings and parliamentary procedure, to individual achievements and accolades, to more stringent reporting requirements, 4-H was becoming a

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18. "County and Home Demonstration Agents Annual Reports," 1913–1970, Montana Extension Service Records, 1913–1970, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, Accession 00021 (henceforth cited as MTER), Series 1, Boxes 1–70; F. E. McSpadden, "Special War Narrative Report, Big Horn County," 1917, MTER, Box 2, Folder 18.

national organization, more similar across the states than different.<sup>19</sup>

Although 4-H clubs became an important part of wartime mobilization, it was in the aftermath of the war that extension work with young people got its most enduring boost. This came not in the form of government assistance, but of private sponsorship. While the support of local businesses—as well as national philanthropists—had been critical to the establishment of club work, the relationships between the young Extension Service and the commercial farming interests had yet to be formalized. In 1921, however, a group of men representing some of the key figures in agricultural enterprise, convened at the Saddle and Sirloin Club in Chicago—the premier hangout of packinghouse executives—to form the National Committee on Boys' and Girls' Club Work. Led by Guy L. Noble, an agricultural economist with the Armour meat company, the group included leaders from agricultural publishing, the International Live Stock Exposition, and the American Farm Bureau Federation. Together they decided that the Committee would help set up 4-H demonstrations before important commercial organizations and fairs, publicize 4-H and its contributions, encourage bankers to make loans to club members, orchestrate educational trips and tours, and act as a clearinghouse for donors. In essence, they created a private fundraising arm for 4-H, one with interests firmly rooted in the growing agribusiness sector.<sup>20</sup>

The emergence of two national 4-H events in the 1920s illustrates not only the solidification of club work as an American, rather than a state or regional program, but also the growing importance of private funds in 4-H's activities, organization, and reward structure. 4-H Club Congress, held annually in Chicago beginning in 1923, began as a prize tour for 4-H winners, organized by the National Committee. This gathering brought club members from around the country to Chicago, where they toured institutions like

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19. O. H. Benson and Gertrude L. Warren, *Organization and Results of Boys' and Girls' Club Work (Northern and Western States)*, 1918, United States Department of Agriculture, Department Circular 66 (Washington: Government Printing Office, February 1920).

20. On the National Committee, see: Reck, see n. 9, chapter 15.

the Board of Trade, the Union Stockyards, Armour Packinghouse, Marshall Field's, and the McCormick works of International Harvester, and attended the International Live Stock Exposition. A similar event, one with a less commercial aspect, was the National 4-H Club Camp, held annually in Washington, DC beginning in 1927, on the grounds of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It was here, at the first Club Camp, that the 4-H club pledge was officially adopted:

I pledge my head to clearer thinking,  
                   my heart to greater loyalty,  
                   my hands to larger service, and  
                   my health to better living,  
 for my club, my community, and my country.<sup>21</sup>

The national camp—an extension of state club camps that had emerged over the decade—brought together leaders and officials as well as club youth. They engaged in traditional camp activities, including sleeping in tents and gathering for sing-alongs, while also touring the metropolis, visiting national monuments and museums, government agencies and buildings, and theaters and music halls. Government officials addressed the crowd, and sometimes club members even had a chance to meet the Secretary of Agriculture and the President and First Lady. Both Club Congress and Club Camp were exciting events for 4-H club members, many of whom had few opportunities to travel beyond their home communities.<sup>22</sup>

The locations of these two nationwide events indicate the coalescence of two foci around which 4-H club work increasingly orbited. The first was the business side of agriculture, represented most prominently by the livestock industry in the form of the Union Stockyards, Armour, and the International Livestock Exhibition. As the most important place where farm products were dismantled, standardized, commodified, packaged, abstracted, and traded on the market, Chicago was arguably the hub of U.S. agricultural change,

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21. Reck, see n. 9, p. 217.

22. On Club Congress, see *ibid.*, chapter 16. On Club Camp, see *ibid.*, chapter 18.

and stood for all that was businesslike about American farming.<sup>23</sup> The second was the federal government, with its seat in the District of Columbia. The desire of 4-H's national leaders and sponsors to make the best club members acquainted with the nation's capital, as well as the capital city of the U.S. agricultural industry—not to mention prominent figures from both—demonstrates the distinctly commercial cast to 4-H's nationalization in the years following World War I, as well as an increasing focus on citizenship at the federal level. As the highest honors in the annual 4-H contests, Club Congress and Club Camp implied a link between the two: good business made for good citizenship, and citizenship, in turn, depended on prosperous business. 4-H club members were thus recruited into the ranks of a more businesslike agriculture, and industrial capitalism, originally seen as a potential threat to agrarian values, was harmonized with farm democracy.

The success of this shift—and 4-H's growth more broadly—is attributable in part to its nature as a government program that hid its government status very well. While adult extension work in agriculture and home economics remained visibly a public service, through the employment of county agents who directed much of the work, 4-H's reliance on local leaders, its cooperation with local business for financing, its nature as a social organization as much as an educational one, and its similarity to other contemporary youth programs meant that, from the perspective of participants, it hardly seemed a government program at all. This is where its power lay. 4-H seamlessly integrated itself into the fabric of rural life by promoting an uncontroversial set of projects for boys and girls that became popular enough to reproduce itself from generation to generation. Parents enrolled successive children, club members grew up and became leaders, community members happily attended 4-H demonstrations and fair exhibits, businessmen saw returns on their investment when farming practices they sought to promote with their sponsorships became more widespread (and their profits increased), and bankers felt more comfortable lending to young people who had proven their

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23. William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

reliability through project work and public demonstration.<sup>24</sup>

### KNOWING RURAL PLACES

The years leading up to World War I saw high prices for farm products, due especially to urbanization, and farmers responded by enthusiastically plowing up more land, planting more crops, and raising more livestock. The war itself accelerated this transformation, providing federal incentives for farmers to produce more and expand their operations through greater access to credit, encouragement to purchase machinery that would take the place of the men serving overseas, and a constant barrage of propaganda linking increased production with liberty, patriotism, and victory. The markets continued to support this expansion, with high prices and high demand from Europe continuing until 1920. But the boom years were not to last: as European countries began to rebuild their agriculture, wartime markets disappeared, and American farmers' continued high output caused prices to crash, forcing many farmers into bankruptcy and ruin. The war had taught them how to produce an incredible amount of food and fiber using modern techniques and machinery, but when peacetime conditions returned, this productivity became a liability that plunged rural America into a depression that lasted a full decade before the stock market crash of 1929 brought the rest of the country to the brink of ruin.<sup>25</sup>

As many scholars have argued, the war years formed the foundation upon which the industrialization of American agriculture was built. The keynote of these changes was mechanization, but equally important was a growing sense that farming should be conducted primarily as a business, rather than as a way of

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24. Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

25. Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); David B. Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900–1930* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979); Gary A. Borkan, *World War I Posters* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2002).

life. This meant that farmers needed to adopt modern cost-accounting and record-keeping methods that would allow them to judge the efficiency of their operations as profit-making ventures, and to improve their practices in a systematic way. This trend toward “farm management” rather than “farming” also reflected the growing influence of government policy in the countryside. The income tax, the county agent, and the land-grant-college specialist all represented the increasing presence of state actors in rural life. Farmers were being incorporated into the bureaucratic state, largely as the result of policies they had advocated during the tumultuous years of the late nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

While it is certainly true that the U.S. government was actively promoting efficiency, production, and mechanization through the USDA as well as the state agricultural colleges and experiment stations, this notion that every farm should become a factory does not tell the whole story of rural change during the early twentieth century. The persistence of the agrarian ideal, despite a declining farm population throughout the twentieth century, suggests that something more complicated has occurred in rural America over the course of the 1900s. A closer look at 4-H club work during the period during and immediately following the First World War complicates this story of agricultural modernization as industrialization and scientization alone. As we saw in chapter one, many rural reformers who sought to use science to improve country life were not convinced that increased production was the sole key to rural betterment, and these reformers had a large hand in shaping the forms that extension work with young people took in the 1910s. Extension and 4-H club work were, I suggest, one of the means by which this agrarian vision was maintained, revised, and appropriated for different purposes. At once an increasingly coordinated national program for rural improvement and a set of diverse and highly local projects to address community concerns, extension and 4-H became embedded in negotiations about the future of American rural life during the first half of the

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26. Fitzgerald, see n. 25; Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures Since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution*, see n. 25; Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

twentieth century.

As the only government organization tasked with instructing farm children, 4-H played an important role in articulating the future of American rural life. By focusing on 4-H projects and the youth carrying them out in interactions with their family members and representatives of the agricultural bureaucracy, such as county agents and land-grant college specialists, we can see the often complicated processes of rural change, modernization, and development as they played out on the ground, in place. In particular, 4-H illuminates a set of knowledge-making, -gathering, and -circulating practices that became a central part not just of how rural people understood their farms, homes, and environments, but also of how scientists, bureaucrats, and administrators understood American agriculture. Together, these processes and ideas shaped what it meant to be rural in twentieth-century America. Project work also helps us see the continued importance of environmental factors—the notion that a person's surroundings were an important determinant of their well-being, both material and spiritual—in rural development efforts. Through seasonal projects conducted on the home place with local resources, 4-H set about improving rural landscapes and rural young people together.

#### THE NATURE OF 4-H

4-H clubs constituted a place-based means of knowing nature, and of gathering knowledge about agriculture and rural life, both for the young people who carried out project work, and for the college and government representatives who oversaw their activities at the county, state, and national levels. 4-H combined social activities with labor in nature that centered on production for the home and for the local and regional market. It thus involved an economic aspect based on ownership that was designed to cultivate a particular kind of relationship with nature and nation: an agrarian form of citizenship that would foment democratic engagement and leadership, as well as stewardship of the land and its resources. 4-H was at once an agent

of modernization along industrial, capitalist, commodity-production lines, *and* an agent of a different kind of modernization, a *rural modernization* that did not see an emotional relationship with the objects of production as antithetical to market orientation. By knowing nature through labor and exchange, as well as the intimate relations involved in raising an animal, cultivating an acre of grain, or cooking the family meals, 4-H furthered a vision of the rural future that did not try to divorce the business of farming from the agrarian way of life, or separate the farm home from the farmstead. Rather, it attempted to cultivate stronger bonds between them, enriching rural life.

Although early extension work with young people—particularly in the South—generally consisted of corn clubs for boys and gardening-canning clubs for girls, by the time of the Smith-Lever Act, these limited offerings had expanded to include a number of projects for both boys and girls. The types of projects available varied in the individual states, and even at the county level, according to the agricultural needs and aims of the different parts of the country, but by the 1910s and 1920s, club work had established a pattern of agricultural and home economics projects that paralleled these early corn and canning projects—as well as the organization of land-grant college curricula in these fields—and that would endure for much of the century. Generally speaking, by the second and third decades of the twentieth century, 4-H club work tended to fall under a few main headings. In the agricultural realm, field crops, such as corn, potatoes, cotton, and other commodities, stood alongside livestock projects as the most popular activities for club boys. As the 1920s gave way to the 1930s, projects in agricultural engineering—such as tractor and small-engine maintenance, terracing, and woodworking—increasingly appeared in 4-H project offerings, but crops and livestock continued to reign supreme among the boys.<sup>27</sup>

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27. This section relies on the archival records and publications of the 4-H Club departments of New York, Mississippi, Montana, and Wisconsin, as well as 4-H materials in selected manuscript and private collections. Cornell Cooperative Extension Records, 1915–2004, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #21-24-1975 (henceforth cited as CCE); New York State College of Agriculture Extension Service, 4-H Club Records, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #21-24-692 (henceforth cited as NYS4H); Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, Cooperative Extension Service, 1925–1963, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State Univer-



In homemaking, the two main categories were foods and nutrition on the one hand—usually further separated into food preparation (cooking and baking) and food preservation (canning, curing, and drying)—and clothing (from elementary sewing to advanced garment construction and textile judging) on the other. These projects were primarily the girls' domain, and invariably included ample instruction in nutrition, health, hygiene, grooming, posture, manners, and a host of other matters considered to be essential to the development of proper womanhood. In the southern states, girls' club work was administered separately from boys' club work, and was instead lumped together with home demonstration work with women. As a result, there tended to be far more gender segregation, both by project and by club, in the South than there was in the North, Midwest, or West.

Straddling agriculture and the home were a set of projects that were less strongly gendered, in the sense that, in most states, neither boys nor girls were encouraged more strongly to partake in these activities, and their enrollment tended to be more mixed than the strictly agricultural or home economic projects. These farm-home projects included vegetable gardening (which sometimes came under the heading of, or was frequently carried alongside, work in foods), poultry raising, dairying, shepherding, and beekeeping. While many of these were, strictly speaking, livestock projects, the farm animal activities that were encouraged for both boys and girls were those that involved raising animals not solely for meat production: eggs in

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sity Libraries, Starkville, A97-14 (henceforth cited as MCES); Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, Cooperative Extension Service 4-H Club, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A88-27 (henceforth cited as MCES4H); Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, Agriculture Extension Service, 1905-1972, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A77-30 (henceforth cited as MCE-SAES); Mississippi State University Extension Service, Annual narrative and statistical records from state offices and county agents, 1909-1944, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, Microfilm NFX Ref S79.M56 (henceforth cited as MSUESANSR); Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, Boys Club, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A88-29 (henceforth cited as MCES Boys Club); MTER; Mack A. Rowzee Collection, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A86-54 (henceforth cited as Rowzee Collection); Ernest Frederick Schaufler 4-H Club Papers, 1937-1957, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #21-24-3526 (henceforth cited as Schaufler Papers); Elda and Linda Schiesser Scrapbooks, 1928-1973, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Accession M2006-066 (henceforth cited as Schiesser Scrapbooks); University of Wisconsin 4-H Club Department, Annual Reports and Project Plans, 1914-1962, University Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Series 9/5/4 (henceforth cited as WI4HAR); University of Wisconsin 4-H Club Department, 4-H Club Records, University Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Series 9/5/00-12 (henceforth cited as WI4H); Whitcomb Materials.

the case of chickens; milk and butter in the case of cows; wool in the case of sheep; honey and pollination in the case of bees. These were farm products that most rural reformers felt could be important factors in farm diversification, and critical sources of income for farm girls and women who were not otherwise much engaged with the market economy.

What set 4-H apart from other contemporaneous youth movements—aside from its nature as a quasi-government program—was its explicit engagement with the market. In contrast to the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, and other organizations that sought to put children into direct contact with nature in order to promote their proper development, 4-H activities in nature were not primarily recreational, but economic. The relationship 4-H sought to cultivate between children and the natural world was one of care and stewardship through ownership of and responsibility for a small piece of nature. Whether this was a lamb, an acre of corn, or a cellarful of home-canned goods, projects were not a matter simply of putting children in charge of a task, but rather of making that work their own, through property, labor in nature, and remunerative engagement with the market.<sup>28</sup> “Let the children own something,” a New York State pamphlet promoting junior extension work suggested. “Give the young people the interest that comes from ownership. ... If he enjoys ownership of a calf, he has a still greater pride in the cow when it is to be sold and the money becomes his.”<sup>29</sup> The opportunity for boys and girls to earn money through their own small-scale farm and home enterprises was key not only to their proper development, but also to “keep[ing] the young people on

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28. For more on the history of scouting and other similar youth programs of the turn of the twentieth century, see: Tammy M. Proctor, “(Uni)Forming Youth: Girl Guides and Boy Scouts in Britain, 1908–1939,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 45 (Spring 1998): 103–134; Tammy M. Proctor, *On My Honour: Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2002); Ben Jordan, “‘Conservation of Boyhood’: Boy Scouting’s Modest Manliness and Natural Resource Conservation,” *Environmental History* 15 (Oct. 2010): 612–642; Helen Buckler, Mary F. Fiedler, and Martha F. Allen, *Wo-He-Lo: The Story of Camp Fire Girls, 1910–1960* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961); Ernest Thompson Seton, *Boy Scouts of America: A Handbook of Woodcraft, Scouting, and Life-craft*, With which is incorporated by arrangement General Sir Robert Baden-Powell’s Scouting for Boys (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1910); Camp Fire Girls, *The Book of the Camp Fire Girls* (New York: Camp Fire Girls National Headquarters, 1914).

29. “Boys and Girls on the Farm,” *Cornell Reading–Course for Farmers’ Wives*, 2nd ser., no. 7 (Dec. 1903), p. 130.

the farm.”<sup>30</sup> This combination of “spiritual value” and “money value” would keep boys and girls interested in rural life, and would stem the troubling tide of migration to the cities.

4-H’s emphasis on ownership, and on materially productive and financially remunerative labor in nature, point to the importance of commerce and markets in spurring interest in the natural world, and consequently in farming as a vocation. However, despite their centrality in Progressive reformers’ plans for improving rural life, these more economic aspects of country-life education have been largely absent from the recent flurry of work on nature study, which has focused instead on the movement’s relationship to science education and Progressive modernity, and its continuities with postwar environmentalism.<sup>31</sup> But, as many rural people knew—and as scholars like Richard White have observed—*working* in nature for living and profit was an important and equally valid way of teaching children to value their environment, one which many nature study educators and country life reformers were eager to put to use. They did not assume that observational and interactive knowledge alone would endear the natural world to all children; nor were they naive enough to think that a purely recreational or emotional/intellectual communion with nature would be enough to make farming an attractive future livelihood for rural youth. Rather, they embraced productive work in agriculture and homemaking as a way of cementing the empathetic teachings of natural history. For 4-H’s leaders, the economic and the emotional were not in conflict, but were integral aspects of coming to know nature, and becoming a successful farmer.<sup>32</sup>

We can get a clearer sense of 4-H’s means of fostering care and investment through ownership by taking a

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30. “Boys and Girls on the Farm,” see n. 29, p. 133.

31. Pamela Henson, “‘Through Books to Nature’: Anna Botsford Comstock and the Nature Study Movement,” in *Natural Eloquence: Women Reinscribe Science*, ed. B. T. Gates and A. B. Shteir (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, “Nature, Not Books: Scientists and the Origins of the Nature-Study Movement in the 1890s,” *Isis* 96, no. 3 (2005): 324–352; Kevin C. Armitage, *The Nature Study Movement: The Forgotten Popularizer of America’s Conservation Ethic* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009); Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, *Teaching Children Science: Hands-On Nature Study in North America, 1890–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

32. Richard White, “Are You An Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?”: Work and Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1996).

closer look at projects themselves, as represented in project bulletins—the instructional materials club members would receive at the beginning of the season—annual reports of 4-H club agents and state leaders, and the records of individual club members themselves, such as Richard Whitcomb’s garden project record, with which we began this chapter. Though project work, farm children came to know nature in a more systematic way, by keeping records and learning the scientific principles that underlay their work; in a more intimate and emotional way, by having responsibility for and care of a piece of the natural world that was important to the family livelihood; and in an economic way, by keeping careful track of expenses, by measuring the enterprise in dollars and cents, and in engaging with the wider market by turning their projects into salable products. These economic, scientific, and emotional aspects of club were were inextricable from one another. Knowing nature as a 4-H youth—and being a successful rural citizen—meant harmonizing all three.

#### INSIDE THE 4-H PROJECT

Though 4-H club work varied somewhat in its focus and organization from state to state, the aspect that held it together nationwide was the project. As one 1928 handbook put it, “The project, sometimes called the demonstration, is the basis of all 4-H Club work. All club members select some project which they study and which they actually carry on, such as growing potatoes, raising a dairy calf, making clothing, and the like. ... Most of these have an economic feature, that is, they offer an opportunity for financial profit.”<sup>33</sup> To aid them, project bulletins were assembled by agricultural college specialists, in cooperation with the state extension and 4-H club staff, and distributed to members and club meetings. These pamphlets laid out the requirements for each project, and contained recommendations about the best practices for carrying them out, both those developed by experts (*e.g.* new vegetable varieties or pest control measures) and those developed through farmers’ experience (such as labor-saving techniques or methods of cultivation). Economic and practical

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33. The 4-H Handbook, Part I: The Purpose and Plan of 4-H Club Work, Cornell Junior Extension Bulletin 30, September 1928, p. 3.

considerations were thus just as important for 4-H projects as the science itself.<sup>34</sup>

Just as 4-H's intellectual goals were not limited to science, its economic goals were not related solely to maximizing farm profits. 4-H club work had gotten its start in the early 1900s as a part of efforts to encourage farmers to diversify their operations, moving them away from dependence on cash crops, and being at the mercy of volatile commodity markets. This impulse towards greater self-sufficiency on the farm was reflected in projects that encouraged boys and girls to contribute to "living at home" by taking charge of aspects of home production, such as the kitchen garden, or by adding a marketable specialty to the farmstead, such as dairy or poultry, that could also support the family during lean times. Project work could help farm girls in particular achieve some measure of financial independence through market gardening, canning, or raising chickens; in some states, club girls pooled their efforts and set up brick-and-mortar stores to sell their wares in the community. Extension work with young people thus supported a set of economic goals that combined greater local market integration with the kind of diversification that would insulate budding producers from the fluctuations of more remote markets.<sup>35</sup>

The diversity offered by a home vegetable garden was an important hedge against environmental fluctuations as well, as we saw with Richard Whitcomb's garden project. Though Richard didn't have a particularly successful year, he learned that early-maturing crops like peas were good protection against late spring frosts. And, even with his reduced profits, he was able to put money in the bank, not just from the sale of his produce, but from fair premiums as well. Had he been unable to sell his vegetables at all, they would have at the very least provided food for his family. Richard thus learned to value not only the financial rewards of

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34. For an example of how one project guide integrated science and tradition, see Arthur J. Pratt, "4-H Vegetable Growing," February 1933 (rev. August 1936), Schaufler Papers, Box 1.

35. O. B. Martin, *The Demonstration Work: Dr. Seaman A. Knapp's Contribution to Civilization* (Boston: The Stratford Co., 1921); C. B. Smith, "Our Responsibilities in the Live At Home Program of All Extension," 1932, CCE, Box 84, Folder 8; Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, Scrapbooks, 1920–1925, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A88-25 (henceforth cited as MCES Scrapbooks); Garrard Harris, *The Treasure of the Land: How Alice Won Her Way* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917).

his labor that were the result of his involvement in the market, but also the ways in which his efforts could insulate him from the unpredictability of both nature and prices.<sup>36</sup>

The knowledge 4-H administrators wanted to capture about projects like Richard's is evident from the kinds of records they asked club members to keep. Record-keeping practices were a central part of every project, as they furthered both the economic and scientific aims of club work. Keeping accurate records would instill better business practices through cost accounting, and more systematic habits of thought and judgment by allowing club members to evaluate the results of their project. Club members' individual records would also allow extension officials to evaluate the results of the program as a whole, and of the kinds of aggregate changes 4-H was effecting at the local level. We saw the kind of detailed records club members were asked to keep at the start of this chapter. A final "project story" fleshed out these facts and figures with photographs, impressions, and ideas for improvement.

We can see how this agricultural knowledge—in the form of records—circulated by following the written reports of club members' projects like Richard's. At the end of the season, Richard submitted his forms to his club leader, who looked them over, along with those of Richard's fellow club members, to certify their accuracy, and sent them on to the leader of 4-H club work for the state of Vermont. Using these records as a reference, this official then compiled his annual report of 4-H club work, which he conveyed to both the state extension office for inclusion in the report of extension work for the state, and to the Federal Extension Office at the USDA, to be included in summaries of both 4-H club work and extension work nationwide for the year 1924. Via both routes, the information contained in Richard's project record made its way to Washington, becoming part of the statistics and reports that would influence both state- and federal-level agricultural policymaking.<sup>37</sup>

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36. Whitcomb Materials.

37. Whitcomb Materials.

Although individual 4-H project records themselves did not arrive in the offices of land-grant colleges and the halls of the USDA, the information officials passed on was not simply stripped down into figures, charts, and graphs. Just as club members were expected to flesh out their accounts with narrative descriptions, impressions, diagrams, and photographs in the form of a story, state club leaders were expected to offer a narrative account of club work for the year. Consequently, their reports are filled not just with summaries of profits and enrollment statistics, but also with stories and photographs of individual club members and their project achievements. These stories help us trace material flows in and out of the projects, as well as to better see the kinds of values project work fostered through ownership.

Project records were not the only kind of knowledge that 4-H helped circulate. The fruits of club members' labor—in the form of farm and home products such as pigs, potatoes, and peas—represented another instantiation of agricultural knowledge that moved around and had a wider influence on the community. For instance, in the annual report of junior extension work in New York State for 1924, we learn that “Kenneth Dorthy, 16, of Tompkins county, raised 265 bushels of Rural New Yorker potatoes from this acre project. He raised the seed last year on this eighth-acre of project potatoes at which time he planted certified tubers. ... His crop is not yet all sold, although neighboring farmers have purchased many bushels for seed.”<sup>38</sup> We can see here that it is not just money that comes in and out of the project work, but material items like potatoes as well. Kenneth's seed potatoes, purchased by neighboring farmers, represent an embodiment of the knowledge and practices put forth in the 4-H potato project guidelines and carried out by Kenneth. They become one of the means by which scientific agriculture—in this case, in the form of improved seed potatoes—would reproduce itself.

This is just the kind of development extension's promoters were hoping for: young people trying out new practices, which would then spread throughout the community as a result of their success, and become

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38. W. J. Wright, “Annual Report of Junior Extension Work for New York State,” 1924, NYS4H, Box 111.

incorporated into the everyday practices of farmers in the vicinity. The labors of young people like Richard and Kenneth were thus instrumental in shaping local people's impressions of what scientific agriculture meant in practice in their locality. Their projects were a critical part of the work of translating the abstract results of agricultural experimentation done in remote locations by equally distant experts into meaningful results, embodied not just in impressive profits or yields—though these were often part of the boosterism—but in edible peas grown by the neighbor boy, or seed potatoes for next year's crop offered at a reasonable price by a hardworking kid from the community. We can think of this as a process of domesticating science, bringing it down to earth in the context of the farm home; and children like Whitcomb and Dorthy were a part of that process.

Club members' work was also part of a larger extension-service goal: to broadly test the results of experiment station research under the particularities of the enormously varied local conditions that pertained from farm to farm and from county to county all across the United States. As one experiment station publication put it, "[t]he extension work will put the conclusions of practical tests, of extended experiment, and of searching inquiry to the most rigid test under a great variety of practical conditions."<sup>39</sup> Since 4-H boys and girls were the entering wedge for this experimental work in most communities, and since the results of their efforts were aggregated and passed on to their state agricultural college, their projects constituted part of a feedback loop for agricultural knowledge-making. Thus, in their projects, club members both reenacted the process of knowledge-creation through experimentation by following experiment-station bulletins and guidelines established by research, and also helped reproduce and refine that scientific knowledge by making observations about how those practices fared under the environmental conditions of their homestead.

The products, profits, and premiums that resulted from club work were not the sum total of 4-H's output. Club members themselves—growing children, who were being improved and refined through their labors

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39. "Editorial," *Experiment Station Record* 34, no. 2 (Feb. 1916): 103.



and interactions with nature, the market, and one another—were the most important product of 4-H club work. County agents and club leaders frequently touted their charges as “the country’s most important crop.”<sup>40</sup> Club members’ project records also show that the effects of project work on the development of boys and girls themselves was just as important as their contributions to agricultural and economic development. For instance, fifteen-year-old Alfred Moses of Livingston county, New York, carried a garden project that provided his family with fresh and canned vegetables, supplemented the family income with a roadside stand, and netted him over a hundred dollars in fair premiums between 1921 and 1924. The state club agent was pleased to report that, “[t]hrough the influence of club work and leaders, he has entered high school, although having previously decided he did not care to go further in school.”<sup>41</sup>

While Moses became convinced of the value of education, nineteen-year-old Eloise Riddell of Delaware County, New York, took on leadership responsibilities that gave her confidence and respect in the community. When her 4-H clothing club of eleven girls “found itself without a leader in 1924,” Eloise “assumed leadership of the club which she carried through most successfully. ... The club exhibit won first at the state fair,” and Eloise walked away with a coveted prize: a Singer sewing machine of her very own. Helping farm girls develop incomes of their own was in fact very important, as the story of Esther Bower illustrates. At fifteen years of age, Esther was the primary caregiver for her bedridden mother, and presumably the primary homemaker in her family as well. Projects in foods, canning, and poultry production helped her to raise a flock of 200 hens that could provide her with a steady income, as well as help put food on the table. In Mississippi, many communities established 4-H markets, where club members could sell their wares to the community. Using advertising leaflets, eye-catching signage, and sometimes even custom labels and brands for canned goods, these markets promoted local products and enabled many rural Mississippi youth—young

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40. See the back cover of *The 4-H Handbook, Part I*, see n. 14.

41. Wright, “Annual Report of Junior Extension Work for New York State,” see n. 38.

women in particular—to achieve some degree of financial independence.

It is important to remember that all of these financial transactions—from fair premiums to roadside sales to neighborly trades to farmer’s markets—intended to improve rural livings took place alongside, and were in fact inextricable from, efforts to deepen farm youth’s enjoyment and appreciation of their natural environment. Perhaps the best illustration of the close intertwining of these spiritual and economic goals is to be found in livestock projects, which emphasized the benefits children would reap from caring for a young, growing creature while they themselves were maturing. In Alabama, county agents promoted pig club work by arranging for “school pigs.” Securing registered Duroc hogs through cooperating breeders and supportive local banks, agents in Franklin and Choctaw counties gave the animals to the country schools, where they were cared for by the students and teachers. At the end of the school year, the student with the best school and club record got to take the pig home as a prize. “[T]hese pigs have been kept growing 40 to 50 pounds each per month all the summer and fall,” the state club leaders reported. “They are now magnificent sows. Who can estimate the influence on a community of having highly bred animals placed in the hands of interested boys whose ambition has been stirred in this way?”<sup>42</sup>

As the Alabama report indicates, good breeding was a preoccupation of many club leaders. This carried a particular resonance in the South, where concerns about racial mixing were embedded in the fabric of everyday life. But 4-H’s interest in guiding farmers away from “scrub” livestock and toward purebreds points to a broader set of eugenic ideas, hardly limited to the southern states, that gained a wide popular currency during the 1920s. The notion that the principles of breeding, so long practiced in animal husbandry, might be applied to humans had been growing since the late nineteenth century. Evolutionary ideas about species change and the rediscovery of Mendelian genetics gave many scientists and social reformers confidence that

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42. J. C. Ford et al., *Report of Boys’ Club Work in Alabama in 1918*, Alabama Extension Circular 28 (Auburn: Alabama Polytechnic Institute, February 1918), pp. 22–23.

controlling human heredity for the good of society was both possible and desirable.

But while 4-H's focus on purebred livestock, and its beneficial effects on the children and families who raised it, was certainly informed by eugenic ideas, club work cannot simply be classed as yet another project of positive eugenics in an era of widespread enthusiasm for its prescriptions. 4-H had far more faith in environmental influences than did most eugenicists, and was committed to emphasizing nurture at least as much as nature. While the goals of rural improvement and eugenic betterment certainly found common ground during the 1910s and 1920s, their means of attaining these goals were not congruent. 4-H's larger project during this period emphasized farm diversification as the key to individual and community health. Reducing 4-H activities, with livestock and otherwise, to a straightforward eugenic project is to misunderstand what 4-H and the Extension Service were trying to do. The lessons of better breeding for livestock club members were about improvement more generally: how the environment could be shaped to turn even poor "scrub" stock into fine animals with a real value to the farm and its inhabitants, and to transform downtrodden rural people into productive citizens. A child or animal's genetic endowment was certainly relevant, but it was not the end of the story.<sup>43</sup>

Even though purebreds were held up as a standard towards which to strive, it was the striving that

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43. For more on eugenics, the connections between rural improvement and eugenic thought, and the consonances between genetics, breeding, and eugenics, see: Laura Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890–1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Alexandra Minna Stern, "We Cannot Make a Silk Purse Out of a Sow's Ear: Eugenics in the Hoosier Heartland," *Indiana Magazine of History* 103 (Mar. 2007): 3–38; Nancy L. Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999); Steven Selden, "Transforming Better Babies into Fitter Families: Archival Resources and the History of the American Eugenics Movement, 1908–1930," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, no. 2 (June 2005): 199–225; Marilyn Bailey Ogilvie, "Inbreeding, eugenics, and Helen Dean King (1869–1955)," *Journal of the History of Biology* 40 (2007): 467–507; David Cullen, "Back to the Future: Eugenics—A Bibliographic Essay," *The Public Historian* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 163–175; Amy Sue Bix, "Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers: 'Women's Work' in Biology," *Social Studies of Science* 27 (1997): 625–668; Leland L. Glenna, Margaret A. Gollnick, and Stephen S. Jones, "Eugenic Opportunity Structures: Teaching Genetic Engineering at U.S. Land-Grant Universities Since 1911," *Social Studies of Science* 37, no. 2 (Apr. 2007): 281–296; Samuel A. McReynolds, "Eugenics and Rural Development: The Vermont Commission on Country Life's Program for the Future," *Agricultural History* 71, no. 3 (1997): 300–329; Cynthia Huff, "Victorian Exhibitionism and Eugenics: The Case of Francis Galton and the 1899 Crystal Palace Dog Show," *Victorian Review* 28, no. 2 (2002): 1–20; Barbara Kimmelman, "The American Breeders' Association: Genetics and Eugenics in an Agricultural Context, 1903–13," *Social Studies of Science* 13 (1983): 163–204; Kathy J. Cooke, "From Science to Practice, or Practice to Science? Chickens and Eggs in Raymond Pearl's Agricultural Breeding Research, 1907–1916," *Isis* 88, no. 1 (Mar. 1997): 62–86.

was 4-H's focus. Livestock project guides thus gave their members information about the best pure breeds and their characteristics, but tended to emphasize the processes of care, feeding, and training that would improve any animal, regardless of its origins. In many cases, this was a process akin to taming, whereby the club member and the animal forged a mutual relationship that improved them both. In eastern Montana in 1921, Coldspring pig club member Richard Flaherty, Jr., acquired a sow from the county agent. Richard's pig, who he named Buster's Birta, was both a playmate and an investment. His project story illustrates how closely the personal and the economic could be intermingled in club work.

I got my pig through Mr. Gustafson. When Mr. Gustafson came he had two pigs each in a sack. He told me to take my choice. I took the first one I came to. Dad wasn't home so I fixed an old setting hen coop, put her in it and she was as wild as a deer. She tried to jump out 'till I had to put chicken wire over the top. After we had built her a pen she soon got tame. When I would turn her out she would give two big grunts and away she would go straight to the house and then start in plowing around the porch. If the door was open she would walk right in the house and drink the cat milk, then ma would fire us both out and tell me to take Birta to the pen.

Sometimes I would hide from Birta, then she would squeal and run hunting for me. I have my pig trained. When I sit down the pig will sit down; when I lay down the pig will lay down. When I got my pig she weighed 26 pounds. I fed milk and ground oats and sometimes cooked potatoes three times a day for the first three months. After that two times a day with a little alfalfa and I kept her in a clean, dry place. She now weighs 192 pounds.

I hope to raise some nice little purebred next year.<sup>44</sup>

As Richard's words so lovingly show, the process of cultivating young people's interest in the farming way of life was always taking place at the spiritual and economic levels at the same time. The two means of improving rural life were, for 4-H's leaders, quite inextricable. 4-H club youth, leaders and agents, county and state officials all moved seamlessly between these two registers, and, I would argue, did not see them as separate activities at all. To make farm life better, the economic and the spiritual had to develop together.

The story of Richard and Buster's Birta speaks to a relationship of taming and training not unlike that

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44. Charles E. Potter, "Narrative Report, Boys' and Girls' Club Work in Montana for 1921," 1921, MTER, Box 80, Folder 50, p. 46.

between master and pet; yet at the same time it raises the prospect of what such a relationship would mean when the animal in question had reached maturity—and marketability. For club members raising stock animals for meat, this was clearly a more complicated question than those raising dairy cows, brood sows, or laying hens. For instance, in the summer of 1932, the Montana Woolgrowers' Association sponsored a lamb-feeding project for 4-H club members in cooperation with the Montana Extension Service. Enrollees would fatten lambs throughout the remainder of the calendar year, to be sold in the wintertime. In January of 1933, Gordon Bradford, Marietta Hamilton, and their fellow lamb-feeding project members convened in Great Falls for the first Montana 4-H Club Fat Lamb Show, sponsored again by the Woolgrowers' Association. Immediately following the show was a public auction, at which the lambs were sold to the highest bidders. Gordon's lamb won the grand champion prize—and was promptly purchased by the Rainbow Hotel, which presumably featured the creature on its dining room menu shortly thereafter. The local S & B grocery store purchased "many of the best lambs"—possibly including Marietta's, which had placed in three different categories—and their carcasses soon formed the centerpiece of the store's window display.<sup>45</sup>

But, demanding as 4-H club work could be, and regardless of the rigorous training it offered in the methods and practices of scientific farming and homemaking, it remained at root a children's program, one that sought to make the learning process fun, and to improve the social landscape of rural America through recreation. Ellen B. Green, of Selway, Montana, felt strongly about 4-H's positive role in her life, even though she faced a number of challenges when she joined a corn club in the spring of 1921. "In the first place the ground was infested with prairie dogs," she wrote in her project story. "Second place, I had no team to plow with, or disk; so it cost me considerable to get my corn in. The next trouble was prairie chickens." Despite these initial setbacks, Ellen was able to raise 50 bushels per acre of red dent—the best in her area. At

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45. D. P. Thurber, "Annual Report of the Agricultural Extension Agent for the Sun River Irrigation Project," 1933, MTER, Box 72, Folder 21, pp. 36–43.

the end of the season, her distance from the railroad—over 100 miles—and her family's poverty prevented her both from traveling to the fair itself, and from sending a few sample ears via parcel post. Despite her conviction that her crop was prize-worthy, she was not able to compete. Nonetheless, Ellen was happy she had joined 4-H, not only for the sake of her own accomplishments that year, but for the social outlet club work provided in her remote location. "I always had a good time, especially at the club picnic...[where] we had a big dinner, gunny sack races, base ball game and had the club members' picture taken." For isolated farm children, the society of other young people, and the opportunity to have fun together, was clearly enough to make even the most frustrating projects worth the effort.<sup>46</sup>

The 4-H project was thus a means of gathering knowledge about agriculture and rural places and a way of intervening in and shaping those places through on-farm practices carried out by children. The aim of these activities was to create among 4-H youth a microcosm of rural life that indicated what was possible. It was thus a means of rehearsing solutions to rural problems that could then hopefully be translated, through the reproductive processes of nature and culture, to the whole of the rural population. By practicing adult activities in a circumscribed economic universe, 4-H club youth were demonstrating what a more productive and more sensitive rural life might look like.

### DEMONSTRATING DEVELOPMENT

The demonstration was not just a pedagogical tool carried out by cooperators and club members at the behest of the extension service; it was also a means of providing evidence of development back to the organization. Just as rural people were meant to be better convinced by the visual evidence of local demonstrations, the Extension Service bureaucracy seemed also to rely on visual evidence as confirmation of its efficacy. At the same time, the tableaux club work created—both in person at fairs, congresses, and expositions; and in images

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46. Potter, see n. 44, p. 55.

circulated by way of project records, official reports, and 4-H club bulletins and project circulars—served to generate and reinforce a prototypical vision of rural life fashioned according to a white, middle-class ideal. This was reflected in gender roles, food and health habits, physical surroundings, and other aspects of farm living. The formation of this ideal allowed extension agents to quickly diagnose rural problems among their constituents through a set of visual cues and signs—such as living conditions and labor relations—by judging them in terms of their adherence to or deviation from these norms. This rural family ideal emerged as the goal of 4-H-style development in two important ways: through representations of 4-H club work, and through institutional arrangements.

#### PICTURING RURAL LIFE: THE ICONOGRAPHY OF 4-H

One of the most important ways in which 4-H consistently expressed its developmental vision was through photography. Indeed, by the 1920s, county agents were consistently documenting their work visually as well as statistically and narratively, and they passed on this tendency to 4-H club leaders and members. By offering visual depictions of projects and their results, sometimes juxtaposing “before” and “after” images to underscore changes, 4-H photographs demonstrated improvement as it occurred and was made visible in material ways. This involved invoking a set of symbols and signs that were recognizable by USDA administrators as evidence of improvement on the one hand, and developing a visual language of 4-H-style improvement on the other. By looking at 4-H images in the context of a nationalizing improvement program, we can see development on display.<sup>47</sup>

Images of 4-H tended to be of four general types that reflected the main kinds of activities around which club work coalesced in the 1910s and 1920s. These were pictures of club members with their projects, pictures

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47. For a discussion of film and photography as tools especially suited for visualizing and documenting development, see Gregg Mitman and Paul Erickson, “Latex and Blood: Science, Markets, and American Empire,” *Radical History Review*, no. 107 (Spring 2010): 45–73.

of demonstrations, pictures of fair exhibits, and before-and-after photo pairings that showed the results of project work over time. These images were generated first by extension agents, who took photographs to help show the results of their work at the county level, and illustrate the annual narrative reports they produced for their state leaders. The same tendency existed at the state and federal levels: most state extension and 4-H club offices listed cameras among their office equipment, and the images they captured were part of a larger land-grant-college project of documenting agriculture and rural life conditions in the states. The USDA Extension Service also encouraged agents to take photographs, and to submit them as a part of their reports. Images of club work—often the same ones that appeared in official reports—increasingly graced the pages of 4-H bulletins and circulars put out by the state offices. As funding for extension publications increased and printing facilities improved, mimeographed typewritten circulars gave way to professionally printed and typeset documents, complete with drawings, photographs, and sometimes even color. Such attractive, illustrated bulletins were considered critical to grabbing and holding the attention of rural youth. The iconography of 4-H was thus conveyed to club members, who replicated these poses and framings in the photographs they took to document and illustrate their project records and stories.<sup>48</sup>

The most common and recognizable form of 4-H imagery was (and probably remains) the picture of the club member with his or her project. These photographs usually took one of two forms: the club member posing alongside the project, or the club member engaged in work on the project. While photos of club members in action emphasized the labor and hands-on aspects of the club program—a boy hoeing his garden rows, a girl feeding her chickens, a boy plowing a field to sow grain—more obviously posed photos exhibited a broader range of meanings. Children—almost invariably white children—mugged for the camera leading

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48. This section again relies primarily on archival documents, annual reports, and project records from New York, Mississippi, Montana, and Wisconsin: CCE; NYS4H; MCES; MCES4H; MCESAES; MSUESANSR; MCES Boys Club; MTER; Rowzee Collection; WI4HAR; WI4H. For examples of 4-H project records, see: Whitcomb, "Home Garden Achievement Work," 4-H project record, see n. 3; Beadle Family Papers, 1862–1984, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, M93-196 (henceforth cited as Beadle Papers); Schaufler Papers; Schiesser Scrapbooks.



their individual sheep, calves, and pigs; standing in front of shelves of canned goods they had put up or in the field of corn they had raised; modeling the dresses they had made; holding a loaf of bread they had baked. These images served as exhibits of their own, akin to those that appeared at fairs, in show rings, and in demonstration plots. In them, the child was showcasing the product, but the photo was showcasing the child as well.<sup>49</sup>

Like the corn club images of boys atop their harvest that circulated in the rural press in the years before 4-H, photographs of club members with their projects were meant to impress. This impressiveness was often expressed visually by emphasizing the smallness or youth of the child and the hugeness of his or her achievement.<sup>50</sup> Steers dwarfed their youthful owners, cornstalks grew higher than their ten-year-old cultivators, and stacks of canned goods threatened to topple and bury their proud preparers. Particularly successful club members returned from the fair covered in blue ribbons. The images practically exclaimed to the viewer: *This little girl raised and preserved all this food—enough to feed her whole family for the entire winter! This young boy is handling a man-sized job by raising this beef calf! This kid won all these awards!* Taken together, representations of youth with their projects invited viewers to imagine what might be possible if the efforts of all these young people were combined—and the prosperous future that would unfold when they matured into adults. Showing club members with their projects emphasized the fact that both club member and farm product were being improved at the same time, and that this joint improvement would translate into better living on the farm, and better life in the rural community.

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49. Of course, the line between candid and posed is fuzzy: it is probably safe to assume that, even if some of the images represent photos that were taken as candid, none of the pictures that appeared in 4-H materials were taken without the club member's knowledge, and therefore represent some degree of positioning or self-consciousness.

50. On the iconography of agricultural abundance, see Cindy Ott, "Object Analysis of the Giant Pumpkin," *Environmental History* 15, no. 4 (2010): 746–763.

## RURAL LIFE ON DISPLAY: FAIRS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

In photographs of themselves and their projects, club boys and girls rehearsed the roles they would play at more public exhibitions. Extension agents photographed 4-H demonstrations to show how club members' know-how was shared and passed on. In addition to carrying at least one project, every 4-H club member had to perform demonstrations that taught others about better methods, or simply told of the way in which he or she carried out a particular task. Demonstrations showcased the knowledge and skills that 4-H'ers accumulated through their project work, and brought them into contact with the larger community. A club member could give a demonstration on anything from the simple and everyday, such as how to sew on a button, to the generally useful, such as how to splice rope and make a rope halter, to the complex and advanced, such as the entirety of the cold-pack canning technique. Demonstrations took place in a number of venues, from the club meeting to the Grange hall to the fair, and were often performed by multiple club members as a team. At the fair, demonstrations were a competitive event, with scorecards, judges, and prizes. To show the variety of methods and practices club members were disseminating, extension agents captured images of them carrying out the actions of rural modernization in front of audiences.

In demonstration photographs, club members dressed in their uniforms—a white dress with green trim for girls, trousers, white buttondown shirt, and green sweater for boys—and usually appeared behind a table or bench. In the background was usually displayed the name of the demonstration, and information about it. On the table would be arranged all the necessary equipment: a pressure cooker for canning, the ingredients for a dish to be prepared, a light source and a basket of eggs to be candled, a rooster to be caponized. At state fairgrounds, the 4-H buildings would generally have demonstration halls equipped for this purpose, but some demonstrations—such as those with large livestock—usually took place outside or in the show ring. Images of club members demonstrating resembled nothing so much as a science lecture or lab: the instructor behind the bench, expounding upon the principle being illustrated in physical form in the demo.

However, 4-H demonstrations were more didactic than a scientific lecture: club members were illustrating not so much general principles as procedures and techniques, so they tended to be prescriptive in their mode of instruction. When taking place before a large crowd, as at the fair, photographs of 4-H demonstrations often included audience members, to emphasize the far-reaching effects of club work.

The most public 4-H events of all took place at the fair, and it was here that the poses, the representations of abundance and excellence, and the didactic nature of the demonstration came together in entertainment, enlightenment, and spectacle. Fair photographs often documented both club members with their projects and club members demonstrating, but here another kind of image emerged: the picture of the exhibit. This was the most popular image the issued forth from the fairgrounds. Photos of fair exhibits—the displays themselves being only fleeting phenomena—provide insight into how the performative activities of 4-H club members that appeared in other photographs became national, rather than regional, standards for and depictions of rural development.

Even more than the images of club members with their projects, fair exhibits, both in real life and in photographs, relied on an iconography of abundance rooted in place. The exhibition was a cornucopia showing the variety and excellence of rural products, and thereby the quality of the places and people that produced them. Fair booths linked a particular club to its locality, and positioned that locality within the larger context of the state and nation. The 4-H exhibit hall at the fairgrounds became a microcosm of the best in a county or state's agriculture. By walking through the building, a fairgoer could make a tour of the entire county or state, inspecting its premier products. In the process, he or she would learn what the best canned peas looked like, how a prize-winning dairy cow should appear, or what constituted an appropriate dress for school wear. Booths exhibited a consistent march of superlatives that were meant to render rural life more uniform, and to gloss this improved rural life as American. A 4-H club, county, or state exhibit at a fair was thus a venue where numerous aspects of rural development were negotiated, normalized, displayed, and

related to national progress.

#### FIT FOR SHOW: LEARNING THE DEVELOPMENTAL POSE

Club members did not simply adopt these attitudes naturally; they had to learn how to pose for extension's camera. They did this by reading project guidelines, attending fairs and gatherings where club work was presented to the public, and by practicing at home as a part of their project work and training. In all of these contexts, 4-H boys and girls were able to see instances of ideal types towards which to aspire, and against which to compare themselves and their projects. Ideal types could appear as images of different pure breeds of livestock, or blemish-free tomatoes exhibited at a fair; ears of corn with regular kernels and straight rows, or an attractive and nutritious meal served properly; club members in show-ring stance with their animals, or a symmetrical, evenly-risen loaf of bread baked to a perfect golden brown. Standards of appearance were a part of all projects, from clothing, cooking, and canning to vegetable growing to livestock raising—and they applied as much to the club member as they did to his or her project. Also common to all projects was an emphasis on health—although it was particular stressed in projects that skewed female, such as foods, clothing, and garden work. Health was supposed to be legible in outward signs as well as in individual habits, and during the 1920s, female club members in particular were increasingly required to report on their diet, bodily health, and hygiene as a part of their project work.<sup>51</sup>

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51. Miriam Birdseye, "Grow Finer Club Members," *Agricultural Leaders' Digest* (Oct. 1930): 54–55; Walter Stemmons, "Health in the 4-H Clubs," *Journal of Home Economics* 18, no. 9 (September 1926): 528–530; Lou Tregoning, "4-H Clubs Build Health," *Hygeia* 17 (January 1939): 19–21; Miriam Birdseye, *Growth Work with 4-H Clubs*, Extension Service Circular 14 (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, Extension Service, October 1926); Club Department, *Food for Health: A Manual for Girls in 4-H Food Clubs, Hand Book No. 5*, Special Circular (Madison: Extension Service of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin, February 1928); *Foods and Nutrition – Project I – Breakfast* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-15, 1939); *Foods and Nutrition – Project II – Supper* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-16, 1938); *Foods and Nutrition – Project III – Picnics – Lunches* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-17, 1936); *Foods and Nutrition – Project III – Picnics – Lunches* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-17, 1938); *Foods and Nutrition – Project IV – Dinner* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-18, 1938); *Foods and Nutrition – Project V – Special Occasions* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-19, 1938); *Nutrition Handbook*, Montana Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics, Circular No. 62 (Bozeman: Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Reprinted May 1927).

In the show ring, children appeared with their animals, showing in visual form the ways in which both livestock and rural youth were coming to embody the principles of rural betterment: good health, clean appearance, proper posture, good grooming, all of which were meant to symbolize modern, scientific practices of cultivation and care. In photographs as in person, children could be judged much like their animals were at the fair. They appeared as exhibits as much as their projects did. When they attended the fair, and when they posed for portraits that were subsequently reproduced in reports, bulletins, and pamphlets, 4-H boys and girls were performing aspects of rural modernity. Their bodies, depicted in these images, manifested the aims of club work.

Because the most immediate goal of a year's work in 4-H was to win a prize at the fair, project pamphlets began including guidelines for club members on how to prepare materials for exhibition, so they might better know how their work was to be evaluated by the judges. Garden club bulletins instructed club members on how to select vegetables for exhibit from among their crop, how to trim and clean them for attractiveness, and how to display them to best effect. Pig, cow, steer, and sheep circulars advised children on how to train their animals for the show ring. This involved acclimating them to wearing a halter and being led, teaching them the proper stance to show off their breed characteristics, blocking and grooming them, giving them a pre-exhibit ration that would make their coats glossy, protecting their hide with a blanket, and more.

Livestock project members were encouraged to begin training their animals early, so that they would become used to their owners, learn to take directions from them, and be comfortable when shown in the ring. Indeed, many livestock bulletins insisted that preparing animals for exhibition began at birth. "The club members who proves to be a good showman starts to prepare his calf for the show ring the day it is born," one Wisconsin bulletin proclaimed. It also indicated that club members entering the show ring with their livestock would also be judged on their own "attitude, carriage, and neatness and appropriateness of dress," their "alertness and ability to carry out instructions," their "ability to answer questions promptly and well,"

and the “general effect” of their work.<sup>52</sup> Proper appearance, stance, and behavior were thus not required solely of project animals; club members needed to adopt them as well. Livestock bulletins advised children on how to dress, behave, and present themselves to judges and other authority figures at fairs and demonstrations. At the same time that animals were being trained how to walk, be led, and stand, their owners were being trained on how to present themselves as representatives of the best in rural youth.

In addition, members were advised to make preparations in the weeks leading up to the fair. New York dairy club members were instructed to “give your calf additional care so that it will look its best. Grooming it carefully every day and adding a little oil meal to the ration will make the coat soft and glossy.”<sup>53</sup> The process was similar for pigs: fish oil on the skin, washing and grooming, and clean bedding were important pre-fair preparations. But appearances could not be faked in the weeks before the exhibit: it was only through proper nutrition, care, exercise, and training from the start that club members could ensure a good score in the show ring.<sup>54</sup>

Photographs of club members attested to the mutually constitutive nature of youth betterment and rural betterment. As children labored on their projects, demonstrated their methods, displayed their handiwork at the fair, and exhibited themselves and their projects before the camera, the children themselves were showcased as well, a product of equal—perhaps even greater—importance. Despite the differences between these venues and images, they all had one thing in common: they tended to depict white children with their projects and performing demonstrations. Likewise, exhibits and delegates that made it to the fair were almost always white, and represented the work of children from families that were already relatively prosperous. This was no accident: the criteria by which most 4-H projects were judged, not to mention the

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52. Boys’ and Girls’ Club Department, *Care of Dairy Calves: A Manual for 4-H Club Members, Hand Book No. 1*, Special Circular (Madison: Extension Service of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin, May 1926), pp. 16–17.

53. Howard B. Allen, *Rearing the Dairy Calf: A Manual for Junior Extension Workers in Calf Rearing*, Cornell Junior Extension Bulletin 3 (Ithaca: New York State College of Agriculture, April 1919), p. 85.

54. Allen, *Raising Pigs*, see n. 2, pp. 19–20.

institutional structure supporting them, overwhelmingly favored middle-class white children's success, and presented obstacles for children from poorer families and those of color. There were exceptions to this, of course, which help shed light on how the ideal rural family was construed as white.<sup>55</sup>

#### DEVELOPING RURAL CITIZENS: 4-H WITH NONWHITES

The children who appeared in county and state reports on 4-H club work constituted a visual representation of ideal rural youth. As healthy, smiling, white boys and girls, the 4-H'ers were, like the improved farm products that accompanied them, projecting a vision of rural modernity that was constructed around whiteness, and based on a family farm ideal that reflected solidly middle-class values, tastes, and gender roles. Despite the fact that, taken together, images of club youth did not constitute a comprehensive survey of rural activities and conditions, and did not represent what was possible for a great many farm youth—such as those whose families did not own their property—they were held up, discussed, circulated, and reproduced as though they did. As a result, their ubiquity encouraged those who saw them to imagine a rural future uncomplicated by the tendentious problems of race, class, and land tenure. As these likenesses reappeared in the project bulletins that club members consulted as they undertook their projects, 4-H youth were trained to hold themselves up to a standard that was both an ideal, and an instrument of normalization.<sup>56</sup>

But what of club members who did not fit the mold of the ideal 4-H boy or girl? The whiteness of 4-H's rural ideal is even more apparent when we turn our gaze toward club work that was undertaken specifically

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55. The classic work here is George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

56. This section is informed by literature on the bounding of whiteness and the othering of other races; see, for example: Linda Faye Williams, *The Constraint of Race: Legacies of White Skin Privilege in America* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Paul Outka, *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); David R. Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Birgit Brander Rasmussen et al., eds., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Lipsitz, see n. 55; Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

with non-white groups. Two examples—segregated “negro extension” in the South, and 4-H club work with Native Americans on Indian reservations and in the counties containing or bordering them—show how this normalizing process played out by attempting to turn those who deviated from the white middle-class ideal into proper rural citizens. This process differed along racial lines.<sup>57</sup>

Club work with blacks and Native Americans was informed by the same developmental ideas that guided 4-H club work with white children, but contemporary views about race, progress, and civilization meant that these groups were not seen as the equal of whites. Most turn-of-the-century social reformers felt that nonwhite groups were racially “younger” than northern Europeans, and had not advanced as far in their racial progress. Their development, rural and otherwise, therefore needed to be conducted along somewhat different lines, ones more suited to the developmental “stage” these groups were seen to have attained. In 4-H club work, these parallels between childhood and racial progress found particular resonance.

“Negro” and Indian extension work were both influenced by longer histories of racial segregation and cultural integration in the United States that had agriculture at their centers, and by previous government efforts to shape race relations through land and farm policy directed at these groups. The legacy of southern slavery and the system of racial and economic oppression that arose in its wake positioned blacks as inherently suited to farm labor, and most government policy, particularly in the southern states, aimed to keep blacks on the land and engaged in agricultural pursuits, albeit in a subordinate role as sharecroppers, tenants, and laborers. Indians, on the other hand, appeared to white observers to have a racial aversion to settled farming; the history of American Indian policy is in many ways a story of trying to make yeoman farmers out of peoples with a much wider variety of subsistence strategies that were threatened by white patterns of settlement. These historical legacies informed how extension workers approached blacks and Native Americans as groups

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57. Gregg Mitman, “The Color of Money: Campaigning for Health in Black and White America,” chap. 3, in *Imagining Illness: Public Health and Visual Culture*, ed. David Serlin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).



and as individuals.<sup>58</sup>

Like extension work more broadly, negro extension did not simply appear fully formed with the passing of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914. Outreach and practical education through demonstration with black farmers, particularly in the southern states, drew on a longer history of racial uplift through practical instruction, manual labor, and self-help. At the turn of the century, this philosophy was most cogently expressed in the work of Booker T. Washington, and the schools of industrial education at Hampton and Tuskegee. As recent scholarship has emphasized, the intersection of ideas about race, labor, and agricultural improvement at the turn of the twentieth century were part of a global conversation, and many European nations with colonies inhabited by dark-skinned peoples looked to the southern United States to see how it would handle its ongoing “negro question.”<sup>59</sup>

The answer was largely segregation, and it infused southern policy at every level. The evolution of the Extension Service in the Jim Crow South demonstrates this. The Smith-Lever Act had given authority to the states themselves in allocating funds among land-grant schools within the same state. In the South, a separate set of agricultural and mechanical colleges had been established for African Americans by the Second Morrill Act of 1890. Of course, granting states the ability to divvy up Smith-Lever funds as they saw fit meant that most of the black institutions saw little of the money. This was equally true in terms of 4-H club expenditures. For instance, for the year 1921–1922 in Mississippi, the “Boys’ Club allotment”—the unmarked category consisting of white boys—was ten times the “Negro Boys’ Club allotment,” meaning

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58. I use the term “negro extension” here as an actors’ category. This reflects the usage of the time, as well as official institutional nomenclature; it also underscores how segregated extension work tended to reinforce white supremacy in the South. See: Karen Ferguson, “Caught in ‘No Man’s Land’: The Negro Cooperative Demonstration Service and the Ideology of Booker T. Washington,” *Agricultural History* 72, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 33–54; Angela Firkus, “The Agricultural Extension Service and Non-Whites in California, 1910–1932,” *Agricultural History* 84, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 506–530; Debra A. Reid, *Reaping a Greater Harvest: African Americans, the Extension Service, and Rural Reform in Jim Crow Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007).

59. On uplift ideology, see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). On Washington, see: Ferguson, “Caught in ‘No Man’s Land,’” see n. 58; Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

that, despite the the fact that blacks made up more than half of the population of the state as a whole, 4-H clubs for African-American boys received scarcely one tenth of the money made available through federal and state allocations. It comes as little surprise, then, that 4-H club work with black children in the South was grossly underfinanced, painfully understaffed, and continually hobbled by the white bureaucracy.<sup>60</sup>

One of the most important results of the war for extension was the expansion of work with African-American farmers, mostly in the southern states. The first black extension agents, Thomas M. Campbell of Alabama and John B. Pierce of Virginia, had been hired by the USDA in 1906 to assist with the expansion of Knapp's demonstration work among the South's rural black population, but the war gave further impetus to these activities. By 1919, every state in the southern district had black agents working in one or more counties, numbering 459 (191 men and 268 women) at war's end.<sup>61</sup> These "negro extension agents," as they were called, were hired to take what usually amounted to a more basic and stripped-down program of extension work to black families. As historian Debra A. Reid has shown, segregated extension work "developed as an exercise in contradictions" in that it "reflected black agency as well as black subjugation. It grew because of black talent as well as white racism." Although Negro extension was created as a separate entity in order to enforce

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60. James E. Tanner to R. S. Wilson, Dec. 1, 1922, MCES Boys Club, Box 1; "County Extension Workers – Mississippi – History," n.d., MCESAES, Folder H-7, Box 4; *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923). On the development of Negro extension, see: William E. Ammons, "Some Facts about Negro Agricultural Agents in Mississippi," ca. 1945, MCESAES, Box 4, Folder H-2; Thomas Monroe Campbell, *The Movable School Goes to the Negro Farmer* (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute Press, 1936); Thomas Monroe Campbell, *The School Comes to the Farmer: The Autobiography of T. M. Campbell* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1947); W. B. Mercier, *Extension Work Among Negroes, 1920*, United States Department of Agriculture, Department Circular 190 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921); W. A. Lloyd, *An Extension Program in Crop Production to Reenforce Range Livestock, Dairying, and Human Nutrition for the Western States*, United States Department of Agriculture, Department Circular 335 (Washington: Government Printing Office, December 1924); O. B. Martin, *A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914–1924* (U.S. Department of Agriculture Miscellaneous Circular No. 72, 1926); Baker, see n. 6, chapter 8; True, *Agricultural Extension Work in the United States*, see n. 6, pp. 189–193. See also: Ferguson, "Caught in 'No Man's Land,'" see n. 58; Allen W. Jones, "The South's First Black Farm Agents," *Agricultural History* 50, no. 4 (Oct. 1976): 636–644; B. D. Mayberry, *A Century of Agriculture in the 1890 Land-Grant Institutions and Tuskegee University, 1890–1990* (New York: Vantage Press, 1991); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); James D. Anderson, "Northern Foundations and the Shaping of Southern Black Rural Education, 1902–1935," *History of Education Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 371–396; Wayne D. Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-Five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989). For an in-depth look at segregated extension, see Reid, see n. 58.

61. Jones, "The South's First Black Farm Agents," see n. 60.

white supremacy, it also served to some extent as a means for African Americans to improve their own lot and address their own problems as they saw them, though always within the confines of what the white bureaucracy allowed.<sup>62</sup>

White administrators tended to treat the disparities between extension work with whites and negro extension simply as a matter of course that needed no explanation. “Club work among the Negro boys of the state in 1921 was projected along similar lines to that of the white boys, though on a simpler, less complicated plan,” Mississippi’s state leader of boys’ club work reported to the USDA in 1922.<sup>63</sup> What this meant in practice was that black children could only enroll in a limited set of projects—in Mississippi in 1924, for example, only half the offerings allowed whites—that they had fewer opportunities to gather in camps or congresses, that they were excluded from national gatherings like the annual 4-H Club Congress, and that the value of the prizes they received was a small fraction of those awarded to whites.<sup>64</sup> “For obvious reasons the work of this [Negro] Division of Boys’ Club Work has been confined largely to demonstrations in Corn, Cotton, Sweet Potatoes, and Pigs,” he reported to the state director of extension the following year. He also reiterated that “The plan of organization, too, has necessarily been simpler and less complicated.”<sup>65</sup>

In the South, one of the most important things extension might do was keep black people down on the farm. Black migration during the war, both to the military and to urban and northern industry, threatened many white planters, who feared losing their supply of cheap labor. This made them skeptical of extension work on the one hand, as diversification and living-at-home projects designed to make black farmers more self-sufficient might mean greater black independence from the oppressive tenant, sharecropper, and farm labor system that prevailed in the southern states. On the other hand, though, if extension promised to keep

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62. Reid, see n. 58, p. xxiv.

63. James E. Tanner to I. W. Hill, Jan. 30, 1922, MCES Boys Club, Box 1, p. 17.

64. James E. Tanner to R. S. Wilson, Apr. 23, 1924, MCES Boys Club, Box 1.

65. James E. Tanner to R. S. Wilson, *Bi-ennial Report Boys’ Club Division*, 1923-06-30, MCES Boys Club, Box 1, p. 12.

blacks from leaving the land and the South, landlords might be placated. White interests, then, gave their grudging support to negro extension work, being fearful of the alternatives. In the end, most landlords came to support the activities of the negro agents, as they seemed committed to keeping blacks on the land through superficial improvements, but not powerful or subversive enough to undermine the tenant system.<sup>66</sup>

However, planters' limited support of black extension did not translate into anything more than tolerance of its programs. Indeed, negro extension in the South struggled along, always trailing white activities in terms of staff, money, and time. Many blacks themselves were less than enthusiastic about extension in their communities, suspecting—often rightly—that it was simply a white man's agency conducted according to whites' goals and interests. Some assumed county agents were government spies sent to take their land.<sup>67</sup> But the many black agricultural, home demonstration, club, and district agents who joined extension's ranks over the course of the 1910s and 1920s were generally committed to their work, and to using their skills and resources to help black farm families.<sup>68</sup>

Just as there were existing precedents for negro extension in the programs of industrial education and community outreach taking place at Hampton and Tuskegee, the extension method of agricultural instruction was already underway in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) by the 1910s. The year before the establishment of the Extension Service, the BIA was already employing about 300 "government farmers"—essentially agricultural consultants tasked with instructing Indians in methods of farming, stock-raising, and other related pursuits. It also began running farmers' institutes, as well as fairs to encourage a spirit of competition and achievement among Indians, who would display their produce and livestock for prizes. The Smith-Lever Act

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66. Lucille McGhee, "The Origin and Development of Black Extension Work in Mississippi, 1906–1933," n.d., Robert and Sadye Wier Papers, Special Collections, Manuscripts Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, Accession No. 313 (henceforth cited as Wier Papers), Wier Family: Sadye Wier: African-American History: Reports on early education and extension work, undated, p. 9.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 13.

68. McGhee, see n. 66; Reid, see n. 58.

added impetus to this push, opening up 4-H and other club activities to those on the reservations. Through a variety of different cooperative arrangements between counties, the Extension Service, and the BIA, Indian reservations gained county, home demonstration, and club agents, sometimes employed by the BIA itself, but more often paid through some combination of BIA, extension, and county funds. By the late 1910s, Indian work was established in many states across the country.<sup>69</sup>

Extension work with nonwhites was based on an ideology of racial uplift and progress that equated simple, clean, moral living with civilization.<sup>70</sup> Negro and Indian extension thus emphasized projects that aimed to bring these groups in line with dominant white standards of rural domesticity and yeoman farming. Cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation, and the improvement and beautification of the farm and home surroundings formed a central focus of these efforts, alongside improving livestock, creating year-round sources of income, increasing the supply of food produced at home, teaching “American” cooking and eating habits, and general program promoting thrift. Under the direction of extension agents, southern blacks whitewashed their tenant shacks and barns, Crow and Northern Cheyenne Indians cleaned their yards of rubbish, and everyone, it seems, planted kitchen gardens. Girls made simple, white cotton dresses, and learned to bake white bread. However, because it never addressed the structural problems that kept blacks and Native Americans in poverty, extension work with these groups usually did little more than tidy up a farmstead, offer a few new recipes to a struggling farm wife, help a girl can the family’s food for the winter, offer tips on thrift and

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69. For details on Indian extension, see R. Douglas Hurt, *Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), esp. pp. 155–156; Firkus, “The Agricultural Extension Service and Non-Whites in California,” see n. 58; Angela Firkus, “Native Americans and the Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service, 1910–1940” (Ph.D. Thesis, Purdue University, 1998). For a sense of how extension work was organized on Montana reservations, see Elisabeth Hart, “Annual Report of Home Extension Work on Fort Peck Reservation,” 1931, MTER, Box 70, Folder 53; “Annual Reports of Extension Work, Big Horn County, Montana,” 1917, 1921–1928, 1933–1970, MTER, Box 2, Folders 18–38; Box 3, Folders 1–34. For a glimpse of early Indian extension in Wisconsin, see H. L. Russell and K. L. Hatch, *Serving Wisconsin Farmers in War Time: Report of the Director of the Agricultural Extension Service*, Bulletin 294 (Madison: College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin, July 1918), p. 19; H. L. Russell and K. L. Hatch, *Wisconsin Wins: Annual Report of the Agricultural Extension Service for 1917–18*, Bulletin 301 (Madison: College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin, April 1919), p. 21; H. L. Russell and K. L. Hatch, *Demonstrations Convince: Annual Report of the Agricultural Extension Service*, Circular 126 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, March 1920), p. 20.

70. For more on this uplift ideology, see Gaines, see n. 59.

economy, or help a boy acquire a pig. It rarely transformed people's lives, turned tenants and sharecroppers into landowners, or appreciably reduced Indians' dependence on federal aid. Nonetheless, even these small bits of assistance could appreciably improve—if not completely change—the lives of poor farmers on a day-to-day basis. A vegetable garden, access to better seed, a community canning event, or a dairy cow might mean the difference between going hungry and eating a nutritious meal at the end of the day. Even screens on a farmhouse window could mean comfort and better sanitation for struggling families. These incremental improvements were the focus of the agents who toiled—usually long hours, over thousands of miles, at very little pay—for rural improvement through extension work.<sup>71</sup>

While extension work with blacks and Indians was aimed at making both groups more similar to the white middle-class, the two efforts differed in important ways according to how the white establishment aimed to position these groups with respect to American agriculture. In line with federal Indian policy, extension agents working with Indians focused primarily on integrating them more fully into the white community by encouraging private ownership of their agricultural and domestic enterprises. Extension work with blacks, on the other hand, operated at a remove from white extension. The creation of a separate “negro extension” organization, run essentially at the pleasure and discretion of the white organization, with an all-black staff serving an all-black clientele, precluded interactions between white and black members and agents in all but administrative situations. While agents working on Indian reservations reported enthusiastically on the mingling of whites and Indians that occurred at county fairs, 4-H exhibitions, and other club activities, demonstrating their belief in integration and assimilation, in the southern states, no such contact was reported or encouraged. Indeed, the existence of separate organizations, in line with both legally and informally enforced segregation, ensured that black and white 4-H club members never encountered one

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71. Campbell, *The Movable School Goes to the Negro Farmer*, see n. 60; Campbell, *The School Comes to the Farmer*, see n. 60; Reid, see n. 58; Wier Papers.

another. They belonged to different clubs, received different materials, submitted their project records to different authorities, attended different fairs and camps, and received different prizes. Though both Indian and negro clubs were run at a financial disadvantage and with largely white motives, negro extension in the South existed apart in ways that allowed a certain amount of autonomy within the constraints of Jim Crow society and southern land tenure and agricultural economy, but with little of the support for its activities that whites exhibited for extension work with Indians. On the other hand, while negro work allowed for some measure of racial solidarity, Indian extension—perhaps because of its integrated nature—was invariably run by whites, to white ends. The races might mingle, but no Indian could lead a mixed group of whites and Indians.<sup>72</sup>

Working successfully with groups as disadvantaged as Indians and black sharecroppers posed a set of challenges not customarily encountered by white agents, except when reaching out to the poorest farm families. Social and economic inequalities meant that these groups suffered from ill health, poor sanitation, and, often, acute hunger and nutritional deficiencies that far exceeded those of the general country population. As the head Negro Home Demonstration agent for the state of Mississippi reported in 1924,

...we find milk as scarce in some sections as in the heart of New York City. Consequently the number of children and grown-ups who are undernourished is very great and astonishing. In our work we find that seven out of every ten children who die are of preventable complaints, caused mainly from ignoring the laws of hygiene and nutrition. Upon some plantations we have found children quite four years of age who have never had a drink of cows milk. In quite a few other homes we find children who never eat tomatoes nor vegetables to any extent; the fault being found among mothers who know not the value of the vegetable diet.<sup>73</sup>

Projects that could improve the nourishment of black families on an immediate basis—such as gardening, dairy, cooking, and food preservation—thus took priority for most negro club agents.

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72. MCESAES; MTER.

73. Alice Carter Oliver, "Annual Report of Negro Home Demonstration Work," 1924, MSUESANSR, Roll 14, 323333, section II-e.

In extension publications, meant largely for a white audience, images of blacks and Indians mimicked those of whites, and, in so doing, conjured up a different set of meanings. Black families gathered in their well appointed sitting rooms, the father reading the paper in a rocker, the mother sewing in an easy chair, the children engaged in wholesome play at their feet, or reading books. These photographs mimicked the images the extension service disseminated of contented, middle-class, white farm families, whiling away their happy evenings in their improved farm homes, father, mother, boy, and girl all liberated from too much toil, enjoying the togetherness of the farm home while engaging in improving pursuits. Such photographs appeared often in extension bulletins, implying that, if families followed the advice of their county agents, they would find themselves with more time to enjoy as a family, in the comfort of the farm home, which would be more pleasant than before due to the increased profits that would result from a combination of improved practices in the field and around the farmstead. But when the race of the subjects was changed, the photographs acquired an additional layer of meaning. Black families, posed to resemble middle-class white families, stood for racial harmony through segregation, and accommodation to the existing system of farm labor in the South. These images were meant to appeal or placate whites, not necessarily to offer an enticing prospect to black farm families. If allowed to develop these basic improvements through their own work and the assistance of negro extension agents, the photos suggested, black tenants and sharecroppers would remain on plantations, contented with their lot. Indian families pictured in a similar way represented assimilation, rather than segregation, although they also signified accommodation to white ways. Indians living in the style of white Americans, in whitewashed wooden houses eating white bread, indicated their acceptance of European systems of land tenure, private ownership, and settled farming. By posing like white folks, nonwhites demonstrated extension's aims for these groups.

In the photographs that accompanied negro and Indian 4-H club reports, we see an emphasis on basic environmental and nutritional improvements that made blacks and Indians resemble middle-class whites;



but we also see a view filtered through racial ideas that was distinct from the views advanced by the groups themselves. What emerges from negro and Indian extension reports, then, is a particularly *white* view of the process of improvement as it took place with these groups. While the text of negro extension agents' reports emphasized improving the health of black families through access to better food, nutritional instruction, and basic sanitation, whites tended to focus on the appearance of the farm surroundings as indicators of betterment. Negro agents rarely had access to cameras and other equipment possessed by white extension workers, so it is impossible to know exactly what they would have chosen to document in pictures, their focus on basic health comes through clearly in their narrative reports. In white summaries of extension work that included reports on negro extension, on the other hand, we see numerous depictions of the farm and home environment being tidied, beautified, and fixed up. Women make quilts from tobacco sacks, and girls clean and refurnish their rooms. Often, the people are absent from the photographs altogether: a dilapidated farm shack appears, followed in the next frame by a whitewashed shack with windowboxes. The agent of change—the individual club member and his or her labor—disappears from the process, and 4-H itself appears to be effecting the transformation. When we do see club members, they tend to be at work on their projects, signifying the improving results of labor, not only on the project, but on the club member and his or her race. Unlike white children, Black and Indian club members were rarely photographed posing with their livestock or standing proudly in front of a stack of canned goods. Their individual achievements are less important than the outward signs of an improved environment that will benefit whites.<sup>74</sup>

What emerges in these photographs, then, is an iconography that differs from the one we see in white extension work. With people of color, extension photographs place an even greater emphasis on development, evidenced by boys and girls hard at work on their own endeavors, and by visual proof of the results of those

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74. Hart, see n. 69; "Annual Report of Division of Extension and Industry, Fort Peck," 1932, MTER, Box 70, Folder 54; "Annual Reports of Extension Work, Big Horn County, Montana," see n. 69; MCESAES, Box 1.

efforts, which tend to be related to health, sanitation, and nutrition. What we also see that is new are sets of before-and-after images that show development happening, and that underline the difference between conditions before 4-H club work, and conditions after. Predictably, the “before” images are of very dilapidated and unsavory conditions that stress the degree of difference between the nonwhite rural family’s usual state of living—presumed to be dirty and unhygienic—and the ideal white norm of cleanliness, beauty, and health. The “after” images depict scenes that would be more familiar to the (white, middle-class) viewer: well-appointed rooms, made beds, clean sheets, orderly kitchens, attractively planted yards, fixed-up and whitewashed outbuildings, tasteful clothing. For nonwhite club members, development had to be shown in process: in order to assure the viewer that 4-H was contributing to the right kinds of racial progress, the individual’s journey from backwardness to civilization had to be traced again and again.<sup>75</sup>

The posed photos of nonwhite club members that do appear in official reports demonstrate how 4-H envisioned civilization for these groups. In these images, we can see how extension’s gaze attempted to fit nonwhite children into a white American mold through outward signs that were more indicative of white desires for nonwhite groups than they were of actual improvements made by whites or nonwhites on behalf of nonwhite groups. A pair of images that appeared in a Montana county extension report in 1925 offer insight into this process. In them, two Crow Indian 4-H club girls, Cerise Hogan and Evelyn Charges Strong, pose for the camera. In the first image, they wear the white cotton dresses they made as a part of their club work. In the second, they appear in moccasins, shawls, and blankets. The captions the club agent provided for the photos describe these two outfits as “citizen clothes” and “Indian garb.”<sup>76</sup>

The fact that the club agent directing the 4-H program in which these girls were participating chose to depict them in what can only be described as two different costumes representing two facets of the girls’

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75. “Happier Living Contest for Negro 4-H Club Girls in Mississippi,” 1951–1952, MCES, Box 61, “Hapier Living Contest – GM&O RR (for Negro girls)” folder.

76. Martha Eder, “Narrative Report of Big Horn County Club Work for 1925,” 1925, MTER, Box 2, Folder 24.

identity is suggestive. In this set of images, Cerise and Evelyn appear to be trying on American citizenship as well as dressing up in “traditional” clothes. But the fact that the two images appeared reverse order—with the “civilized” image appearing first—tells us that something more is going on here. The ordering of these images is designed to demonstrate not degeneration, but a degree of development that has advanced beyond the need to show it in series. The first image, in which the girls appear as happy American girls with bobbed hair and stockings, has become the default state: the girls are becoming citizens.

In fact, although many images of Cerise and Evelyn appeared in club agent reports, the second image in the set is the only one where they appear in “Indian garb.” Their Indianness in this image is thus the exception that proves the rule. Cerise and Evelyn are no longer simply Indian girls; rather, because of their 4-H club activities, they have become American girls who, like white Americans, can still have fun dressing up and playing Indian. This set of images implies that now, when they put on their Indian garb, they are donning a costume that reflects a vanishing past, rather than their current condition.<sup>77</sup>

What was at issue, then, in the depiction of nonwhite 4-H club members, was citizenship—belonging to the American nation, as members of the rural citizenry. This form of agricultural and national citizenship took different forms for whites, blacks, Indians, and other nonwhite groups. While white club members were routinely represented as worthy of the responsibilities of rural citizenship through their continual depiction as the standard-bearers for an improved agriculture, seen at fairs and demonstrations, in project work and 4-H reports, and in extension publications that promulgated these views, nonwhites had to prove their worthiness before they could be represented in these ways. Black and Indian club members, shown at work on the process of self-improvement and racial uplift, were called upon to demonstrate their readiness for becoming American rural citizens. For blacks, particularly in the South, this meant submitting to the white

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77. For an excellent discussion of donning the Indian costume, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

power structure, and working to improve their surroundings without upsetting the economic and racial system of southern farming. For Native Americans, becoming citizens meant giving up Indian ways—taking off Indian garb and donning citizen clothes—assuming settled patterns of farming and animal husbandry premised on individual ownership, and assimilating themselves into white society. Only when nonwhite club members adopted these deferential poses would they demonstrate themselves as ready for white-style rural improvement.

### CONCLUSION: AGRICULTURE'S STANDARD-BEARERS

In the winter of 1929, as the United States was plunging into the Great Depression, a Watertown, New York-based 4-H newsletter published an illustration that expressed an abiding faith in the promise of 4-H club work, and great hope in its readers' ability to continue to buttress and support American agricultural advancement. The drawing depicted four young people representing the four H's, cloverleaf pins at their breasts, supporting a plinth bearing the words "standard of agriculture," atop which rested all the products of barn and field: sheep, fruits, pumpkins, cows, calves, bulls, pigs, horses, sacks of grain, bales of hay, and more. In the background, a modern farmhouse with a well-appointed barn and silo graced a gently sloping hillside, amid trees. Underneath the young people—two boys identified as head and hand, two girls representing heart and health—the caption read, "What 4-H club work does."<sup>78</sup>

The maturation of 4-H between the establishment of the Extension Service in 1914 and the advent of the Great Depression in 1929 constituted one of the means by which rural reformers and government administrators tried to achieve this "standard of agriculture"—both a higher standard, and one that was more standardized—and the attendant Americanization of rural places and people. As we have seen, this process took place on many levels. It happened institutionally, through new government funding, an expanding

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78. *Jefferson County 4-H Club News* 7, no. 2 (Dec. 1929). In W. J. Wright, "Annual Report of 4-H Club Work for New York State," 1929, NYS4H, Box 111.

staff at the local and national levels, and growing enrollment; the standardization and regulation of club work across the country by USDA officials; and the creation of new organizational partnerships, such as the National Committee on Boys' and Girls' Club Work, in order to support 4-H awards and gatherings. It also played out in 4-H activities themselves, as corn and canning clubs gave way to a variety of projects for both farm and home, as contests brought young people from different localities, counties, and states together in competition and congregation, and as judging and demonstrations made assessment and comparison to ideal types more central to the 4-H program. The upshot of all this was a more uniform vision of modernization for rural places that was national in scope, and was gendered and racialized in ways that reflected a belief in white, middle-class standards of appearance, behavior, and living as the measure of rural progress. In the process, nonwhite groups seen as backward, and whose incorporation into the national body had been an important issue of policy in the early twentieth century, were increasingly marginalized by the Extension Service.

But as the farm depression experienced by many rural areas in the wake of World War I deepened into a national economic depression, holding aloft the "standard of agriculture" would turn out to be an increasingly heavy burden for America's 4-H club youth, white as well as nonwhite. The economic and ecological crises that swept the nation in the 1930s seemed to indicate that extension's program for rural America was not living up to the vision it espoused: building better incomes, better homes, and better farms through increased production appeared more and more to be a fundamentally untenable proposition. As the standard of agriculture faltered, a new vision of rural modernity rooted in the health of both landscapes and people took shape.

## 3

## Healing the Rural Community:

## Conservation and Health in Depression-Era 4-H

Conservation is learning to be partners with Nature. By applying the work of hands and mind to Nature, the needs, comforts and pleasures of mankind are supplied. It is positively the only way. To be a good partner with Nature you must learn as much as you can about how Nature works. Nobody knows all there is to know about it, but if you are a thoughtful worker, you will come to see that Nature has a plan in which every living thing has a part to play.<sup>1</sup>

—*Wakelin McNeel, 1953*

4-H... offers an opportunity for a unique form of health education for adolescents and older boys and girls. We prefer, however, to call this “Growth work” rather than health education, because we want our club members to feel that they have a responsibility to demonstrate to the community modern methods of growing boys and girls, and because we want them to understand that the same fundamental laws of growth that bring them success in their crop and livestock enterprises govern the growth of human beings as well.<sup>2</sup>

—*Miriam Birdseye, 1926*

## INTRODUCTION: REVISING RURAL MODERNITY

At the dawn of the 1930s, 4-H’s agricultural standard-bearers were faltering. The onset of the Great Depression on the heels of the agricultural downturn of the 1920s was calling into question 4-H’s fundamental notion of building a better nation through agriculture. The economic and ecological crises of the period caused farmers and rural reformers alike to revisit the notion that their activities in developing the countryside through agricultural production were resulting in dividends for the farmer and the nation. In particular,

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1. Wakelin McNeel, ed., *Getting Started in Conservation with 4-H* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-71, 1953).

2. Miriam Birdseye, *Growth Work with 4-H Clubs*, Extension Service Circular 14 (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, Extension Service, October 1926), p. 13.

there was mounting evidence that farming and other “improving” pursuits were not everywhere beneficial, either for the condition of the land itself or for the farmer’s pocketbook. During the Depression, Americans took stock of their rural landscapes; and what they saw was deeply troubling.

The story in this chapter relates to a major shift in how Americans regarded their agricultural landscapes, and how development was envisioned for rural places: what its goals were, what its end state would look like, and the means by which it would be attained. During the nineteenth century and on into the Progressive Era, development and improvement were essentially equated with human action on the land: turning an area that was only producing what nature made, into an area that produced things useful to humans. Under the Progressive gaze, land fell into two main categories: improved and unimproved. A subclass of unimproved land was waste land: land that had no apparent human use, either to grow economically useful materials such as crops or trees, or to graze livestock. Reclamation of these waste lands, primarily through irrigation, was a means to their improvement; this became a government policy with the Newlands Act in 1902. Likewise, the protection of certain special landscapes—grand forests, spectacular mountains, unusual geological features—as did the new system of National Parks, was a way of turning otherwise “wasted” land to a public purpose, such as protecting drinking water supplies, and supporting healthful recreation. But despite these special purposes for certain kinds of land, it was still largely believed that landscapes of settled agriculture were an unalloyed good: wherever an American could make the land produce more useful things than it did before, whether that crop was grain or lumber, he was doing something good for humanity, for the land, for the nation, for the race. He was improving. This was the nature of progress.

The economic and environmental disasters of the 1920s and 1930s changed this viewpoint dramatically. After hitting hardpan under the prairie sod, after trying to farm the cutover lands of the Upper Midwest, after watching their topsoil run to the sea and their fields and hillsides slide into irretrievable gullies in the South, farmers and Americans more generally began to look at their landscapes differently. They began to see not

just improved and unimproved lands, but degraded lands as well, lands that had, through human action, not improved, but been destroyed, perhaps forever. The emergence of this new category, this new way of looking at land—degraded, or, in the language of government planners, “marginal” and “submarginal”—caused a fundamental revision in the way improvement itself was imagined: what its goals were, and how it was to be achieved. In particular, it involved a new metaphor of development, borrowed from the science of ecology, which saw the progress of landscapes as dictated not by human action and improvement, but by a set of natural processes shaped by climate, soil, and geography, that tended over time to produce a highly stable configuration of plants and animals that would endure indefinitely. The most desirable state of a landscape became not productivity, but permanence.

This chapter explores how, beginning in the interwar period, this new view of development became incorporated into the activities of the nation’s youngest farm folk, as 4-H taught club members to turn an ecologist’s eye on their farmsteads, and inculcated in them a new narrative about Americans and the land. A farmer was only improving a landscape with his actions if it was a landscape that was suited to farming. If it was not, perhaps he was degrading that landscape, not improving it at all. Farmers needed to become better students of nature, and to forge partnerships with the natural world, aligning their agricultural aims with the natural patterns of life. The dividends of doing so would accrue not only to their bank accounts, but to their spiritual satisfaction, and to the health of the landscapes they inhabited and cared for.

Beginning in the 1920s, 4-H incorporated this new vision into its program for rural modernization by introducing two new areas of work: conservation and health. These lines of activity were designed to address a set of problems the club leadership saw emerging in the way rural development was being carried out, problems that became particularly acute in the 1930s, when the nation plunged into the Great Depression. These problems were related to the focus on increasing agricultural productivity that had come to the fore of extension’s efforts in the countryside during World War I. The nation’s farmers were producing more, but the



bottom had dropped out of the market in the 1920s, and rural places were suffering as a result, threatening to render moot all the efforts of county agents and 4-H club leaders to improve the farmer's lot.

In particular, the focus on increasing the output of livestock and field crops had shortchanged two fundamental aspects of farm life: the condition of the land itself, and the health of the people who made their living from it. America's farmlands were depleted, eroded, and exhausted; its people fared little better. Indeed, many observers during the 1930s saw this degradation as related: poor soils made for poor people, and vice versa. In order to counteract this cycle of decline, 4-H club leaders in several states inaugurated projects, programs, camps, and contests that would encourage farm youth to think about agricultural production in a slightly different way. Rather than seeing their fields as the medium for growing market crops alone, 4-H boys and girls were asked to think of them as habitat for wildlife, a source of healthful recreation, and a living community upon which their own well-being depended, for sustenance and for society. Through activities to conserve and build up the fertility of their farmsteads and the health of their own bodies, 4-H boys and girls were enacting a new vision of rural modernity that placed the health of landscapes and people at its center.

This chapter explores the critique of production-focused schemes of agricultural development that played out in 4-H club work between the 1920s and the 1950s. Two important movements emerged during this time to heal the rural places so ravaged by economic and ecological crisis; together, they offered an alternative vision for rural modernization that saw the community as the most important unit of rural reform. The first movement centered on conservation, and sought to bring nature, wild and tame, into the purview of the rural community by demonstrating the connections between soil, plants, animals, and people. The second movement centered on health, and sought to expand the goals of agricultural improvement to include the bodily and social well-being of the human beings carrying them out. Both constituted an important expansion of the purview of agrarian reform: in the case of conservation, it was including the wild and the natural in the scheme of farm life; in the case of health, it was including the human element as well as the commercial

products themselves. And although neither achieved its full aims or launched a lastingly radical revision of modernization, both were incorporated into 4-H's rural development program in more circumscribed ways that remained for the rest of the century.

Because the process of healing the landscapes and people of rural America was a local process, rooted in rural communities and regional geographies, and expressed largely through state-level programs, this chapter adopts a similar view to trace the emergence and elaboration of conservation and health work in the state of Wisconsin during the period between the 1920s and the 1950s. By following Wisconsin 4-H's attempts to deal with a set of ecological, economic, and social problems that had resulted largely from the "development" and "improvement" of some of its more marginal lands, we can better understand how conservation and health's course-correction for rural modernity played out on the ground.

This chapter begins with a short overview of 4-H's conservation and health programs: how they came into being during the 1920s and '30s, and why. Both were responses to the material conditions of rural life in the period, and both sought to broaden rural people's ideas of what their landscapes produced and were in aid of. It then focuses in on Wisconsin to show how these two movements played out in one state's reform program for agriculture and rural life. This process was related to ideas in two disciplines—ecology and rural sociology—and carried out through the leadership of the state's club leader, a forester named Wakelin McNeel. Finally, the chapter addresses how these conservation and health programs diverged in the post-World War II era, exploring the limits of the conservation and health critique of rural modernization in the mid-twentieth century.

#### **HAVE BOYS AND TREES GROW UP TOGETHER**

In April of 1929, the Wisconsin Extension Service put out a special circular outlining a junior forestry program for the state's youth. The author, Wakelin McNeel, was Assistant State 4-H Club Leader in the

College of Agriculture at Madison, and had for many years been working for forest conservation in the state: in the schools, in government, and through 4-H club work. In the pamphlet, McNeel outlined a conservation problem of national import. America was at a crossroads. Its vast territory and seemingly inexhaustible supply of natural resources had been the source of its wealth and character, and had enabled it to advance quickly as a nation, despite its relative youth. But the “initiative and courageous spirit of the pioneer” that had been so crucial was under threat, because, in its quest for rapid growth, America had squandered its natural endowments. This was particularly apparent in the nation’s forests, which in 1929 encompassed less than 20 percent of their original area. In Wisconsin, lumber money had paid for many of the state’s internal improvements—its dams, roads, and factories—but had caused devastation in the northern reaches of the state, which had been practically denuded, stripped of the one use to which they could properly be put: growing trees. The economic, social, and environmental problems of this “cutover” region were a dire warning for America’s future should its people continue to allow the wholesale destruction of its forests.

The solution, McNeel argued, lay not in regretting the past, but in molding the future. Young people needed to be aware of this issue; and, even more, they needed to become invested in it, for the sake of themselves and their nation. This could not be done simply by telling them over and over again about the importance of natural resources, or even by putting them out in nature to experience its beauty firsthand. The “active interest” McNeel was proposing could only be brought about through work. “People who live in houses they did not help construct, eat from gardens they did not help plant, or receive a heritage they did not sacrifice to build up, will never have the basis of a sane and lasting enjoyment,” he wrote. “Where there is no endeavor there can be no enduring attachments. *Let’s Have Boys and Trees Grow Up Together.*”<sup>3</sup>

To this end, McNeel was recruiting “Junior Forest Rangers” from among Wisconsin’s youth, putting them

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3. Wakelin McNeel, *Have Boys and Trees Grow Up Together*, Special Circular (Madison: Extension Service of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin, April 1929), p. 9. Emphasis in original.

to work learning the ideas and practices of forestry, and turning that knowledge to use in forest planting, care, and management across the state. From enrolling Junior Forest Rangers, to encouraging Wisconsin's public schoolchildren to plant school forests in their districts, to having boys and girls sign "covenants" pledging themselves to the development of "a true forest attitude, to which the ideals of American Citizenship must ever be allied," McNeel was at the forefront of a broad and far-reaching conservation movement in his home state and elsewhere in the country that saw the labor and education of young people as central to its cause. His work as the Assistant and later the State 4-H Club Leader placed conservation projects squarely at the heart of club work over the course of the 1930s, and positioned the care of natural resources as a central aspect of rural life that was integral to all farm and home activities.<sup>4</sup>

This movement to integrate conservation into the practice of agriculture was not exclusive to Wisconsin, but reflected a growing view during the years of the Great Depression that identified environmental degradation—including soil depletion, deforestation, and species extinction—as one of the main causes of the rural problems that had troubled reformers for decades. The reason for this degradation, many government experts and social reformers argued, was a rampaging capitalism, and an ignorance of and disregard for the processes of nature that supported agriculture and human life, on the part of both business interests and the people on the land. During the New Deal, the USDA became increasingly concerned about rural poverty, and its social scientists linked economic problems to environmental conditions through a set of ideas about soil, plants, animals, people, and the rural community they constituted. Two disciplines in particular—ecology and rural sociology—provided the intellectual basis for this communitarian thinking, and the rural social planning it spawned. These theories and practices made their way into 4-H club activities by way of scientifically trained educators like Wakelin McNeel, enlisting rural youth in the movement to restore the American rural landscape—and, with it, the rural community and its way of life.

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4. McNeel, *Have Boys and Trees Grow Up Together*, see n. 3, p. 46.

McNeel's biography encapsulated the combination of scientific, pedagogical, and hands-on training that characterized both 4-H club work and the conservationist thinking of the 1930s. Born in central Wisconsin in 1884, McNeel trained first as a schoolteacher, and spent four of his earliest working years as a school principal in Tomah. His upbringing occurred amid some of Wisconsin's most striking landscapes, both natural and manmade. In Kilbourn and Tomah, he lived in close proximity to the Dells of the Wisconsin River, and the unique rock formations that were the result of the last ice age. He was also witness to the creation of the state's greatest environmental disaster: a massive and largely failed experiment to settle the "cutover" regions of northern Wisconsin in the wake of the lumbering operations that denuded the great pineries of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota during the second half of the nineteenth century. Attempts at farming these stump-covered, fire-ravaged landscapes of poor soil between 1890 and 1920 had resulted in massive erosion, as well as devastating poverty for the majority of the would-be colonists. It is no wonder that, in this lumbering state, McNeel grew interested in forestry.

Inspired by his surroundings, and by two guiding lights of Progressive conservation, Gifford Pinchot and John Muir, McNeel enrolled in the forestry program at the Biltmore School in Cadillac, Michigan, where he studied under C. A. Schenck, and traveled to Germany's Black Forest to study the scientific practices that had made German forestry so famous and influential. After graduating in 1911, McNeel returned to his home state to work for a lumber company, but quickly moved to a job with the newly formed state Conservation Department, where he grew interested in educating the state's young people about forestry and natural resources. He returned to the schools, teaching and serving as superintendent in Fort Atkinson. After serving in France during the First World War, McNeel took up youth education work full time in Marathon County, with a focus on conservation activities and the financial backing of a Wausau paper mill. His efforts attracted the attention of the State Club Leaders at the College of Agriculture in Madison, and in 1922 they appointed McNeel to the position of Assistant State 4-H Club Leader under T. L. Bewick. In

1944, McNeel advanced to State Club Leader, and retired in 1950 after 28 years of service.<sup>5</sup>

It was during his time with the state 4-H organization that McNeel's youth conservation work took off. He immediately began writing circulars for forestry, soil, and other conservation projects. "Rural youth live close to the soil, in daily contact with trees and soil and birds and insects and all that make up the world of Nature," he wrote in a 1953 autobiographical sketch. "Here was the best place to lay the foundation for good conservation practices. 'Have Youth and Trees Grow Up Together' became the slogan." This motto was the basis for the Junior Forest Rangers program, a branch of 4-H conservation work, which McNeel began in the mid-1920s. In 1927, he began to promote the establishment of school forests, whereby the state would provide free seedlings to school districts that set aside a piece of property for the purpose of planting. These proved such a success that over the course of the 1930s, Wisconsin school children planted an average of more than a million trees each year. In addition to teaching a class in farm forestry at the agricultural school, he helped add to the college curriculum a pre-forestry course for young people interested in studying conservation, and wrote a monthly column for youth in *American Forestry Magazine*. In 1932, he began broadcasting *Afield with Ranger Mac*, a weekly radio program on conservation and nature-study on the University radio station, WHA, as part of the Wisconsin School of the Air (WSA). The WSA was geared in particular to rural schools, which often had little in the way of resources; *Afield with Ranger Mac* helped many of them fulfill the 1935 state law requiring the teaching of conservation in the public schools. Over the next twenty-two years, an average of fifty thousand school children in classrooms around Wisconsin tuned in every Monday morning to hear Ranger Mac talk to his "trailhitters" about the wonders of the natural world.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Biographical information on Wakelin McNeel is from: Wakelin McNeel, "Wakelin McNeel Biography File (autobiographical sketch circa 1953)," URL: [http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/specialcollections/forestry/schenck/series\\_vi/bios/McNeel.html](http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/specialcollections/forestry/schenck/series_vi/bios/McNeel.html) (accessed 12/08/2006); Story Matkin-Rawn, "Afield with Ranger Mac: Conservation Education and School Radio during the Great Depression," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 88, no. 1 (2004): 2–15; Wakelin McNeel, *Papers, 1926–1951* (Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives, Mss 150, 4/39/D5, Madison, WI, n.d.).

6. McNeel, "Biography File," see n. 5; Matkin-Rawn, see n. 5. A good overview of WHA's educational programming on the nationally-renowned Wisconsin School of the Air—including a section on *Afield with Ranger Mac*—is in Randall Davidson, *9XM Talking: WHA Radio and the Wisconsin Idea* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), chapter 21. McNeel's program

McNeel's experiences as a child in the Wisconsin countryside, a professional forester and conservationist, an educator, and a resident of Marathon County, adjacent to the cutover region and dominated by paper mills, gave him firsthand knowledge of the problems facing forestry, soil conservation, and the management of natural resources in a state whose economy was dependent upon agriculture and forestry. This personal background would prove instrumental in shaping his outlook on conservation and the role of farmers and farm youth in caring for the natural world. In particular, he began to embrace a view of agricultural landscapes that was ecological in nature, and that was deeply influenced by his correspondence and interactions with the Wisconsin professor of game management Aldo Leopold, who arrived in Madison to work for the Forest Products Laboratory two years after McNeel's appointment as Assistant State Club Leader. Leopold's ecological training, and the theory of agricultural conservation he developed during the 1930s, dovetailed felicitously with McNeel's efforts to educate rural youth as stewards of the natural world. Together, these two foresters implemented a conservation program in Wisconsin's 4-H clubs that aimed at combating the emphasis on economic productivity that had characterized American agriculture during the 1910s and 1920s, and that had led to the environmental problems Americans were experiencing during the 1930s. By emphasizing the connections between the state of "the land"—conceived broadly, and including soil, plants, and animals—and the state of the people and the human communities that depended upon it, McNeel and Leopold hoped to teach youngsters how to create the permanent rural landscapes of the future.<sup>7</sup>

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won the George Foster Peabody award for the best educational radio program in 1942. For the legislation on conservation education, see Bill No. 319, *S. Laws of Wisconsin*, 1935, Wisconsin Session Laws, Ch. 445.

7. McNeel highlights these experiences in his autobiographical sketch: McNeel, "Biography File," see n. 5. For more on McNeel's move beyond "the language of scientific efficiency," see Matkin-Rawn, see n. 5, 6. For the correspondence between McNeel and Leopold, see University of Wisconsin 4-H Club Department, 4-H Club Records, Conservation Camps, 1934–1950, University Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Series 9/5/5 (henceforth cited as WI4HCC).

### MY HEALTH TO BETTER LIVING

At the same time that McNeel and Leopold were mounting a conservationist critique of production- and profit-focused agriculture and natural resource use in Wisconsin's 4-H clubs, a set of 4-H educators interested in human health were offering another set of reasons for broadening the view of the farm and its products on a national scale. Speaking before the American Posture League in March of 1926, Miriam Birdseye, a nutritionist and extension agent with the Department of Agriculture, drew her audience's attention to "the wonderful groundwork we have for a type of health education unique in its approach and far-reaching in its possibilities." She was referring to 4-H clubs—or, rather, "the development of the fourth or the 'health' H of the club insignia."<sup>8</sup> Club members had for many years been proving their worth by raising premium livestock, making quality clothing, canning the produce of their excellent gardens, and growing bumper crops. However, despite their enormous contributions to rural productivity, club members did not seem to have translated the lessons of improvement they practiced in their projects into the realm of their own lives. Specifically for Birdseye, despite the fact that club members pledged their "health to better living," the standards of excellence for which club members were striving did not appear to include their own bodies. "I well remember the day when one of the men club leaders of the Washington Office told how he had recently gone with a county club agent to visit the club boy who raised the pig that had carried off the prize at the county fair," she reflected. "The pig, it seemed, was all that could be desired, but to a discriminating eye the boy was not. He was thin, underweight, stoop shouldered, and narrow chested. On inquiry it transpired that although he had raised his pig on milk, he didn't think much of it for himself, and that his diet was unsatisfactory in other respects as well." The club member had raised the pig well, but had neglected himself in the process.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Birdseye, *Growth Work with 4-H Clubs*, see n. 2, p. 4.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 5.



This state of affairs was a far cry from the joint development of child and project the originators of club work had envisioned. The skills and intellect of club members were perhaps being cultivated, but their physical bodies were not keeping pace. Fortunately, Birdseye observed, there was a ready solution at hand, built into club work as it existed. Because 4-H boys and girls were already accustomed to striving toward better standards when they were visually illustrated, why not give them such a standard to strive for? Clearly 4-H'ers were not beyond rescuing: the sickly owner of the prize pig himself was immediately amenable to the notion. "When it was pointed out to him that he ought not to let his pig get ahead of him, he was eager to take himself in hand, even if it involved drinking milk and learning to eat vegetables." From this occurrence flowed a new motto—"Be your own best exhibit"—and a new set of health projects and contests focused on "selecting superior children as living models" to illustrate the points of good nutrition and health habits, in order to "build up the 'eye-picture' of the optimal child." By emphasizing "the fourth H," rural boys and girls were encouraged to treat their own bodies with the same care they were showing their livestock and other farm produce. Health as a 4-H project was born.<sup>10</sup>

As with conservation, the introduction of a concerted program in health for 4-H club members indicated reformers' dissatisfaction with the notion that rural life could be improved through increasing farm production alone. While conservation educators like McNeel and Leopold were teaching young people to include trees, wildlife, and soil among the farm's products and assets to be husbanded and protected, health educators and extension nutritionists like Birdseye were asking those same youth to see *themselves* as an equally important resource for rural living, and the farm's most valuable product. By treating their own bodies as their most important 4-H project, club members were taught that the same principles of diet, hygiene, and care that dictated the growth of livestock and plants applied to their own development as well. 4-H health work thus illuminates a parallel but distinct story of how the aims of rural modernization were revised and

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10. Birdseye, *Growth Work with 4-H Clubs*, see n. 2, pp. 5–6.

reshaped beginning in the 1920s. The movements to incorporate conservation and health into 4-H's program for better rural living both broadened the view of the farm and its products, and emphasized the connections between the condition of the soil, the quality of the plants that grew in it, and the health of the animals and people that ate those plants. During the 1930s, these connections between soil, plants, animals, and people to form a community that behaved like a complex organism, and that could exhibit properties such as health and sickness, were apparent in both conservation and health club work.

However, while conservation continually adopted a focus on the rural community as the locus of reform, health projects were primarily focused on the individual. Furthermore, between the 1920s and the 1950s, the individual club member's duty to maintain bodily health was articulated in relation to a shifting set of groups: the race, the community, the nation, the family. As the goals of individual health changed over this period, its relationship to 4-H's conservation programs also varied. The remainder of this chapter will deal primarily with the intersections between these two movements during the 1930s and '40s, when individual health was related most strongly to the health of the rural community itself, while pointing to the ways in which they diverged before and afterward.

Like conservation work, 4-H health activities were a response to the material conditions of the 1920s and '30s. Just as the environmental problems of the Dust Bowl and the cutover prompted alarm among farmers and agricultural experts, the state of rural health in the 1930s was unsettling to public health workers, medical professionals, and rural reformers alike. With doctors few and far between, running water and modern sanitary facilities a rare luxury, and farm incomes suffering in the wake of the war, rural Americans were generally far from healthy. The First World War brought concrete proof of an actual health disparity. Men enlisting in the armed forces received physical examinations, and those who were not fit enough were rejected; the number of rural rejections visibly exceeded those of men coming from the cities and towns, leading Americans to conclude that the health of its rural stock was alarmingly at odds with the perception of

healthful country living. These figures were continually reported in the press alongside those documenting a similar disparity between urban and rural schoolchildren, and served as a frequent subject of discussion among those seeking to improve rural life. Rural health, which had been among the Country Life Commission's main concerns in the 1900s, resurfaced after the First World War with a vengeance.<sup>11</sup>

The health of rural people was consistently linked to the condition of the landscapes in which they lived. During the 1910s and 1920s, eugenic fieldworkers had drawn parallels between backward rural landscapes and backward people, in order to drum up support for their campaign of racial improvement. The images circulated by Farm Security Administration photographers during the 1930s made a different appeal: their depictions of degraded people in barren landscapes and dilapidated housing was an indictment of the economic system that had destroyed rural people's livelihoods, had uprooted them from the land, and was now exploiting their labor. This "record of human erosion" drew strong connections between the condition of the landscape and the condition of the people who inhabited it. The economic and ecological crises of the 1930s were having social and bodily consequences as well as financial and environmental ones; these paved the way for a broader conception of health that saw the bodies of individual rural people as connected to the well-being of the landscapes in which they lived. The problems of the Depression—poverty, ill health, erosion—could only be addressed when the natural and the social were treated together.<sup>12</sup>

During the 1930s and 1940s, conservation and health became the means by which these efforts to reform

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11. For more on rural health from the period, see C.-E. A. Winslow, *Health on the Farm and in the Village: A Review and Evaluation of the Cattaraugus County Health Demonstration with Special Reference to Its Lessons for Other Rural Areas* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1931); George A. Works and Simon O. Lesser, *Rural America Today: Its Schools and Community Life* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

12. On eugenics and the landscape, see: Kevin Dann, *Across the Great Border Fault: The Naturalist Myth in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Laura Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890–1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), esp. chapter 5; Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), chapter 4. On FSA photography, see Linda Gordon, "Dorothea Lange: The Photographer as Agricultural Sociologist," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 3 (Dec. 2006): 693–727; Douglas Cazaux Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), chapter 7; Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor, *An America Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1939).

nature and society were made possible. At the same time that conservationists like Leopold were developing theories about the “health of the land,” health practitioners were speaking of the conservation of human health and of human resources alongside natural resources. Conservation and health thus became ways of speaking about rural reform that could bring the biological and the social together under a uniform set of theories about self-regulation, balance, and wholeness. These ideas were expressed by both conservationists, through the language of ecology, and by health advocates, through the language of bodily regulation and social well-being. As Gregg Mitman has shown, the 1930s were marked by a “neo-Hippocratic revival” in medicine that paralleled ecological and sociological thinking about organismal balance as the expression of health. The organism—whether an ecological community, an individual, or a social body—had a capacity for self-regulation that, when disturbed, led to ill health. During the Depression, evidence of this disturbance and illness was everywhere apparent, from worn-out farms to gullied fields to degraded communities to sickly people. Embedded in these notions was a biological understanding of development that mapped onto the social sphere. Rural reformers hoped to heal troubled communities by restoring the natural balance and order of things.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1930s and '40s—and extending to some extent into the 1950s—4-H conservation and health work enacted ecological and sociological ideas in rural communities that sought to restore balance to the relationships among soil, plants, animals, people, and the natural and human communities they constituted. Conservation work carried this out by encouraging farm children to see themselves and their communities as part of a larger whole that included both the wild and the tame. Health projects achieved this by showing 4-H club boys and girls that the principles they followed to care for their plants and animals applied to their own bodies as well. By having boys and trees grow up together, and encouraging children to see themselves

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13. Gregg Mitman, “In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History,” *Environmental History* 10 (Apr. 2005): 184–210, p. 186.

as embodiments of the well-being of their rural landscapes and communities, club work put forth a new view of rural landscapes, modernity, and development.

### LOOKING TO NATURE

During the 1930s and '40s, Wakelin McNeel used the language of health to draw connections between the natural environments his club members labored in on their farms, the rural communities they inhabited, and their own bodily well-being. He encouraged them to take a broader view of farm resources and produce that included wild nature—trees, weeds, wildflowers, shrubs, deer, birds, and other wildlife—as well as an inclusive understanding of nature that extended to the domesticated landscapes of the farm—from barn and field, to roadside, fencerow, and woodlot. In doing so, McNeel relied on ideas elaborated in two disciplines with a strong interest in rural reform during this time. The first was ecology, which McNeel came to understand through an ongoing dialogue with his Wisconsin colleague Aldo Leopold, as well as through his own work writing radio broadcasts for *Afield with Ranger Mac*, and his conversations and interactions with the university and government experts in soils, wildlife, and conservation issues he consulted in formulating 4-H conservation programs. The second was rural sociology, which he encountered through his colleagues in the state 4-H club office, and through his connections with New Deal agencies whose work was based in rural sociological ideas about the community. From the airwaves to the printed page, McNeel's conservation program for Wisconsin's rural boys and girls reflected a set of ideas formulated by ecologists and rural sociologists about how to create healthy, stable, and enduring rural communities.

### THE NATURAL COMMUNITY: THE ECOLOGY AND HEALTH OF LAND AND BODY

Through the bulletins he wrote and distributed to 4-H club members across Wisconsin, McNeel sought to convey the fundamental interrelatedness of everything in the natural world. As McNeel told a reporter in

1943, “every creature has some place in the scheme of nature, from the angleworm that burrows in the ground to the hawk that swings at anchor in the sky.”<sup>14</sup> In addition to demonstrating the complexities of natural relationships, McNeel showed club members that they themselves were a part of this natural scheme, and that, by understanding nature’s workings and paying attention to the natural world that surrounded them, they would be able to become better farmers and better stewards of the land for future generations. This would happen through a “partnership” between humans and nature, in which nature provided the guidance and humans provided the action. “The world of Nature is all about us. We, ourselves, are a part of her. We should understand her better, enjoy her more, come to terms with her. Here lies the hope of sufficiency for ourselves and those who come after us.”<sup>15</sup>

In this respect, McNeel was echoing a set of ideas emerging in the 1930s about the proper uses of the land. Rural reformers approached the problem of the Depression-Era landscape with a critical eye, offering a tale of human hubris, in which settlers and corporations paid no heed to local conditions, assuming that their uses for the land were the best ones. This had led to the economic ruin and environmental disasters of the 1930s. Chastened by their failure to work within nature’s limits, agricultural specialists sought to better understand the “natural” state of different landscapes, so that could Americans determine the best economic uses to which they should be put, and develop a long-term, permanent agricultural and land policy.

These notions of agricultural permanence drew a great deal from the grasslands school of plant ecology that developed in the U.S. Great Plains at the turn of the twentieth century. Plant ecology was a well established field by the 1920s, and in the United States in this time it was oriented around the delineation of plant communities and the tracing of their *succession*: how their composition changed over time. When “colonizing” a new area, plants would gain a foothold, and then, depending on the nature of the soil and

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14. Wakelin McNeel, from an August 1943 interview in the *Extension Service Review*, quoted in Matkin-Rawn, see n. 5, 6–7.

15. WI4HCC, 1947 file.

climate, would change according to identifiable patterns. Frederick Clements and Henry Chandler Cowles both elaborated theories of plant succession in which vegetation passed through several distinct stages before achieving an end state, a “climax” community that was characteristic of a particular place, and that was stable and permanent. Only major disturbances could alter the climax. For Clements, Cowles, and other plant ecologists of the period, development was thus a directional process, one whose end was marked by stability and permanence.<sup>16</sup>

This had important implications for American agriculture, for, as many plant ecologists of the time argued, it was the disturbance of these highly stable climax communities—by, for instance, plowing them up for agriculture, or clearing them for lumber—that was causing the environmental problems gripping the headlines of the 1930s, and costing people their livelihoods the nation over. Those who made their living off the land needed to take a new approach, one that paid closer attention to the existing plant communities and soil conditions on their property, and that sought not to inscribe a new order on top of them, but to adapt their own uses of the land in ways that followed its natural tendencies. By working with, rather than against, nature’s plan, farmers and other landowners would be better off.

Clementsian ecologists believed that plant communities changed over time in ways that paralleled the development of individual organisms. They also believed that it was primarily environmental conditions—soil, moisture, climate—that determined their composition, rather than struggles between individual plants. Succession and development, then, for the grasslands ecologists of the 1930s, was the story of adaptation to the landscape, whereby plants struggled not against one another but rather to fit themselves to their surroundings. The lessons for the farmers of the plans was clear: like developing plant communities, rural communities needed to better adapt to their environments, rather than struggle against one another individually.

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16. On plant ecology and Clements, see: Ronald C. Tobey, *Saving the Prairies: The Life Cycle of the Founding School of American Plant Ecology, 1895–1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Sharon E. Kingsland, *The Evolution of American Ecology, 1890–2000* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), chapter 5.

In the 4-H bulletins he authored for Wisconsin boys and girls, McNeel continually emphasized the connections between wild nature and the domesticated plants and animals of the farm, showing how thoughtful observers of nature could achieve better results by making their own agricultural labors reinforce, rather than disturb, the natural tendencies of balance and self-regulation that landscapes possessed. His descriptions always connected the wild and the domesticated aspects of farm work, and were rooted in the practicalities of Wisconsin farming. For instance,

A farmer wants to plant red clover to restore the fertility of a field. Red clover, like all legumes, is equipped by Nature to do it. It so happens that the bumblebee is the only bee that can reach the nectar in the clover blossoms and do the work of pollination. Field mice destroy the nests of the bumblebee and thin out their population. This means a poorer crop of clover. Where the numbers of field mice are kept down, red clover flourishes, other conditions being right. What keeps down the number of field mice? Hawks and owls do. When a marsh hawk is circling over your clover field, it is serving you. No living thing stands alone in the world of Nature. This is a maxim of Conservation.<sup>17</sup>

In this description, conservation meant understanding the relationships between living things, both wild and tame, and adapting the human practice of agriculture to the landscape in such a way that the existing processes would mean a boon to the farmer. To build a more permanent agriculture, 4-H boys and girls needed to see the farm as a place where the wild and the tame met, and where the understanding hand of the farmer could guide their joint development.<sup>18</sup>

As the clover passage showed, McNeel taught his 4-H club youth that humans and nature were connected through food and health. This showed up in health projects as well as . Just as the soil's fertility and the clover's growth was dependent on the stability of the food chain connecting bees, mice, and birds, human health was dependent upon maintaining proper diet and nutrition, which in turn derived from the products of the soil.

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17. McNeel, *Getting Started in Conservation with 4-H*, see n. 1.

18. *ibid.* It is worth noting that Charles Darwin uses a similar example of bees, mice, and clover to describe the “web of complex relations” in Charles Darwin, *On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life* (London: John Murray, 1859), pp. 73–74.



As Birdseye's health programs indicated, good nutrition could be seen in the body through outward physical signs. These included clear, bright eyes with no dark circles, smooth, glossy hair, a sturdy build, straight limbs, good, erect posture, well formed teeth, healthy gums, regular elimination, and a happy, cheerful disposition.<sup>19</sup> But diet alone was not the determinant of good health. As with conservation, maintaining a state of bodily health involved a complex of practices aimed at eliminating the obstacles to the body's own mechanisms of balance and regulation. "Good hygiene must go hand in hand with an adequate diet to produce really good nutrition," one foods circular proclaimed. "Unless a boy or girl has plenty of sleep, is careful not to get overtired each night, gets plenty of fresh air, exercise and sunshine and stands straight he will not be truly well nourished. Food alone cannot create a healthy body but it can combine with good hygiene to maintain good health."<sup>20</sup> Club members needed to support their body's own mechanisms for maintaining health, through eating right, getting plenty of exercise and rest, and developing habits to prevent disease and ailments.

Just as good health was reflected throughout the community, poor health would ramify in multiple ways if malnourishment occurred. This could happen in the literal sense—people not having enough to eat, or not eating nutritious foods—but it usually was a symptom of a larger problem. Soil exhaustion was one, but it could also be overgrazing, or cash-crop farming—anything that led to declining yields or farm incomes, or that sacrificed family needs for the needs of the farm business. As one foods and nutrition circular put it, "No country boys and girls should fail to get the right foods. The right foods are country produce."<sup>21</sup> Poor land management practices were often at the root of poor health. A soil circular depicted this visually for its readers, juxtaposing images of healthy cattle grazing on a lush, well-cared-for pasture and sickly stock grazing on a stubbly hillside. "Good Land Use," the caption indicated, would result in "healthy, productive

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19. *Foods and Nutrition – Project III – Picnics – Lunches* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-17, 1936), p. 4.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

cattle,” while “Poor Land Use” would give the opposite.<sup>22</sup> What is even more interesting is how conservation club members used metaphors of health and healing to describe their project work. As one Mississippi conservation club member wrote of his terracing project, “A person who is sick with anemia or does not have any red corpuscles likely needs a blood transfusion to improve and without it he would more than likely die. So it is with eroded land that is torn and has lost all of its fertility needs a fertility transfusion instead of a blood transfusion and if it does not get it, it will more than likely die or will not grow crops.”<sup>23</sup> For 4-H boys and girls, health was not simply a bodily affair, but something that obtained in landscapes as well as in people and human communities.

Garden club work was another project area consistently linked to individual and community health. McNeel lent his imprimatur to a series of garden pamphlets prepared by the horticulture department, connecting community well-being to the individual practice of keeping a kitchen garden to feed and nourish the family. “The well-being of any country depends not alone on its mighty industrial plants, or its extensive farms, but quite as much upon the production from the well-selected, much-loved gardens,” he declared. “Too often the importance of the farm home garden, from the health and budgetary standpoints, is lost in the larger farm work. But is it not a fact of general observation that a nation of good gardeners is a thrifty, healthy, kindly people?”<sup>24</sup> Good health thus resulted not simply from the garden’s produce, or from the increased income a garden project could contribute, but also from the process of planning, planting, tending, and cultivating the garden itself, through a partnership with nature.

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22. I. O. Hembre et al., *Getting Acquainted with Our Soil* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-62, 1950), pp. 8–9.

23. H. Burkett Hedgepeth, “Soil Conservation,” 1941, Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service Cooperative Extension Service, 1925–1963, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A97-14 (henceforth cited as MCES), Box 63, 4-H Land-Use Conservation folder, p. 2.

24. *4-H Garden Club Work: Projects 1, 2, and 3*, Special Circular 21 (Madison: Extension Service of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin, February 1933), back cover. The quotation also appeared in the 1934, 1938, and 1939 revisions of the circular. In the first two versions, the quote was unattributed, but in the latter two, it was attributed to Wakelin McNeel.

McNeel made a similar set of parallels to connect humans to the natural world by encouraging children to think of wild organisms like they thought of their own bodies. In an *Afield with Ranger Mac* program aired in March of 1938, McNeel drew an analogy between humans and trees. “Trees, like people, have diseases,” he explained. “[T]hey are just like we are. When we are not in good health, have not taken good care of ourselves, we lay ourselves open to colds and other ailments.” Similarly, when their defenses were weakened by fire and other threats, trees were more susceptible to sickness. Trees were also part of a biological community that helped to take care of them. Birds were their partners, since these feathered friends helped to eat bugs, caterpillars, and other pests that irritated them, and that spread disease and injury. By doing their part in the scheme of nature, birds were “helping trees to be healthy and disease-resisting.”<sup>25</sup>

By thinking about natural communities as things that could be healthy or unhealthy, and understanding the mechanisms that determined health, club members could take better care of their own bodies and the landscapes they inhabited. Just as health was a condition of natural balance, ill health was the result of a disturbance in a normally self-regulating system. As McNeel pointed out in his broadcast, the greatest threats to trees were not from local disease agents, but diseases and pests that came from other lands, and that thus had no natural mechanism of control locally.<sup>26</sup> In framing the problem this way, McNeel was drawing on Aldo Leopold’s idea of land health, and the notion of “the cycle,” an increasingly common phenomenon in which wildlife populations experienced cyclic fluctuations from year to year that had not been seen previously. This was a familiar phenomenon to Wisconsin farmers, who saw deer destroying their own means of subsistence through cycles of boom and bust. “I suspect that cycles are a disorder of animal populations, in some way spread by awkward land-use,” Leopold told an audience of Wisconsin rural folk at the University’s annual Farm and Home Week in 1939, in a talk he delivered to a gathering of 4-H club

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25. Wakelin McNeel, “Afield with Ranger Mac: Enemies of the Forest,” Mar. 13, 1938, Box 68.

26. Ibid.

boys and girls at the state's annual conservation camp six years later.<sup>27</sup> Cycles represented a disorder in the landscape, a throwing-off of a naturally existing balance, most likely through human action. Discovering the causes of these cycles involved tracing the connections among organisms in the natural community, much as McNeel was teaching his club members to do.

Cycles and the complex interconnections that characterized them meant that restoring the balance of human-natural systems like Wisconsin's agricultural landscapes had to be approached holistically. This was best done through the lens of health. As Leopold told the folks at Farm and Home Week, and the 4-H club members assembled at camp,

It seems to me that the pattern of the rural landscape, like the configuration of our own bodies, has in it (or should have in it) a certain wholeness. No one censures a man who loses his leg in an accident, or who was born with only four fingers, but we should look askance at a man who amputated a natural part on the grounds that some other is more profitable.... [T]o entirely remove any natural feature from representation in the rural landscape seems to me a defacement which the calm verdict of history will not approve, either as good conservation, good taste, or good economics.<sup>28</sup>

This "principle of wholeness in the farm landscape" was what Wisconsin's farmers needed to appreciate and to safeguard. By understanding the similarities between the landscapes they inhabited and upon which they

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27. Aldo Leopold, *The Farmer as a Conservationist*, Stencil Circular 210 (Madison: Extension Service, College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin, February 1939), p. 2. "The Farmer as a Conservationist" was reproduced and reprinted in many forms surrounding its initial presentation that February day in 1939. The ideas contained in the talk were ones Leopold had been rehearsing in short pieces in the Racine farm paper the *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer* over the course of the previous year; see: Aldo Leopold, "Wildlife Conservation on the Farm," *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer* 65, no. 23 (Nov. 5, 1938): 5; Aldo Leopold, "Wildlife Conservation on the Farm," *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer* 65, no. 24 (Nov. 19, 1938): 18; Aldo Leopold, "Feed the Song Birds," *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer* 65, no. 25 (Dec. 3, 1938): 5; Aldo Leopold, "Woodlot Wildlife Aids," *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer* 65, no. 27 (Dec. 31, 1938): 4; Aldo Leopold, "The Farm Pond Attracts Game," *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer* 66, no. 3 (Feb. 11, 1939): 7. Immediately after his speech at Farm and Home Week, the Wisconsin Extension Service put out a special mimeographed circular containing the text of the talk, which it distributed to farmers all over the state: Leopold, *The Farmer as a Conservationist*, see n. 27. In June of 1939, Leopold published a revised version of the essay in *American Forests*, which the magazine made available as a reprint, and distributed upon request. This revised version, shorter and a bit less conversational, is the one found today in collected volumes of Leopold's writings; see: Aldo Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," *American Forests* 45, no. 6 (June 1939): 294–299, 316, 323; Aldo Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," in *For the Health of the Land: Previously Unpublished Essays and Other Writings*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Eric T. Freyfogle (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1999). For an overview of this essay in relation to the development of Leopold's idea of the Land Ethic, see Curt Meine, *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), pp. 388–391.

28. Leopold, *The Farmer as a Conservationist*, see n. 27, p. 4.

relied, and their own bodies, rural boys and girls could learn how to combat the cycle, and create a more stable livelihood for themselves and their communities. Together, Leopold and McNeel trained them to see health as a state of balance, and to see landscapes, like bodies, as organisms that could be healthy or not.<sup>29</sup>

Through Wisconsin's 4-H conservation and health programs, club members learned that the goal of conservation was a healthy natural community—and that this health would be reflected in the human community as well. A healthy natural community was a stable rural community—one that was not troubled by fluctuations or disturbances, one that was not exhibiting major population booms and busts. In ecological terms, McNeel and his 4-H conservationists were seeking to uncover the climax of rural life, and to realign Wisconsin's rural communities toward it.

#### THE SOCIAL COMMUNITY: CULTIVATING RURAL LIFE THROUGH CONSERVATION AND HEALTH

While individual 4-H projects in soil conservation, forestry, and wildlife management gave boys and girls the ecological knowledge and techniques to practice health-minded conservation on their farms, as Leopold pointed out, it was only when the actions of individuals combined into group effort for the good of the whole that the thing he called “conservation” would really begin to emerge. McNeel trained Wisconsin's boys and girls in collective action, discussion, and planning of land use for community gain by holding conservation camps that brought each state's most distinguished conservation club members together with experts and practitioners working actively in the conservation field for a weekend of talks, field trips, conversation, and planning. Through the conservation camps, 4-H expressed not only its ecological view of the community, but its sociological view as well.

Like the ecologists who were putting forth theories of the community-as-organism, social scientists in the 1930s were developing theories about community life and development in which the irreducibility of the

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29. Leopold, *The Farmer as a Conservationist*, see n. 27, p. 4.

whole figured prominently. The so-called “community movement” in sociology during the 1930s and 1940s took the ideas of community relationships and analysis developed in the fields of plant and animal ecology and applied them to human social groups, resulting in what came to be called “human ecology,” an integrative discipline that encompassed everything from human geography and sociology to anatomy, physiology, and psychology.<sup>30</sup>

Community studies were rural sociology’s first analytical tool, and, like ecology, the field elaborated a concept of the community that was essentially organismal in nature. Take, for example, one of the founding documents of the field, Charles Josiah Galpin’s *The Social Anatomy of an Agricultural Community*. Based on survey research he had done in Walworth County in southeastern Wisconsin, Galpin traced and then mapped the areas of reach of different rural social services. By asking farmers where they went to church, where their children attended school, what merchants they bought their household goods from, where they sold their farm produce, and what paper they subscribed to, Galpin and his assistants were able to outline the boundaries of different communities within the county: where people stopped taking one paper and subscribed to another, or the line across which people stopped attending this church and attended that one. This, he argued, was a delineation of rural communities grounded in the everyday practices of the people on the ground, and was thus a much truer description of the community than could be observed by looking at a map alone.

One of Galpin’s key insights was that the communities he discerned did not correspond to the political

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30. See, for instance: Jesse Frederick Steiner, “An Appraisal of the Community Movement,” *Social Forces* 7 (1929): 333–342; Ernest W. Burgess, “The Value of Sociological Community Studies for the Work of Social Agencies,” *Social Forces* 8 (1930): 481–491; W. Russell Tylor, “The Process of Change from Neighborhood to Regional Organization and Its Effect on Rural Life,” *Social Forces* 16 (1938): 530–542; T. Lynn Smith, “Trends in Community Organization and Life,” *American Sociological Review* 5 (1940): 325–334; August B. Hollingshead, “Human Ecology and Human Society,” *Ecological Monographs* 10 (1940): 354–366; August B. Hollingshead, “Community Research: Development and Present Condition,” *American Sociological Review* 13 (1948): 136–156; Louis Wirth, “Human Ecology,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 50 (1945): 483–488. For more on the links between biology and society in this period, see Gregg Mitman, “Defining the Organism in the Welfare State: The Politics of Individuality in American Culture, 1890–1950,” in *Biology as Society, Society as Biology: Metaphors*, ed. Sabine Maasen, Everett Mendelsohn, and Peter Weingart (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995); Emanuel Gaziano, “Ecological Metaphors as Scientific Boundary Work: Innovation and Authority in Interwar Sociology and Biology,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 101 (1996): 874–907.

divisions of the county or its municipalities; rather, they were determined by a host of factors as varied as geography, interpersonal relationships, farm prices, land quality, roads and other aspects of the county infrastructure. This had important implications for those interested in fomenting agrarian democracy. If the rural community as experienced by its inhabitants did not correspond to the civic community as outlined by politicians, it was no wonder that rural people felt largely disengaged from local governance. What is more, communities on the ground were not static, but constantly shifting depending on geographical constraints, economic conditions, environmental factors, technological change, and social forces. The rural sociologist could, through careful on-the-ground research and a knowledge of broader social and economic theory, determine the boundaries of these communities, and work to make the outlines of the two communities—one actual, one artificial—overlap. The result would be greater rural engagement and leadership: when the civic community of governance reflected the felt community of local experience, rural men and women would be more likely to work for its improvement, for they would feel a personal investment and see their efforts reflected in the community they knew to be their own.<sup>31</sup>

Galpin's description of the rural community as a social body, with a comprehensible anatomy and function akin to the human body, reflected the organismal and biological thinking that suffused rural sociology in the early twentieth century, ideas that it held in common with the ecological disciplines. The rural environment—conceived not only as its physical surroundings, but in terms of economic conditions, attitudes and relationships, and technologies of transportation and communication—was an important force that shaped the form rural communities took over time. All of this produced another aspect of community life that was rising in theoretical prominence during the 1930s: culture. The culture of rural communities, and, indeed, of entire regions, was another important contribution of Depression-era planning to ideas of rural improve-

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31. Charles Josiah Galpin, *The Social Anatomy of an Agricultural Community* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station, Research Bulletin 34, 1915).

ment. Rural reformers' concept of culture was in many ways the human elaboration of the physiological and behavioral adaptations groups of plants and animals developed in response to their environments. Sociologists and reformers thus needed to understand the regional cultures of the United States, in order to shepherd their readjustment to the conditions of modernity.<sup>32</sup>

This move toward a “cultural approach” was articulated most succinctly by Milburn Lincoln Wilson, better known as M. L., a career extension figure who rose to prominence in Washington during the New Deal and became Undersecretary of Agriculture under Henry A. Wallace before directing the Federal Extension Service from 1940 to 1953. Trained as an agronomist, agricultural economist, and rural sociologist at Iowa State and Wisconsin, Wilson had an abiding interest in the relationship between modern science and technology and the “folkways” of traditional societies, such as those that predominated in rural areas worldwide. By the late 1930s, after immersing himself in the latest trends in cultural anthropology, social psychology, and what might best be described as a nascent history of science and technology, Wilson had come to believe that the social sciences were going to play a crucial role in agriculture and government policy long into the future. However, he was disturbed by the trend he perceived towards increasing isolation and specialization among the social scientific disciplines, and felt that, in order to be most useful to spurring social action, the fields needed a conceptual core around which to rally, a “common fundamental basis for attack.” Culture, and a “cultural approach,” could be the unifying theme of the social sciences.<sup>33</sup>

In a paper he wrote outlining this “cultural approach in extension work,” Wilson articulated a vision for the social sciences—particularly the rural social sciences—that paralleled the vision laid out for ecology by

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32. My thinking on these subjects owes a great deal to conversations with and the ideas of Todd Dresser. See Todd Dresser, “Nightmares of Rural Life: Fearing the Future in the Transition from Country Life to the Family Farm, 1890–1960” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2011), chapter 5.

33. Biographical information on Wilson is from M. L. Wilson Papers, 1913–1970, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, Collection 2100 (henceforth cited as Wilson Papers), Box 5, Folders 1–3. The quotes are from M. L. Wilson, *The Cultural Approach in Extension Work*, Extension Service Circular 332 (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, Extension Service, May 1940), p. 3.



its 1930s practitioners. By taking culture—which he defined as “the whole range of material things, and the habits, attitudes, and values in which these things are set and which condition their function in the life of the community, as well as the social arrangements which man has developed”—as their central object of inquiry, the social sciences could take “an integrated approach” in which culture was “an indivisible whole” whose inner workings must be understood not separately but in intimate relation to one another.<sup>34</sup> Just as an organism could not be fully understood when taken out of its environment, the economic conditions of a farm community could not be understood apart from the community itself: its social relations, its values, its physical environment, its people. This was because “All parts of a culture are related to all other parts and the effects of an important change in one element will eventually be reflected in other parts.”<sup>35</sup> Like nature, society was a complex being.

In ways that paralleled Leopold’s ideas of healthy equilibrium and cycles that reflected disequilibrium, for M. L. Wilson the history of human cultures was marked by balance and disturbance. When functioning properly, cultures corrected disturbances themselves, but when they were unhealthy—such as when a new technology was introduced that was not properly integrated into the cultural value system—disturbances could lead to the destruction of the entire culture. Social scientists “must recognize the wholeness of farm problems” by “attempting to get at an integrated view of life as it flows along.”<sup>36</sup> Extension agents following their advice also had to change their behavior. Instead of being “cafeteria workers who served up advice,” they needed to become “social engineers—aware of and dealing constructively with the whole inter-relationships in the cultural setting.”<sup>37</sup>

Wilson articulated a similarly holistic view of health, and as director of extension, he worked to develop

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34. Wilson, *The Cultural Approach in Extension Work*, see n. 33, pp. 5, 10.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

a comprehensive health policy for the Extension Service. In a memorandum to the states, he advocated for an extensive approach to rural health. “We do not want to see the Extension health program become a series of unrelated health activities,” he wrote. “Instead we are seeking one unified extension health program.” This might be a difficult task, because medical science tended to specialize as it advanced. Instead of focusing on individual diseases, extension workers should emphasize “the whole man” in a way that would “contribute to the great common health goal of conservation of our human resources.”<sup>38</sup> For Wilson, extension work with rural people could form an important service, integrating otherwise disparate ideas and practices drawn from distinct scientific fields in a holistic approach rooted in the particular local needs of rural communities.

McNeel himself carried out this service through the conservation camps he began in Wisconsin in 1935, which ran through the 1950s. Interestingly enough, the conservation camps themselves were not the brainchild of the national 4-H organization, or of McNeel, but rather the result of a cooperation between state 4-H club organization and private philanthropy. In 1934, Minnesota’s 4-H club director, T. A. Erickson, approached Charles L. Horn, the president of Federal Cartridge Corporation, an ammunitions manufacturer in Minneapolis best known for its “Hi-Power” shotgun shells, popular with hunters, to see if he would sponsor a 4-H wildlife conservation project. Horn agreed, and the following year decided to expand his donations to neighboring states, including Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska. In order to help promote the wildlife management project work, Horn began providing money to run conservation camps for the states’ highest-achieving conservation project members. To oversee the operation of the camps, and to act as his representative, Horn hired George W. McCullough, a wildlife specialist and collaborator with the Bureau of Biological Survey (today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). Over the course of the first few years of the camps, McCullough developed a set of guidelines, which he began distributing to the states

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38. M. L. Wilson to State Extension Directors, *Need for a Unified Extension Health Program*, Jan. 10, 1950, New York State College of Agriculture Extension Service 4-H Club Records, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #21-24-692 (henceforth cited as NYS4H), Box 115, NYS Extension Coordinating Committee - Health & Safety - 1951-54 folder.

in the late 1930s. These gave an overview of Horn's and McCullough's aims in the camps, and how they expected them to be achieved.<sup>39</sup>

Horn's chief concern, as the head of an ammunition concern catering to sportsmen, was wildlife conservation. The health of his business depended upon the continued availability of wild game, and therefore the maintenance of its habitat. Horn's conservationist ideas were descended directly from Theodore Roosevelt, the most famous sportsman-conservationist of the twentieth century. Indeed, as historians have amply demonstrated, protecting and maintaining wildlife stocks for the recreation of elite hunters was one of the overriding concerns of the Progressive conservation movement.<sup>40</sup> By the 1920s and '30s, game management had become a scientific field, one that was beginning to offer a more complicated view of wildlife and its habitat, as well as a different set of prescriptions for its maintenance. While early game conservation had focused on eliminating predators such as wolves in order to protect desirable hunting species such as deer and small game birds, research being done in animal ecology on wildlife population fluctuations over time was beginning to call these methods into question. Predator destruction indeed boosted deer numbers at first, but it set off a cycle of destruction. The explosion of the deer population meant that the animals soon outstripped the ability of the landscape to support them. They overgrazed the woods until there was nothing left to eat, and their populations then crashed when mass starvation took hold. The woodlands suffered, too, as plants were eaten down to stubs, tree roots were damaged, and soil- and moisture-holding grasses

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39. On the development of 4-H conservation camps, see: Franklin M. Reck, *The 4-H Story: A History of 4-H Club Work* (Ames: Iowa State College Press, 1951), pp. 258–259; G. W. McCullough, "Suggestions Pertaining to the 4-H Club Conservation Program and Conservation Camps," 1939, WI4HCC, 1939 Camp File; G. W. McCullough, "A Guide to Better Conservation for 4-H Club Boys and Girls," n.d., Mack A. Rowzee Collection, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A86-54 (henceforth cited as Rowzee Collection), Box 9; "Montana 4-H Conservation Camp," July 18–22, 1949, Extension Service General Correspondence, 1947–1970, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Record Group 33 (Records of the Federal Extension Service) (henceforth cited as ESGC), Box 18, "4-H Clubs by States" folder; WI4HCC.

40. Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Louis Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Richard W. Judd, *Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Daniel Schneider, "Local Knowledge, Environmental Politics, and the Founding of Ecology in the United States: Stephen Forbes and the 'Lake as a Microcosm,'" *Isis* 91 (2000): 681–705.

were trampled by hungry hordes. State departments of conservation, mostly newer entities dating from the Progressive Era, began to shift their policies away from predator bounties and toward a more comprehensive management scheme.

The recommendations McCullough came up with to guide the conservation camps were emblematic of this period of transition between active favoring of certain “valuable” game species and a wildlife management approach that took a more holistic view. “The principal purpose of this conservation program, of course, is to increase wildlife,” McCullough wrote. “The propagation of game birds through full or partial artificial methods is recommended, yet we are unalterably of the opinion that the larger field is one of Ecology.” This meant that would-be conservationists needed to take a wide-angle view of the relationships among soils, plants, and wildlife, and to understand how changes in one group made for changes in the others. To do this, McCullough recommended emphasizing the ecological concept of succession as a central theme of conservation. “The subjects which fall well within, and can and should be correlated under the heading of Conservation are numerous, and too, there are many subjects which can be presented and discussed which will throw light upon the thing we referred to as the ‘Succession’, whether it be plant or animal life,” he wrote. “An attempt should be made to show ...the succession of plant and animal life, soil building and nature’s orderly method of progress and biological balance.”<sup>41</sup> Ecology, to McCullough, involved understanding these processes of succession, and the ways in which nature sought a balance. Humans could husband this process in ways that would be familiar to farmers. “Undisturbed coverts, plus natural wild food patches augmented by cultivating plantings does, without doubt, result in an increase of game. Adding to this a four-way cooperative plan; i.e., the State Conservation Department, the sportsmen and the farm folk cooperating with the 4-H Club Department, you have a rather complete picture.”<sup>42</sup>

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41. McCullough, “Suggestions Pertaining to the 4-H Club Conservation Program and Conservation Camps,” see n. 39, pp. 2–3.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

McCullough's description of the 4-H conservation program points to a new element in resource management thinking in this period: the inclusion of local people in its prosecution. In the Progressive Era, conservationists had tended to perceive local resource users as threats to rather than partners in conservation. While scientific experts still provided the main thrust of conservation policy in the 1930s, agencies tasked with managing natural resources attempted to recruit landowners and local people in the process. This included explaining the biological thinking behind such everyday manifestations of conservations such as game laws, hunting seasons, and take limits, as well as enlisting the cooperation of rural people in enforcing those policies. As Horn himself put it, "Not only does the conservation of the Nation's most valuable physical asset, the Soil, rest with the farm Youth and Parents, the Agricultural Advisers and the 4-H Club leaders, but also the perpetuation of the Nation's wildlife resources. Without the assistance of the rural people, many species of wildlife will vanish, and with the loss of our Fertile Soils, we suffer our greatest economic loss."<sup>43</sup> Spreading the "gospel of conservation," as 4-H conservation campers were expected to do, thus involved bringing local resource users into the fold, and showing them how conservation could be beneficial to them and their communities.

By bringing together formal expertise and working knowledge to create a fuller picture of rural life, Horn, McNeel, and their colleagues were practicing a form of what Jess Gilbert has termed "low modernism"—a "moderate brand of state-led reform" that incorporated local knowledge and tradition into expert, scientific planning through citizen participation. Like the community-based participatory planning carried out by the agrarians of the third New Deal, 4-H programs in the thirties and forties sought to "narrow the gap between scientist and citizen" by bringing expert and local knowledge into conversation.<sup>44</sup> Nowhere were

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43. Charles L. Horn, quoted in McCullough, "Suggestions Pertaining to the 4-H Club Conservation Program and Conservation Camps," see n. 39, p. 6.

44. The term "low modernism" is after Jess Gilbert, "Low Modernism and the Agrarian New Deal: A Different Kind of State," in *Fighting for the Farm: Rural America Transformed*, ed. Jane Adams (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 131. The article reacts to the "high modernist" statecraft arguments in James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the*

these efforts more apparent than in the structure of the annual 4-H conservation camp. A glance at the camp programs looks like something between a summer camp, an extended educational field trip, and a professional conference. Picnic lunches and campfire sing-alongs punctuated nature hikes, presentations and practica in the field, and informative talks. McNeel drew on his connections in academia and state government to supply the camps with a plethora of experts. He was in frequent contact with university professors, members of the state conservation department, Soil Conservation Service officials, representatives of the Tennessee Valley Authority, and various conservation organizations such as Trees for Tomorrow and American Forests. Over the course of the camps' fifteen-year run, McNeel brought in over seventy-five different speakers and instructors from all over Wisconsin and beyond. After the day's field trips, the campers would gather for supper and listen to a series of talks by such experts, some of whom had traveled from as far away as Tennessee or Georgia.<sup>45</sup>

However, in spite of their prominence, these government and university specialists did not function solely as lecturers, spouting their knowledge from the pulpit. Most of them stayed for the duration of the camp, hiking alongside the youngsters, joining them on their field trips, participating in the round-table discussions that took place after supper, and singing with them around the campfire at night. The format of the clubs encouraged interaction and conversation, as well as the transfer of knowledge in both directions: from experts to laypeople, and from laypeople to experts as well. "Some of the greatest values and joys will come from the associations at the camp," one program read. "Learn to know each person," one program read, "speakers and

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*Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). The "third New Deal" refers to the reforms enacted during the second presidential term of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, from 1937–1940; see Gilbert, "Low Modernism and the Agrarian New Deal," see n. 44, p. 133; Jess Gilbert, "Rural Sociology and Democratic Planning in the Third New Deal," *Agricultural History* 82, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 421–438. The quote is from Gilbert, "Low Modernism and the Agrarian New Deal," see n. 44, p. 141.

45. The most frequent visitors to the camps included Fred B. Trenk, a Wisconsin extension forester with whom he would eventually author a handbook on school forestry; John W. Thomson, a University Botanist; forest ranger Leigh Hilliker; W. T. Calhoun, educational director with the Wisconsin Conservation Department; and George W. McCullough, a wildlife technician in the employ of Horn who had formerly worked with the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey. Some of the more prominent University faculty he used were Arthur D. Hasler of the Zoology department, George S. Wehrwein of Land Economics, and the venerable Aldo Leopold of Wildlife Management. WI4HCC; Wakelin McNeel and Fred Trenk, *School Forests: A Handbook* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 387, 1954).

delegates alike.” It is clear from the letters of appreciation these specialists sent to McNeel that they learned as much from their time at camp as did the children. The conservation camps thus fostered an environment that reflected a growing desire among agricultural leaders of the time to bring experts and citizens—and the special knowledge each group possessed—into fruitful conversation.<sup>46</sup>

The most important lesson of the conservation camps was how the individual related to the community. In addition to teaching young people about their civic responsibility to participate in community planning for conservation and land use, the camps also made sure they understood their ethical responsibility as farmer-conservationists. Aldo Leopold articulated these ideas in his visits to the campers, which he made five times between the year he first presented “The Farmer as a Conservationist” at Farm and Home Week, and his untimely death in 1948. In addition to interacting with the young conservationists, accompanying them on their field trips, and discussing conservation issues with them around the campfire at night, Leopold gave talks on “Birds and their Place in Conservation,” “What Is the Deer Problem? A Study of Deer and Food,” and, of course, “The Farmer as a Conservationist” itself. McNeel had modeled his 4-H conservation program around this latter essay in particular, and was eager to ensure his campers absorbed its ideas fully. In August of 1945, McNeel wrote to the *Wisconsin Agriculturist & Farmer*—which had reprinted “The Farmer as a Conservationist” and several other of Leopold’s essays on conservation and agriculture—to request copies of the articles in booklet form to distribute to his 4-H conservationists. The magazine’s editors sent along 60 of the booklets, entitled “Wildlife Conservation on the Farm,” as a donation to the cause, and on the evening of September 7th, 1945, McNeel’s young conservationists gathered around to hear Leopold summarize in words what they had been striving for in their projects.<sup>47</sup>

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46. WI4HCC. The quote is from the 1943 file.

47. Wakelin McNeel to *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer*, Aug. 4, 1945, WI4HCC, 1945 file; F. B. Swingle to Wakelin McNeel, Aug. 8, 1945, WI4HCC, 1945 file. See also the program for the Eleventh Wisconsin 4-H Conservation Camp, WI4HCC, 1945 file.

As Leopold explained to the campers, conservation meant not following a set of rules laid out by government, but actively engaging with the community, both biotic and social. “Only he who has built a terrace, or planted a pine grove, or tried to raise a better crop of birds can appreciate how easy it is to fail; how futile it is to passively follow a recipe without understanding the mechanisms behind it.” At the root of this new thing Leopold called conservation, was “skill, ... a lively and vital curiosity about the workings of the biological engine” that was obtainable only through labor in and among the elements of that organic machine. “Real skill with the husbandry of land is born of curiosity and pride.... The 4-H boy who becomes curious about why red pines need more acid than white is closer to conservation than he who writes a prize essay on the dangers of timber famine.” Through conservation project work carried out on Wisconsin’s farms, McNeel hoped to connect curiosity and skill to create conservation. It was something that would happen as the result of manifold individual decisions guided by an ethical attitude towards the land and its inhabitants. It was both an individual task, which one undertook for sound individual reasons; but its true benefits would only be realized on a community scale. Wisconsin’s young people had good reason to be optimistic: there was evidence of this conservation conscience already peeking up along the fields of the state in the form of shrubs, trees, and windbreaks. This “dedication of private land to a community purpose” needed to happen on a large scale in order to make a difference, but the more people who practiced it, the more good it would do. The result would be “an undivided surplus, not payable in dollars, but rather in fertility, peace, comfort, in the sense of something alive and growing,” Leopold declared. “It pleases me that farmers, pinched rather than affluent in pocketbook, should do this new thing. It foreshadows the thing I call conservation.”<sup>48</sup>

The ultimate expression of the confluence of conservation and health in Wisconsin’s 4-H programs under McNeel’s leadership came at the close of World War II. In September of 1947 and 1948, on the grounds of the Northern Baptist Assembly in Green Lake, over sixty boys and girls gathered for four days to discuss

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48. Leopold, *The Farmer as a Conservationist*, see n. 27, pp. 3, 5.



subjects such as “nature enjoyment and health,” “wild life work for farm young people,” and “what can be done about conservation and health at home,” and to attend talks entitled “No Land, No Life,” and “You and Your Public Health Service.” During those years, in addition to sponsoring a conservation camp for the state’s most promising conservation project members, the 4-H club department held a health camp for 4-Hers with a strong interest in the health aspects of the club program. What is more, these camps met jointly, attending sessions together, participating in discussions, and listening to presentations that connected the practices of soil and wildlife preservation to the health of rural people and communities. For two consecutive years, artists, doctors, public health nurses, soil scientists, and conservation department representatives joined Wakelin McNeel and George W. McCullough in welcoming Wisconsin’s best young missionaries of the twin gospels of conservation and health to a weekend that put their pursuits into conversation.<sup>49</sup>

The health camps had a “twofold purpose” that echoed not only the 4-H club pledge, but the humanitarian agenda of Wisconsin’s 4-H conservation program. First, they aimed “For better health: To help us understand health problems for self and community, learning more of the ways of healthful living, learning more about health services which promote good health, and learning to recognize our share in establishing better health practices in our homes and communities.” Second, the camps aimed “For better living: To help us find freedom and joy in the out-of-doors by learning to know Nature’s creatures, catching glimpses of Nature’s ways; enlarging life by increasing our interest in things about us.”<sup>50</sup> These goals point to the ways in which conservation and health activities reinforced each other in ways that benefitted the rural community. The physical activities of conservation would improve boys’ and girls’ bodily health through exercise and labor. The intellectual and spiritual aspects of conservation work, its broadening of ethics to include the

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49. “First Wisconsin Health Camp,” September 1947, University of Wisconsin 4-H Club Department Annual Reports and Project Plans, 1914–1962, University Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Series 9/5/4 (henceforth cited as WI4HAR), Box 5, 1947 Annual Report; “Second Wisconsin Health Camp,” September 1948, WI4HAR, Box 5, 1948 Annual Report; WI4HCC.

50. “Second Wisconsin Health Camp,” see n. 49, p. 1.

land, and the sympathy it created with living things, would likewise improve young people's mental health and social adjustment by making them happier and more at peace in their environment. Finally, health was spoken of as something worthy of conservation itself, both for bodies and for landscapes; it was, as Leopold put it, the "foundation" upon which conservation work rested, and the outcome for which it aimed.<sup>51</sup> As the 1948 health camp program put it in verse,

The Health is gladsome soundness of the whole,  
That gives to all our present life its worth;  
Insuring to the Head, the Heart, the Hand  
A free unfettered highway to the goal.<sup>52</sup>

By the close of the Second World War, health had become, for Wisconsin's 4-H boys and girls, both the measure of conservation, and the means to its attainment.

### THE FARMER AS A CONSERVATIONIST

The shift in evaluating America's landscapes that occurred in the 1930s was illustrated nicely in a cartoon that appeared on the back cover of the conservation guide McNeel and McCullough assembled, and which Federal Cartridge printed and distributed to club members nationwide. In the left panel stood a farmer in a black coat and hat, accepting money from a man in a deerstalker cap, breeches, boots, and a hunting coat. Behind the pair, two other hunters and their dogs were lingering by the fenceposts and investigating the areas of brush and woodland that dotted the landscape beyond. "I have always found it paid to leave hedgerows and clumps of weeds as shelter for my feathered friends," the farmer was saying to his companion. "Yes," the hunter agreed, "it attracts sportsmen to your farm. We are glad to pay for the right to hunt." This "Good and Prudent Farmer" was a wise and thrifty man who practiced conservation. He knew that birds were a good

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51. Leopold, *The Farmer as a Conservationist*, see n. 27, p. 7.

52. "Second Wisconsin Health Camp," see n. 49, p. 5.

thing for a farm to have, and made sure to leave his fencerows and ditches a bit wild so that they might have places to nest. “This successful farmer’s advisor is no other than Nature,” the caption proclaimed, “and long experience has taught him that using bird life to combat bugs, worms and insects has resulted in saving funds which otherwise would have been spent as protective measures.” Paying heed to the wildlife that inhabited his domesticated landscape as well as to his livestock and crops was remunerative to him several times over. As a result, “Mr. Wise Farmer harvests a good crop of grain and dollars from the sale of agricultural products and the shooting rights sold to friendly and appreciative sportsmen.”

In the panel opposite, a different scene appeared. Orderly quadrilinear fields stretched out into the distance. Not a tree was in sight save for a few around the farmhouse. In the foreground, a young man was speaking excitedly to his father, while gesturing at the landscape before them. “Look, father,” he enthused. “Every acre clear, not a weed. We grow two blades where one grew before.” The stoop-shouldered old man beside him had a less sanguine response. “Yes,” he agreed, “every acre tilled—surplus of grain—no market. Our neighbor harvests a crop from sportsmen.” In his hand, he clutched a piece of paper which read, “Mortgage due, pay up!”<sup>53</sup>

While the Good and Prudent Farmer had cultivated a Leopoldian pattern in the landscape, a “mixture of wild and tame attributes” that would lead to health for both the land and its inhabitants, his neighbor had not been so wise. He had allowed his son to listen too much to the scientific experts who believed in increasing farm production above all else, and the farm was planted fencerow to fencerow, turned over entirely to the domesticated and expunged of the wild. As a result, he now had to pay for chemicals to deter bugs and other pests that birds and other wild creatures once kept in check for him. To top it off, he was not even reaping a profit on all his acres in cultivation, because he had a surplus which he could not sell. This was driving him into debt, and, as the letter in his hand indicated, he stood to lose his farm. The image was a warning to 4-H

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53. McCullough, “A Guide to Better Conservation for 4-H Club Boys and Girls,” see n. 39, back cover.

youth: do not be like this Once Wise Farmer's son.

This cartoon nicely captures some of the most important shifts in thinking that occurred during the 1930s concerning what modern agriculture should look like and how it should be practiced. It echoes a picture Leopold painted for his listeners at the 1945 conservation camp of what the ideal farm might look like under a regime of ethical conservation—a depiction that gives us a clear view of this new view of rural modernity. It was very much a middle landscape, neither completely regimented nor completely untamed. The pond had not been drained to make room for the plough, the stream had not been straightened for efficiency, the hedges and roadsides were neither unkempt nor pristine. On the farmhouse wall, the family displayed its soil analysis charts, which attested to the land's fertility. The fields and woodlots were a refuge for wildlife and people alike, a place for learning about the land as well as enjoying it. "The fields and pastures of this farm, like its sons and daughters, are a mixture of wild and tame attributes," he told the campers, "all built on a foundation of good health."<sup>54</sup>

It was this integration of the wild and tame, the natural and the cultural, that would form the basis for a more enduring agriculture. Diversity was important ecologically and socially, for it allowed a community—biological or otherwise—to adapt in the face of changes. The ecological and economic crises of the thirties had shown the need for flexibility in the biota and in society: as Leopold framed the issue, the versatility that derived from variation was an essential component of the capacity for self-renewal. The Dust Bowl, the cutover, and the susceptibility to the vagaries of nature they demonstrated served as warnings against the dangers of putting all of one's ecological eggs in one basket. A simple landscape was an incomplete landscape, and therefore a damaged and vulnerable one. For the sake of mind and body, heart and health, the integrity of the landscape needed to be preserved.<sup>55</sup>

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54. Leopold, *The Farmer as a Conservationist*, see n. 27, p. 7.

55. Aldo Leopold, "Wilderness," in *A Sand County Almanac* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1949), 274; Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," see n. 27, 166.

This vivid depiction of the future farm landscape stood in stark contrast to the rationalized farmstead envisioned by those who looked to technological modernization and rational management to guide rural reform. Yet, in spite of their differences, these two pictures were, for their promoters, both essentially modern: they simply resulted from different visions of modernity. Leopold made this contrast himself, imagining the owner of his ideal farm telling stories about “the mad decade when they taught economics in the local kindergarten, but the college president couldn’t tell a bluebird from a blue cohosh,” when “[e]verybody worried about getting his share; nobody worried about doing his bit.”<sup>56</sup> His hope was that this age of engineers would give way to an age of ecology, “an equal bent for the mechanisms of nature,” and a society that embraced a more capacious idea of ethics.<sup>57</sup> For Leopold and McNeel, conservation was fundamentally a progressive activity, part of the process of growth, learning, and enlightenment. Theirs was a future that saw an increasing alliance with, rather than separation from, the natural world. By having “youth and trees grow up together,” the community would also mature: in its relationship to nature, and in the interpersonal relationships of which it was composed. This was precisely how Leopold described his land ethic: an inevitable upshot of a more highly developed understanding of ecology and society. For 4-H, it constituted a new vision of rural modernity, one which the farmers of the future had an obligation to implement.<sup>58</sup>

### CONCLUSION: THE DIVERGENCE OF CONSERVATION AND HEALTH

Beginning in the 1930s and continuing into the 1940s and '50s, 4-H became one of the most prominent platforms for conservation’s critique of a production-focused view of rural modernization. As the nation reeled from the economic, environmental, and social dislocations of the Great Depression, ecologists and

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56. Leopold, “The Farmer as a Conservationist,” see n. 27, 175.

57. *Ibid.*, 164–165.

58. Wakelin McNeel, *Forestry Club Work* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-20, 1940); Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” in *A Sand County Almanac* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1949).

rural sociologists offered an alternative vision of the rural future, one which was in greater harmony with natural processes and the landscape's tendencies, and which would support agrarian democracy by involving farmers in planning land use through local participatory councils, facilitated by government agencies, and determined by the natural features of the land rather than by political boundaries. 4-H's conservation program thus ushered in a new view of rural modernity, one that placed ecological and social considerations at the center of its idea of improvement, placed the locus of development at the level of the community rather than the individual, and measured development through the health of the people, the soil, the plants, the animals, and the community.

As this chapter has focused largely on the Wisconsin context, it is important to ask to what extent Wisconsin's program to bring together conservation and health was representative of club work in other states, and nationwide. Clearly Wisconsin was special in that it had in Leopold and McNeel two leaders who embraced this ecological view of conservation and health, who were prolific writers and publicist, and who were known beyond the boundaries of their state. Leopold wrote actively for such popular national periodicals as *American Forests*; McNeel's radio show was syndicated nationally and won a Peabody award in 1942. Both were skilled writers, and saw themselves as missionaries for an ecological view of conservation whose stakes were moral as well as scientific and economic. In this sense, Wisconsin was unique.

However, the prominence of these two men meant that Wisconsin's conservation program was also highly influential. As one of the first states to begin holding conservation camps in cooperation with Charles L. Horn and George W. McCullough of Federal Cartridge, Wisconsin's 4-H conservation activities became a model for other states. McNeel helped to write the conservation booklets that Federal Cartridge distributed to 4-H'ers across the country, and his contact with Horn and McCullough was more extensive than other state club leaders'. It is clear from their correspondence that the clubs' sponsors relied on McNeel as an advisor and a collaborator in guiding and expanding the national 4-H conservation program; and, as McNeel in turn

drew heavily on Leopold and other Wisconsin specialists, it is safe to say that Federal Cartridge's conservation message was greatly shaped by Wisconsin ideas. McNeel even wrote to Leopold on one occasion to tell him that he had heard a speech by Horn in which "He quoted you so many times that you are truly responsible for the success of [his] talk."<sup>59</sup> McNeel and Leopold thus had the devoted ear of Federal Cartridge, and Wisconsin's program rode the company's money into states the nation over.

This influence is borne out by camp programs and conservation circulars that appeared in other states. Montana's 1949 conservation camp included health activities on the program, and counted extension health specialists and public health nurses among its attendees.<sup>60</sup> New York state adopted McNeel's slogan for its 4-H forestry program, hoping to have "boys and trees grow up together."<sup>61</sup> Mississippi's 4-H Forest Tree Planting Contest likewise touted its "young citizens—young pines" as "Mississippi's Investment for the Future." The state's conservation camps followed a similar program as Wisconsin's.<sup>62</sup> The Wisconsin model—for everything from junior forestry programs to the organization of the camps—clearly traveled far and wide.

But Wisconsin's story also helps us see the limits of this confluence of conservation and health during the 1930s and '40s, and the challenge of maintaining the connections between the two in the absence of strong leadership. Leopold met an untimely demise in 1948, and McNeel retired his post as state club leader in 1950. That year, he also stopped broadcasting as Ranger Mac. At the national level, the institution that had offered the strongest support for the holistic, communitarian planning espoused by rural sociologists, the

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59. Wakelin McNeel to Aldo Leopold, Aug. 12, 1940, WI4HCC, 1940 file.

60. "Montana 4-H Conservation Camp," see n. 39.

61. "A 4 Year Program in Forestry for 4-H Club Members in New York State," n.d., NYS4H, Box 121, Folder 1.

62. "Mississippi's First 4-H Conservation Camp," May 27, 1937, Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service Boys Club, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A88-29 (henceforth cited as MCES Boys Club), Box 1, 1937 Annual Report; "Fourth Annual State 4-H Conservation Camp Program," August 17–19, 1939, MCES Boys Club, Box 1, 1939 Annual Report; "Mississippi 4-H Club Forest Tree Planting Contest," 1945, MCES, Box 61, Forestry – Tree Planting folder.

Bureau of Agricultural Economics in the USDA, was dismantled in 1953, as congressional support for New Deal programs waned. That same year, M. L. Wilson left his position as director of extension work for the country. The leadership that had helped facilitate the integration of 4-H's conservation and health programs thus disappeared more quickly than it was built up. The links between conservation and health, so reliant on the narrative these men offered, became harder to discern in their absence.<sup>63</sup>

Of course, despite the loss of these leaders, conservation and health themselves both endured in the 4-H program, thanks to the legacy of their work: the bulletins they authored, the programs they instituted, the young people they trained. However, the tight connections between the two that were so apparent in the Wisconsin camp programs of the late 1940s began to fray in the aftermath of World War II, revealing the reasons why the union of conservation and health had been so difficult to achieve in the first place—why M. L. Wilson, writing in 1950, pleaded so strongly with his state extension leaders to work for an integrated health program, despite the forces of specialization that were continually working to fracture it.<sup>64</sup> The most powerful forces were institutional: despite rural sociology's appeal to government to align its programs to the lived experience of rural people, it remained true throughout this period that the organizations tasked with carrying out conservation and health programs were more distinct than they were united. Conservation was primarily the province of entities like the Soil Conservation Service, the Forest Service, state conservation departments, and other Interior and Agriculture agencies. Health remained the purview of medical professionals, whether in state boards of health, public health agencies, or welfare departments. These programs also tended to segregate along gender lines: conservation was largely a male domain, while health activities were gendered female. In states where 4-H club work was more divided by sex, conservation and health had fewer opportunities for convergence. Through the influence and leadership of figures like McNeel, Leopold,

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63. Gilbert, "Rural Sociology and Democratic Planning in the Third New Deal," see n. 44.

64. Wilson to State Extension Directors, Jan. 10, 1950, *Need for a Unified Extension Health Program*, see n. 38.



and Wilson, these groups could be brought together in common purpose, but when that guidance evaporated, their collaborations became fewer and farther between.

While the war itself did not foreclose the connections between 4-H's conservation and health programs, it ushered in a set of ideological and practical changes that hastened the eclipse of holistic thinking. This was particularly apparent in the case of 4-H's health activities, which became increasingly focused on bodily fitness and strength during the war, and the relationship of individual health to the national body. Nutrition guidelines and health contests dominated. The exigencies of wartime mobilization thus transformed club members' health from a community good into a patriotic duty, undertaken alongside food production for the war effort. Conservation, likewise, was increasingly articulated not as an ethical responsibility, as Leopold would have it, but as a requirement of good citizenship, one that could be engaged in by following USDA guidelines, and exercising thrift during a time of resource scarcity. In the 1940s, the Soil Conservation Service began cooperating with Extension on a set of 4-H soil conservation projects that involved teaching young people how to judge land according to the classifications the service had developed over the previous decade. Like 4-H health programs, conservation activities thus became subsumed under the judging regime whereby club members learned what constituted a representative or ideal standard, and worked to make their projects conform to it. This was a more universal notion, one that became uprooted from the local particularities that had guided conservation programs during the Depression. World War II thus introduced a narrower set of understandings of conservation and health, which contributed to their separation. In the postwar era, these activities would be incorporated into a new, universalizing view of development and rural modernity rooted in the nation, rather than the community, and applicable beyond the American context.<sup>65</sup>

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65. On the history of the land classification system see For examples of 4-H land-judging activities, see: Rex Campbell, *Learn to Conserve Our Soil in 4-H Clubs*, Bulletin 279 (Bozeman: Extension Service, Montana State College, December 1953); Rex Campbell, *Land Judging for Young People*, Bulletin 302 (Bozeman: Extension Service, Montana State College, May 1959).

## 4

## America's Grassroots Ambassadors: 4-H, Extension, and Postwar International Development

### INTRODUCTION: THE FOUR POINTS AND THE FOUR H'S

"I saw a new youth movement sweeping occupied Austria this summer," a magazine reporter informed rural Americans in 1950, "enlisting the minds and energies of boys and girls." Readers of *Country Gentleman* did not need to be alarmed, however. This was "Not a 'Hitler Jugend' ... with marching young huskies singing the glories of the Fuehrer," nor was it "a Russian youth union preaching government ownership and communal farming." These Austrian boys and girls were not a portent of global conflict this time around, because this youth movement "was as American as an ice-cream sundae. And it taught the principles of individual ownership, democracy and freedom of action." What was this youth movement that was spreading American ideas in an occupied nation? "[N]one other than our own 4-H transplanted to Austrian soil."<sup>1</sup>

The article, "4-H is Our Best Salesman Abroad," positioned club work as a natural bulwark against communism, a perfect weapon in the war of political and economic ideologies being waged on the world stage. Started under the Marshall Plan in the American sector of the country, 4-H clubs were spreading across the French, British, and Russian zones "like a prairie fire," carrying democratic processes and the rewards of private property in their wake. For Austrian youth, the project of raising a pig or a calf "instills a pride in individual ownership that makes them want to go on and have flocks and farms of their own.

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1. Phil Gustafson, "4-H is Our Best Salesman Abroad," *Country Gentleman* 120, no. 11 (Nov. 1950): 23, 67, p. 23.

Right then they are launched in a way of life directly opposite from Russian communal ownership.” In addition to enacting “the principles of free elections for the first time in their lives” through club meetings and governance, Austria’s 4-H boys and girls were learning “the principle of competition that makes the wheels go round in America.” As an agent of capitalist expansion, 4-H appeared to be just the thing.<sup>2</sup>

The article in *Country Gentleman* demonstrates how 4-H and extension work were repositioned in the years following World War II. As the nations of the globe reeled from the conflict, the problems of assuring the peace in an age of atomic warfare and potential annihilation had never seemed more intractable. The American solution was articulated most famously by President Harry S. Truman in his 1949 inaugural address. He laid out a four-point plan for maintaining world peace and fighting the specter of communism, while expanding democracy and raising global standards of living. “I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life,” the president proclaimed. “Our aim should be to help the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens.”<sup>3</sup> For the leaders of 4-H and the Extension Service, this was a familiar charge. In their attempts to modernize American farming and rural life through the application of science and technology, workers in the USDA Extension Service had been carrying out a domestic version of Truman’s “Point Four” for over three decades, and during World War II they had been working to anticipate the worldwide need for extension work after the end of the conflict. The president’s speech seemed to guarantee extension’s continued growth, and its expansion overseas. As the postwar era dawned, 4-H’s program for rural modernization was envisioned as a vehicle for expanding American influence, ensuring

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2. Gustafson, “4-H is Our Best Salesman Abroad,” see n. 1, pp. 23, 67.

3. President Harry S. Truman, Inaugural Address, 20 January 1949.

peace and prosperity, and rebuilding national economies that had been devastated by war.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter explores this crucial shift in the meaning and exercise of 4-H-style development after World War II by discussing the international aspects of 4-H's postwar programs. 4-H's model for rural development—formulated in the agricultural landscapes and communities of the United States in the first half of the 20th century—became a template for encouraging development internationally after the war. Through programs like the International Farm Youth Exchange, and by setting up clubs like those in Austria, 4-H exported extension methods, first to European countries ravaged by combat, and later to the “developing” nations that were becoming so critical to U.S. foreign policy in the Cold War era. By “lifting up” the parts of the world that lagged behind the West, 4-H's international programs could stimulate those countries' economies, creating new markets for American products and stemming the tide of international communism. As 4-H grew around the world, its administrators increasingly thought of it—and the Extension system more broadly—as the ultimate flexible technology, an institutional apparatus that was adaptable to any cultural, political, or geographical context, rural or otherwise.

The emergence of this universal idea of modernization grew up alongside the holistic, communitarian model for rural improvement discussed in chapter three, and was incorporated into 4-H club programs over the 1940s and '50s. During the Second World War and the years that followed, these two visions of the rural future coexisted, in both federal policy and in club work in particular, as individual- and family-focused programs joined the community planning efforts that were the New Deal's legacy. It was the intensification of the Cold War, in particular the federal government's need to delineate not just a rural development model,

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4. For an overview of extension work in the U.S., see: Gladys Baker, *The County Agent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); David B. Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900–1930* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979); W. H. Glover, *Farm and College: The College of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin – A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952); Roy V. Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer: The Rise of Agricultural Extension to 1914* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1970). Information on extension's global aspirations is from: *Conference Report on the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-Torn Countries* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1945); *Conference Report on Extension Experiences Around the World* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951).

but an *American* development model, that tipped the balance in favor of a universalizing vision of development that focused on the nation rather than the community. This coincided with a shift in thinking among agricultural experts within the USDA that signaled a move away from the institutional economics that had dominated the department throughout the 1930s and '40s, and toward a neoclassical framework that saw individual development within the institution of the family as the hallmark of agrarian democracy. Industrial capitalism, the object of rural reformers' sharpest critiques since the Progressive Era, grew increasingly central to extension's program. It was now imperative to set the American rural development model apart from the Soviet model of large-scale collectivization and mechanization, and the most obvious way to do so was to emphasize the role of the individual over that of the community. The dismantling of the USDA Bureau of Agricultural Economics in 1953, and M. L. Wilson's resignation as Director of Extension that same year, represented just some of the political fallout from this change in thinking. The 4-H and extension program that would burst forth on the national and international stages in the postwar era would be a much more far-reaching result, the effects of which would be felt around the world.

This chapter begins with an account of 4-H club work during the Second World War, showing how U.S. involvement in the conflict transformed not only American agriculture, but the vision of rural modernity extension work was attempting to enact through 4-H. Three important shifts took place. First, the farm family replaced the rural community as the fundamental unit of rural life and the locus of extension's modernization and reform program. At the same time, the economic growth of the nation as a whole became the dominant measure of modernization and development. Finally, the goal of extension work shifted from curtailing production to expanding markets for American farm products and other goods, both at home and around the world. These three loci—the family, the nation, and the market—first rose in prominence in club and extension work as a result of wartime conditions, as U.S. agricultural policy moved away from encouraging farmers to harmonize their activities with nature in order to promote better health for rural landscapes,

people, and communities, and instead toward increasing their production for the war effort. After the Allied victory, the Extension Service focused on maintaining wartime levels of production, while simultaneously developing new markets for agricultural products that could absorb the excess. These shifts—from the health of the rural community to the economic productivity of the family and the nation, and from practices of conservation and permanence toward expanding productivity and markets, signaled the advent of a new era in thinking about agriculture and rural reform. The postwar period saw the emergence of a belief in endless growth, made possible through an ever-expanding cycle of technological advances and market expansion. This would be a force not only for the democratization of rural people worldwide, but also for the expansion of capitalism—and the combatting of communism—in the increasingly strategic nations of the global south. World War II thus constituted an inflection point, but the conditions that led these three new loci to dominate were distinctly postwar phenomena.

The chapter then turns to two extension programs that illustrate how these changes took place on the ground. The story of the International Farm Youth Exchange, a 4-H rural youth exchange program inaugurated in 1947, shows how America's farm boys and girls were positioned as important diplomats of the postwar era, fostering peace and understanding through common labor, and carrying improved practices to other lands. While the program began as a means of aiding the European nations whose agriculture had been devastated by the war, it quickly became mobilized as a weapon in America's cold war arsenal, a means of spurring the agricultural modernization and economic development of third-world nations, expanding U.S. political influence overseas, and broadening the markets for American manufactured goods and agricultural products. Through a host-family exchange that identified farm families as the fundamental unit of rural life the world over, and a widening array of private sponsorship that saw in IFYE an opportunity for market expansion, 4-H exported not only the American model of rural development, but its economic and political systems as well.

At the same time that rural youth were crossing the oceans in furtherance of world peace and economic integration, extension specialists and USDA social scientists were traveling abroad to implement extension programs in the developing nations of the world. Following the cultural approach advocated by rural sociologists and agricultural economics in the BAE, these American experts collaborated with third world governments to implement the American model of extension work as a new form of community development for underdeveloped areas. As domestic extension work lost its community cast in the postwar era, international extension retained elements of this communitarian focus, in ways that would later influence the development of urban extension work at home.

### WORLD WAR II AND RURAL AMERICA

The conflict that erupted in Europe in the fall of 1939 not only transformed American agriculture, it paved the way for a new mode of thinking about rural life, and a new set of approaches to its improvement. These centered on the family, the nation, and the economy. As the previous chapter showed, communitarian thinking pervaded the ecological and sociological approaches to conservation and health activities during the Depression, and continuing on through the 1940s. While it did not cause the community to disappear, wartime needs introduced a new set of objectives and groups toward which individual club effort should be directed. These coexisted, sometimes uncomfortably, during the war, but both remained important throughout the conflict, and into the immediate postwar period. It was in the aftermath of the war that the family and the nation began to replace the community as the important scales of rural life, and that rural improvement began to be measured in terms of its contributions to national economic growth.

The emergence of the family farm rather than the community as the most important unit of rural life was solidified during the war. The rural family had become an increasing subject of analysis among sociologists during the 1930s, as totalitarianism swept across Europe, and rural thinkers became eager to promote

bulwarks against it. The notion that the community was more important than the individual began to take on a more sinister cast, and many sociologists saw the family as a better means for formulating an alternative social program for rural life. For a youth movement such as 4-H, the family was a means of differentiating their rural development activities from those of the Hitler Jugend and other fascist and communist youth movements that had emerged during the 1920s and '30s. While the Nazis sought to remove children from the protection of the family and raise them under a state program of institutionalized physical activity, heavy labor, and discipline, 4-H sought to forge stronger bonds among family members, strengthening the farm enterprise in the process. The war solidified this move toward the family, and club documents increasingly spoke not of 4-H club members, but of 4-H families. "There is no such thing as just one member of a family belonging to a 4-H club," one pamphlet insisted. "If one is an active member, all are in it, and you have a 4-H family." As the family became the primary focus of 4-H club work, the community faded into the background.<sup>5</sup>

When the U.S. entered the war in 1941, the nation became the most important social grouping, and the focus of all individual effort. Mobilization for victory had a stimulating effect of American agriculture, as on the rest of the economy. Although farm prices rose slowly at the beginning of the conflict in Europe, by 1941 they had begun to rise sharply. In order to fully mobilize for war, the United States had essentially needed to turn its Depression-Era farm policy on its head. After nearly a decade of convincing farmers to lower their output in order to stabilize prices, the government began encouraging them to produce more. It did so by relaxing the output limits that had obtained during the 1930s, and introducing subsidies to help stimulate

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5. On these shifts in thinking among rural reformers and social scientists during and after the war, see Todd Dresser, "Nightmares of Rural Life: Fearing the Future in the Transition from Country Life to the Family Farm, 1890–1960" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2011), chs. 5–7. For a document expressing this new family-farm focus, see *Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940). On the Hitler Youth, see Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Susan Campbell Bartoletti, *Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow* (New York: Scholastic, 2005). For examples of 4-H's increasing focus on the family, see "4-H is a Family Affair," Publication 344(20M), December 1956, Mack A. Rowzee Collection, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A86-54 (henceforth cited as Rowzee Collection), Box 9; T. A. Erickson, "Parents' Opportunities in 4-H Club Work," 1954, Rowzee Collection, Box 9. The quote is from the latter, p. 1.



production.<sup>6</sup> Club members had already proven their usefulness as the ground troops of the home front during World War I, and they were once again called into service to increase both the on-farm production of critical wartime needs, and the at-home conservation of scarce goods. In April of 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued what would become an annual appeal to 4-H club members across the nation during a period in the spring designated National 4-H Mobilization Week. “Let your head, heart, hands and health truly be dedicated to your country, which needs them now as never before.” As a Mississippi 4-H poster proclaimed, club work during wartime asked boys and girls “to be strong and healthy to produce and save and serve” by fully pledging themselves to their country’s aid. The emphasis was squarely on the individual club member, and his or her contributions to the nation as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

The nation also came to dominate 4-H’s administration, as the federal 4-H organization worked to coordinate and regulate activities at the state and local levels. Since the number and variety of 4-H projects had multiplied in the years since the First World War, this time around the Extension Service restricted club members’ enrollment to designated “victory projects” that would directly support the war effort. These included crop and livestock production projects, foods and nutrition, home gardening, clothing, and conservation. Health projects also fell under this rubric, and were given a bit of a makeover, emphasizing daily health practices that linked individual bodily health to the nation’s efficient prosecuting of the war. “America needs us strong,” a 1944 health circular proclaimed, encouraging boys and girls to keep their bodies fit, efficient, and free of disease.<sup>8</sup> Health returned to being a bodily phenomenon, expressed not in relationships or community well-being, but in physical capabilities and efficiencies that would aid the war effort. A new

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6. On the transition to wartime, and World War II farm policy, see Murray R. Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790–1950* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), esp. pp. 401–402, 420–430, and chapter 17.

7. Franklin M. Reck, *The 4-H Story: A History of 4-H Club Work* (Ames: Iowa State College Press, 1951), p. 271; “4-H Victory Volunteer,” November 1942, Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service Cooperative Extension Service, 1925–1963, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A97-14 (henceforth cited as MCES), Box 57.

8. *I Pledge My Health* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4-H 38, 1944), p. 2.

line of safety projects also joined the ranks, promoting accident and fire prevention at home and on the farm. Club members combed their barns and homesteads for fire hazards that could result in property loss, and worked to keep their machinery in good working order so as to avoid accidents that might slow productivity, injure family members, or otherwise hamper production. Just as project work was narrowed to efforts in direct aid of the emergency, 4-H festivities were suspended, lending urgency and importance to club members' work. For four years, club members ceased to gather in Washington, D.C. for National Club Camp, and many state and local gatherings were scaled back or put on hiatus. This led to a sense of sacrifice that helped club members see the primacy of the war effort in every facet of life. In victory project work, the links between the individual boy or girl and the U.S.A. were consistently the main emphasis.<sup>9</sup>

The federal government also introduced special initiatives to drum up support and enthusiasm among club members by helping them see how their individual efforts furthered national goals, definted increasingly in terms of the economic activities of production and consumption. The Extension Service jumped into action with the "Feed a Fighter" campaign, which allowed club members to relate their individual food production activities to soldiers' stomachs on the receiving end. 4-H boys and girls bought and sold war bonds, and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Allied cause, as well as for the Red Cross and the U.S.O. Even more popular was the 4-H Liberty ship program, an arrangement between the Extension Service and the Maritime Commission whereby the club members of a state who raised enough in government bonds would earn the right to name one of the United States' seagoing cargo carriers. This sparked such enthusiasm—and raised so many millions of dollars—that by war's end a total of 40 Liberty ships bore the names of 4-H and extension leaders from across the country, including Asbury F. Lever and Hoke Smith

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9. See, for example: *Let's Do Something About Safety – Wisconsin 4H Safety Program* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-41, 1944); *Let's Talk About Safety – Wisconsin 4H Radio Speaking Program* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension, Circular 4H-42, 1944); Gladys Ward, "Guard Your Home From Three Black Witches," 1949, New York State College of Agriculture Extension Service 4-H Club Records, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #21-24-692 (henceforth cited as NYS4H), Box 115, Health and Safety - 1949 folder.

of the Smith-Lever Act, “father of Wisconsin 4-H” Ransom Asa Moore, and Country Life Commission member Kenyon Butterfield. Through the Liberty ship campaign, the agrarian figureheads sailed overseas, perhaps for the first, but hardly the last, time.<sup>10</sup>

The economic activities of club members extended into the labor market as well. U.S. entry into the war precipitated a farm labor shortage, as able-bodied men joined the armed forces and were shipped overseas, and as men and women flocked to wage jobs in the burgeoning defense industries in towns and cities. At the outset of the European conflict, labor had remained plentiful in most rural areas: many Americans were still out of work due to the Depression, and idle farmhands mostly took war industry jobs. But when the U.S. began sending troops to Europe and the Pacific, the situation changed, and labor quickly became scarce.<sup>11</sup> 4-H club members were encouraged to step in and help close the labor gap by taking jobs as hired hands on farms. These “victory farm volunteers” could work doubly for the cause by turning their wages into war bonds. In Big Horn County, Montana in 1943, 475 boys and girls between the ages of eight and sixteen worked a total of 224,005 hours in the fields, making \$24,979.15 dollars, with which they bought \$7,286 in government bonds. More than half of these children were also growing their own victory gardens, which were producing \$15,922 in vegetables. Despite these valiant efforts, the wartime labor shortage was so acute that youth alone could hardly close the gap. In the wheat- and sugar-beet-growing sections of Montana, where migrant labor was increasingly a part of the state’s agricultural economy, the extension service arranged for outside groups to pick up the slack by turning wartime conditions to the state’s advantage. In 1942, Japanese-Americans interned at the Hart Mountain camp just over the border in Wyoming were brought in to Big Horn County to harvest the sugar beet crop. The following year, the Holly Sugar Corporation arranged for nearly 500 workers to be imported, including 100 Mexican nationals, 100 Japanese-American

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10. Reck, see n. 7, pp. 271–274. New York’s 4-H club youth attempted to sponsor the *Carl E. Ladd*, but were unsuccessful; see NYS4H, Box 118, Folders 22 and 23.

11. Benedict, see n. 6, p. 400.

internees, 130 “Negroes,” and 150 Mexican-Americans. By 1944, the sugar-beet harvest roster included German prisoners of war, and the Montana Extension Service was printing instructional bulletins on proper sugar beet harvesting technique in English, Spanish, and German. The labor shortage also contributed to the mechanization of agriculture in many sections of the country, particularly where there were simply not enough bodies to carry out all the work of the harvest. In 1942, the Montana Extension Service facilitated not only the importation of Japanese-American internees, but also mechanical sugar beet toppers. In 1944, 45 combines were brought in from out-of-state to facilitate the wheat harvest. However, the wartime rationing of gasoline, and shortages of rubber and metal meant that such mechanization was limited during the conflict. The large-scale mechanization of much of American agriculture thus took place not during World War II, but in its aftermath, when rationing ceased, and wartime industry was turned toward manufacturing more products for peacetime purposes. It was then that farmers who had first encountered these new implements during the war had the means and opportunity to invest in it long-term.<sup>12</sup>

4-H labor activities point to how rapidly American farmers reversed their conservationist policies during the war to produce ever larger harvests, as well as to the emergence of a new way of thinking about agricultural growth. Officials within the USDA began planning for the postwar transition almost as soon as the nation entered the fray. The department’s main concern was how to prevent the sudden drop in prices that had occurred after the First World War, and how to avert a similar agricultural depression. USDA officials knew that it would be difficult, after the sudden ramping up of farm production in the wake of the 1930s, to step production back down again quickly enough to avoid economic turmoil. Their solution was thus not to try to restrain production in the transition to peace, but rather to ensure the existence of sufficient markets to absorb

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12. George W. Gustafson, “Narrative Report, Big Horn County Extension Service,” 1942, Montana Extension Service Records, 1913–1970, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, Accession 00021 (henceforth cited as MTER), Box 2, Folder 37; George W. Gustafson, “Narrative Report, Big Horn County Extension Service,” 1943, MTER, Box 2, Folder 38; George W. Gustafson, “Narrative Report, Big Horn County Extension Service,” 1944, MTER, Box 3, Folder 1; George W. Gustafson and A. L. Johnson, “Narrative Report, Big Horn County Extension Service,” 1945, MTER, Box 3, Folder 2.

the postwar surplus, as well as to support America's increased farm output into the future. This proved quite easy in the initial postwar period, as European agriculture had been devastated by the war, and many nations were already relying on the United States for much of their food. The U.S. government also worked actively to develop new markets for American goods—agricultural and otherwise—through the economic cooperation programs of the Marshall Plan. In conjunction with the State Department, the Extension Service sent specialists abroad to assist the war-torn nations in rebuilding their agricultural sectors. International bodies also presided over postwar farm planning: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the fledgling United Nations was created in 1945, and had objectives that were perfectly aligned with the United States' increasing interest in cultivating international markets, including, "raising levels of nutrition and standards of living of the peoples... securing improvements in the efficiency of the production and distribution of all food and agricultural products, bettering the condition of rural populations, and thus contributing towards an expanding world economy." Expansion, growth, and ever-greater production, supported by enlarging markets and higher standards of living, became in the postwar period the predominant way of thinking about agriculture. Rural development thus became increasingly tied to national economic growth, and that growth was seen as limitless.<sup>13</sup>

For 4-H clubs, the end of the war was marked by new official support and expansion. Enrollment held relatively steady, partly due to the fact that wartime support was not withdrawn as it had been during the First World War. New sources of funding appeared as well. In 1945, Congress passed the Bankhead-Flanagan Act, which made more federal money available for cooperative extension work. In 1949, the National 4-H Club Foundation was established too coordinate 4-H's expanding private fundraising needs on a national level. The foundation joined the National Committee on Boys' and Girls' Club Work as a partner

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13. On postwar farm policy and planning, see: Benedict, see n. 6, pp. 455–462; the quote is from p. 456; David B Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 229–232. Information on extension's activities during this time is also from Extension Service General Correspondence, 1947–1970, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Record Group 33 (Records of the Federal Extension Service) (henceforth cited as ESGC).

organization devoted to helping 4-H maintain high levels of corporate support, as well as to lobby on 4-H's behalf in Washington. Two years later, the foundation purchased what had been Chevy Chase Junior College in Maryland as a site for a new National 4-H Club Center, where the organization's fundraising activities were located, and which served as a location for conferences, leadership development, and other 4-H club and professional extension gatherings. Finally, as in World War I, 4-H emerged from the conflict with a higher public profile, largely due to its visibility in helping out on the home front. Large colorful posters—sponsored by thread manufacturer Coats & Clark—appeared in shop windows across the country to promote National 4-H Club Week, which was rendered highly visible in the wake of its incarnation as 4-H Mobilization Week during the war. In 1952, when the U.S. Postal Service issued a 3¢ stamp honoring club work, 4-H appeared to have been firmly absorbed into the fabric of the nation's consciousness.<sup>14</sup>

The shifts in 4-H club work toward the family, the nation, and the market that emerged during World War II were made clear in a set of “guideposts” that a group of state and federal club leaders authored at the request of Extension Director M. L. Wilson. The guideposts were meant to give direction to 4-H club programs in the postwar period, and, taken together, they point to the increasing focus on the individual and his or her relationship to the nation as a whole that dominated club work during the war. In addition to reiterating such wartime aims as “building health for a strong America” and “producing food and fiber for home and market,” the guideposts included such new charges as “learning to live in a changing world,” “choosing a way to earn a living,” and “serving as citizens in maintaining world peace.” No longer was it a given that 4-H members would continue on as farm men and women, or that the democracy they practiced in their clubs and homes would be secure. Rather, they would need to continually work to safeguard it, and their way of life, by “creating better homes for better living.” This happened not so much at the level of the community or the region, but within the family unit itself, which was emerging as the dominant institution of rural policy

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14. Reck, see n. 7, pp. 287–288.

by the end of the 1940s. The family was a bulwark against communism, an island of peace in a troubling and turbulent world. In the postwar period, it was not the rural community that would maintain agrarian democracy, but the increasingly isolated middle-class, upwardly-mobile rural family, producing commercial products for sale on the market, and consuming the products of an ever-expanding American economy. Whereas in the Depression, the connections between club, community, and country depicted in the 4-H pledge came to the fore, after the war, the motto was “Today’s Home Builds Tomorrow’s World.”<sup>15</sup>

#### AMERICA’S GRASSROOTS AMBASSADORS: THE INTERNATIONAL FARM YOUTH EXCHANGE

To build the world of tomorrow, 4-H club members were mobilized in the postwar years to help contribute to peace, understanding, and the reconstruction of agriculture in the war-torn nations. At the federal level, 4-H began forging ties with rural youth organizations in Europe, and helping individual clubs across the oceans get to know one another through “Pen Pal” programs. These proved enormously popular, and the extension office in Washington was inundated with requests from 4-H clubs around the U.S. asking for the addresses of clubs and clubs members with which they might correspond. Local clubs organized to send CARE packages to European villages, raised money for Heifer International to help rural young people get on their feet by acquiring livestock, and held “international nights” to foster understanding of other countries and their cultures and customs. Club members, leaders, and administrators alike showed a strong interest in international affairs and learning about international issues after the war.<sup>16</sup>

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15. On the guideposts, see: Reck, see n. 7, p. 275; “Some Wartime Guideposts for 1945 4-H Club Programs,” 1945, MCES, Box 58, “Guideposts” folder; Albert Hoefer et al., “Annual Report of 4-H Club Work for New York State,” 1946, NYS4H, Box 112, esp. p. 20.

16. For information on local and federal efforts at international outreach, see *General Correspondence, 1947–1970* (National Archives and Records Administration RG 33 (Records of the Federal Extension Service), n.d.), esp. Boxes 82 and 83. For more on international activities in club programs, see: *World Atlas of 4-H and Other Principal Rural Youth Educational Programs* (Washington, DC: National 4-H Club Foundation, 1963) and Marilyn Wessel and Kathleen Flom, *Begin with a 4-H International Night: Colorful “How-To” Ideas for an Added Dimension in your County 4-H Program* (Washington, DC: National 4-H Club Foundation, undated (ca. 1960s)). International 4-H Programs, Volume II, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Record Group 33 (Records of the Federal Extension Service) (henceforth cited as I4H II), items 28 and 29. See also: *Passport to International*

Though 4-H was gaining an international dimension in these small ways, the most elaborate and high-profile of 4-H's new postwar programs was the International Farm Youth Exchange, affectionately known as IFYE (pronounced "iffy"—the nickname for both the program and its participants). IFYE was originally dreamt up in 1946 by a group of Cornell undergraduates who felt that America's rural young people had an important part to play in preventing future global conflict. They envisioned a goodwill exchange, in which farm youth would travel to another country to live and work with a host family, thus fostering a grassroots understanding between individuals from different nations, while at the same time improving agriculture through the sharing of knowledge and labor. They brought their ideas to the New York State 4-H office, which floated the idea to officials in the Departments of Agriculture and State, who in turn invited the Cornellians and the state club leader to Washington to hash out the details. In 1947, the first European young people made a small tour of U.S. agriculture, and by 1948 a two-way program was up and running. During that first summer, 17 American youth, all from different states, traveled to 7 countries in Europe, and 45 European young people came to the U.S. in return.<sup>17</sup>

From its beginnings in the late 1940s, to its transformation into the International Four-H Youth Exchange in 1974, the International Farm Youth Exchange reflected the goals of and challenges to American rural development efforts on the world stage. Initially conceived of as a cultural exchange, aimed at fostering international understanding through travel and interpersonal contact, and an assistance program, focused on rebuilding the agricultural economies of war-torn nations in Europe and the Pacific, IFYE soon became

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*Understanding: Your Commitment* (Washington, DC: National 4-H Club Foundation, ca. 1960). Records of the International 4-H Exchange Program, 1955–1999, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Record Group 33 (Records of the Federal Extension Service), ARC ID 2133236 P, Entry 20 (henceforth cited as IFYE Records), Box 1, Folder "IFYE News." This entire section owes much to research in the following collections: IFYE Records; I4H II; "International Farm Youth Exchange Apps., 1949–1969," n.d., NYS4H, Box 132; Records relating to International Agricultural Training Programs, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, RG 33, ARC ID 2663446 P, Entry 30 (henceforth cited as IATP).

17. Information on the origins of IFYE is from: *Interview with Richard and May Lou Tenney* (Brooktondale, NY, 2010); *Interview with Bernard L. Stanton* (Ithaca, NY, 2010). See also: Cornell University 4-H Club Minutes, 1938–1952, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #37-6-2084 (henceforth cited as CU4H); Roy E. Hranicky and Lois Belle White, *The Five H's: Head, Heart, Hand, and Health in Holland* (1950).



incorporated in to a broader American mission to actively develop the economically “backward” nations of the third world. This transition, which happened over the course of the 1950s and ’60s, illustrates how the tripartite target of family, nation, and market increasingly dominated the activities of international 4-H programs. As the Cold War deepened, the United States became concerned less with reconstructing farming in the Euro-American world, and more with stimulating economic growth in developing countries by modernizing their agricultural sectors along capitalist, industrial, commodity-production lines. This new definition of an American model of development was still centered on fomenting democracy; but, as the *Country Gentleman* article indicated, it was equally interested in spreading capitalism as the primary means of enabling democratic governance.

By tracing IFYE’s growth from the late 1940s to the early 1970s—how and where it was conducted, what its aims were, who participated, and who paid for it—I will argue that what began as a humanitarian and cultural mission took an increasingly active role in global economic development along capitalist, industrial, commodity-production lines. Helping to catalyze this shift were emerging theories of economic growth—particularly the rise of modernization theory in economics—and changes in how the program was funded and organized. Over more than two decades, IFYE moved gradually from broad public financing and generous private foundation support to specific, targeted corporate funding, donated by companies with vested interests in a particular type of agricultural development—namely, that modeled on the progress of farming in the United States. Encouraging commodity production in the “less developed” nations of the world became a key underlying motive of IFYE’s work abroad, and while the program continued to advertise itself as primarily a cultural exchange, its funding sources and participants paint a more complicated picture, one tied increasingly to the United States’ ideological position in the Cold War. As the firms sponsoring IFYE sought to develop customers and markets alongside agricultural production and democracy, the Extension Service was expanding its technical training programs for foreign visitors, and playing an active role

in development around the world.<sup>18</sup>

#### TODAY'S HOME BUILDS TOMORROW'S WORLD

The growing emphasis on the farm family, and its importance in national and world affairs, was apparent in IFYE's organization from the start. Like other programs interested in fostering peace and understanding through travel and interpersonal contact, IFYE's form of agrarian diplomacy was centered on the home. In a typical exchange, an IFYE would stay on a few farms in different locations for several weeks at a stretch, so as to get a flavor for the country as a whole, while also experiencing life at the level of the home. This "homestay" model, now the standard practice in international study and exchange, was developed in the 1930s by Donald Watt, the originator of the Experiment in International Living. After first attempting to conduct his "experiment" on a camp basis, Watt had discovered that bringing together youth of several nationalities in a group setting led young people to form national cliques, rather than get to know each other one-on-one. Ironically, this tendency toward group behavior often led to international antagonisms, rather than the mutual interest and understanding the Experiment sought to foster. Watt decided that individual interactions were the only way of surmounting this problem, and achieving true empathy between people of different backgrounds. He thus settled on the family, rather than the even-aged group, as a preferable means of conducting the Experiment, and the homestay as the best model for achieving cross-cultural empathy.<sup>19</sup>

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18. This chapter relies upon archival grant and report materials relating to the Ford Foundation's support of IFYE, including: Grant No. 51-290, Ford Foundation Archives, New York, R-0515 (henceforth cited as FF51-290); Grant No. 52-80, Ford Foundation Archives, New York, R-0515 (henceforth cited as FF52-80); Grant No. 53-128, Ford Foundation Archives, New York, R-0517 (henceforth cited as FF53-138); Grant No. 53-200, Ford Foundation Archives, New York, R-0515 (henceforth cited as FF53-200); Grant No. 54-179, Ford Foundation Archives, New York, R-0517 (henceforth cited as FF54-179); Grant No. 55-20, Ford Foundation Archives, New York, R-0518 and R-0519 (henceforth cited as FF55-20); Grant No. 55-37, Foreign Office File, Ford Foundation Archives, New York, R-3136 and R-3137 (henceforth cited as FF55-37); Grant No. 58-81, Ford Foundation Archives, New York, R-0523 (henceforth cited as FF58-81); Grant No. 59-32, Ford Foundation Archives, New York, R-0523 (henceforth cited as FF59-32).

19. The Experiment proved quite important to future exchange programs, including the Peace Corps. Sargent Shriver, the first director of the Peace Corps and its primary architect, participated in the Experiment while a young man in the 1930s. William Peters, *Passport to Friendship: The Story of the Experiment in International Living* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957). The Experiment was also a model for 4-H's international programs, and Watt was in touch with IFYE's administrators in Washington;

In IFYE, as in the Experiment, international understanding began in the home—indeed, within the family itself. Only there might a traveler gain a full picture of what it meant to be a citizen of that nation on a day-to-day basis—and only there, at the level of the home, would empathy flourish. As Paul Corwith, 1954 delegate from New York State to Brazil, mused in his IFYE application, “[b]y living with the family of another country one would be at the neuculus [*sic*] of the civilization of that nation. In the home you can’t help knowing the joys and sorrows and problems that family faces.”<sup>20</sup> The camaraderie and understanding that resulted from family interactions would translate into improved relations between nations. IFYE materials were insistent on the importance of the family unit to international understanding. “Since the family is the basis of all society,” one promotional brochure stated, IFYE “could best make a contribution to world peace by helping to further an understanding between rural people at the family level.”<sup>21</sup>

IFYE was initially conceived of as a cultural exchange, a two-way learning experience in which rural young people, usually of college age, traveled to another country for three to six months to “learn another way of life by living it.”<sup>22</sup> The aims of the program were twofold: for young people from different countries to both learn about life in another nation—in particular the problems faced by its farmers—and for them to share ideas and practices directed toward improving agriculture and rural living. In a typical exchange, an IFYE would stay on a few farms in different locations for several weeks at a stretch, so as to get a flavor for the country as a whole, while also experiencing life at the level of the home. Between homestays, IFYEs would tour the countryside, observe 4-H schools or other rural organizations, and have a chance to meet up with one another to share their experiences and have the comfort of a taste of home—and, for those staying

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see: Donald Watt Jr. to Warren E. Schmidt, May 2, 1951, ESGC, Box 84.

20. “International Farm Youth Exchange Apps., 1949–1969,” see n. 16.

21. *IFYE: A Program for Developing International Understanding* (1955).

22. This phrase was one of IFYE’s central taglines, appearing in brochures such as *ibid.* and *IFYE: International Farm Youth Exchange* (1962). IFYE Records, Box 1, Folder “IFYE Program Management – Festival/Budget Info.”

in the more remote areas, an opportunity to speak English. The importance of the individual farm family, and its relationship to the nation as a whole, were thus built into the exchange program from the start.<sup>23</sup>

The connections IFYEs forged with their host families were in most cases very strong. The exchange was an intense experience, especially when it involved the physical strain of long hours of hard labor on top of the mental strain of a foreign language, and the emotional strain of being far from home in a strange place among strange people. This intensity, coupled with the necessity of forming bonds in an isolating environment, tended to produce deep and lasting—often lifelong—friendships. “Ask any IFYE about getting acquainted on a new farm and I think he will tell you that the first week is always the most difficult,” Joann Campbell wrote in a article in the *Dayton Daily News* in September of 1952, describing the usual process of getting settled. “With the passing of those first few days go the anxiety and tension created by strange surroundings and unfamiliar faces. ...Now that each has unconsciously established a position in the eyes of the other, we can begin to cultivate and enjoy our new friendship.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the normally stolid patriarch of Campbell’s first Finnish host family, owner of a rather poor, subsistence farm near the Russian border where Joann worked her hands to the bone, was so moved by her stay that he shed ample tears at her departure. He was not the only one to be moved: Joann cried herself. Despite the formidable language barrier, these people had come to be like family.

But why was this sort of intimate “understanding between rural people” so important to postwar diplomacy? And what did rural youth in particular have to contribute to the process of peace? Implicit in the IFYE program was the notion that there was something special and universal about the vocation of farming, a set of outlooks, motivations, attitudes, and values shared by rural people everywhere. Getting a living from

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23. *Interview with Richard and May Lou Tenney*, see n. 17; Hranicky and White, see n. 17; Joann Campbell Jones, *Letters from Finland: An Ohio Girl's Experiences as a Delegate of the International Farm Youth Exchange*, ed. Paul F. Erwin (Cincinnati, OH: Creative Writers & Publishers, Inc., 1967); Lois Linse Gleiter Oral history interview, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Sound/Tape 586A (henceforth cited as GleiterOH); Charles E. Palm Papers, 1956–1986, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #21-2-1478 (henceforth cited as Palm Papers).

24. Jones, *Letters from Finland*, see n. 23, pp. 247–249.

the land was fundamentally the same process, whether through subsistence farming or commercial agriculture, in Peoria or the Philippines. One pamphlet enumerated these supposed “mutual interests” of farmers the world over, including “home and family, love of the soil, pride in livestock, and concern for weather to favor the crops.” These shared goals offered a built-in basis for cooperation, a ready-made common goal that would allow IFYEs to build “a bridge of understanding.”<sup>25</sup> This would happen through another central aspect of rural life: work. As Joann Campbell explained to her hometown followers in Ohio:

An IFYE does not go to a new home just to pass the time. There is work to be done. This means more than just carrying on his share of the everyday activities. There are often barriers of misunderstanding and doubt, which need to be erased before he can establish himself as a member and friend of the family. When this is accomplished the door is then opened for the growth of an exciting and meaningful friendship.<sup>26</sup>

The family was thus important to IFYE’s mission for another reason: as the fundamental unit of rural life, it was the place where people came together in common purpose for the fundamental goals of subsistence. By incorporating a foreign youth into the family, and having that young person labor alongside his newfound kin, their shared interests would come to the fore, and cultural differences would fade into the background. The result would be a sort of international relations by synecdoche, built on a foundation of work, in which the farmers of the world would come together for peace and prosperity. Rural youth could thus be the key diplomats of the postwar era, upon whose labor rested the success of international understanding. This new role for 4-H club members on the world stage was expressed succinctly in the nickname IFYEs earned: “America’s grassroots ambassadors.”<sup>27</sup>

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IFYE’s administrators expressed this belief in the fundamental kinship of farm folk everywhere in the

25. *IFYE: A Program for Developing International Understanding*, see n. 21.

26. Jones, *Letters from Finland*, see n. 23, pp. 247–249.

27. This was another central tagline for the program, appearing all over promotional materials and in media coverage of IFYE. See, for example, Hranicky and White, see n. 17, p. 98; *About Our Youngest Ambassadors* (Grocery Manufacturers of America, ca. 1954). IFYE Records, Box 1, Folder “IFYE News.”

ways they selected the 4-H club youth who traveled overseas as delegates. The chief qualification these young people possessed to become “grassroots ambassadors”—evident in their applications to the state 4-H office—was their lifelong experience of everyday work in the fields, barns, and homes of rural America. Applicants were asked to describe their farm background in detail, including the size and products of the farms on which they had worked and been raised, down to each acre of crops and head of livestock. And experience they had in abundance: all of the IFYEs chosen to represent New York State between 1949 and 1962 had spent at least 17 years of their lives on farms—most their whole lives—and all had worked on many different facets of agriculture as a result of their upbringings. Many were building their own dairy herds, poultry flocks, or crop and gardening enterprises, and some were already gainfully employed as partners in a family farming operation, or as nurses, 4-H club agents, or soil conservationists. The girls had at least as much expertise as the boys, for, in addition to understanding the operation of the farm, they had extensive training in homemaking. They could drive tractors and trucks, tend to livestock, and till the soil, as well as prepare and preserve food, decorate the home, make the household purchases, and sew and mend clothing. Linda Lee Giles, 1962 delegate from New York State to Israel, had spent her 20 years doing “everything [on her family’s diversely planted 425-acre farm] but plow[ing].” As 4-H’ers, Giles and others had imbibed government advice on these matters; already in their young lives they were turning it to account. They could thus forge partnerships with other rural people through labor, while also offering a perspective on the means by which other countries’ farming might be improved.<sup>28</sup>

This interest in using young people as both participants in and evaluators of foreign farm practices is also evident in how they matched delegates and hosts. Though applicants indicated on their forms where in the world they would most like to go, they rarely ended up getting any of their choices. The main factors in determining where delegates would travel seem to have been the phases of farming in which they were most

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28. “International Farm Youth Exchange Apps., 1949–1969,” see n. 16.

interested or experienced—and, to a lesser extent, language skills, though foreign language facility was rare among applicants. Most had never traveled much further than a few hundred miles from their birthplace, and few had any experience whatsoever with international travel. To help correct this deficit—and to equip delegates with the basic necessary skills to get along in a foreign land—IFYEs received something of a crash-course immediately prior to their travels, a condensed and intensive training on the customs, history, and language of the country to which they would be traveling, along with some general information about the United States to help them answer questions from people abroad. But this was rudimentary preparation to be sure, and in general IFYEs did most of their learning once they had arrived at their host farm. By making farm experience central to the matching process, IFYE’s administrators demonstrated their belief that this grounded form of expertise would help promote the improvement of farming and rural life around the world.<sup>29</sup>

But, as grassroots experts, IFYE delegates’ knowledge qualified them to not only participate in but also to pass judgment on the farming they encountered overseas. Their applications indicate that they knew they might be called upon not only to spread peace and understanding through common purpose, but also to share American techniques where they felt improvement was needed. “I believe that by actually spending a summer living, working and playing with European farm families, I could best get to know these people, their problems and meet and share these problems as they confront the farmer there,” wrote Rodney Sellen, a 1949 delegate from New York State to Sweden, in his IFYE application essay. “Living with them would give me a chance to compare their problems with ours, show them, if possible, how we try to solve similar problems, or to learn how they do the job better than we.”<sup>30</sup> Sellen’s observation hints at a thorny point in the IFYE mission: was it exchangees’ job simply to help and observe, or to act as agents of change, either in the

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29. “International Farm Youth Exchange Apps., 1949–1969,” see n. 16; *Interview with Richard and May Lou Tenney*, see n. 17.

30. “International Farm Youth Exchange Apps., 1949–1969,” see n. 16.

U.S. or elsewhere? In other words, was their role simply to improve understanding, or to improve agriculture as well?

Campbell mused on the difficult situation this placed her in when penning an article for the Dayton paper. "I couldn't teach these people an easier way to stack their oats or a quicker way to dig potatoes," she wrote, even though at other moments she had written home about the changes she would make if she were in charge. She did not feel comfortable changing local ways; she could observe the differences, but not do anything about them. "[I]n telling that our ways are a little different from theirs, I couldn't tell them they are any better. No, I couldn't, because I didn't want to; it wasn't the purpose of my trip." Instead, she decided simply to share with them, through her own actions and behavior, a sense of America and its citizens, and of the commonalities between rural life the world over. "What I could tell them was the story of a people like themselves, people who have hopes and fears such as their own, people who love and want to be loved, people who work for the welfare of their homes and who pray for the welfare of their friends."<sup>31</sup>

Through hard work and close and sustained contact, individual interactions between IFYEs and their hosts at the level of the family were intended to eventually stand in for international ones. But as Sellen's and Campbell's observations suggest, the issue of whether or not IFYEs were supposed to be playing an active role in the development of agricultural techniques around the world remained an open question in the program's first decade. However, as the '50s gave way to the '60s, IFYE's stance on economic development became much more clear, as the program became enmeshed in a broader American mission to actively develop the economies of nations seen as strategic in the Cold-War struggle against the U.S.S.R. As the aim of international extension work shifted from the reconstruction of European agriculture to the modernization of farming in the developing world, the importance of the nation as a unit of development came to the fore.

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31. Jones, *Letters from Finland*, see n. 23, p. 269.



## DEVELOPING YOUTH, DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

In the summer of 1948, Roy Hranicky of Texas and Lois Belle White of New York set sail for Europe aboard the *Marine Jumper* with the first group of American IFYEs. They were bound for the Netherlands, where they would spend three months with the Westerhuis family in the province of Gröningen, helping out on the farm, touring villages and industries, observing farming practices, and learning about Dutch agricultural organizations. The report they published about their trip—quaintly titled *The Five H's: Head, Heart, Hand, and Health in Holland*—focused on Dutch community life and land tenure patterns, postwar recovery, and the state of rural youth clubs. They were so fascinated by land use that they spent an entire chapter on how the Dutch were “building a nation” through reclaiming land from the sea.<sup>32</sup>

The “nation-building” Hranicky and White observed in the Netherlands was quite literal: it was a process of improving Dutch agriculture by adding to the nation’s store of land. However, as the years wore on, IFYE became interested in a different kind of nation-building, one that was primarily focused on the role of agriculture in economic development. This paralleled a shift in social scientific thinking about rural life from the community-based rural sociology of the ’30, ’40s, and ’50s, to the progressive outlooks of modernization theory and development economics in the ’60s and ’70s. Books like W. W. Rostow’s *Stages of Economic Growth* categorized the nations of the world by degrees of “development.” Lesser-developed countries were seen as inherently rural and agrarian—and decidedly non-industrial. These “traditional societies” were not applying the fruits of modern science and technology to farming and manufacturing: consequently, they remained economically and culturally stagnant.<sup>33</sup> 4-H’s foray onto the international stage was thus part of an important shift in the locus of state intervention in rural life. The community-based methods and concerns

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32. Hranicky and White, see n. 17.

33. Walt Whitman Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

of rural sociology that were apparent in international extension rhetoric in the 1940s and '50s were nowhere to be found in 4-H and IFYE materials from the 1960s and '70s. The discourse informing 4-H programs had shifted: from an emphasis on the health of the agricultural community, to the development impulse of economic modernization theories that saw the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis. This was a world not of local industries and agriculture driving a village-centered regional economy, but one of multinational corporations, private foundations, and international agencies shaping national economies through technical training in agriculture.

So: what did an exchange look like a decade or two after Hranicky and White steamed back into New York Harbor? To begin with, the map of participating IFYE countries had changed. No longer was IFYE wrapped up in European economic recovery: it had shifted its focus toward the developing and newly independent countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. While it retained its ties with Western Europe, by the late 1950s the program's main thrust was definitely elsewhere. This shift in geographical focus paralleled a shift in IFYE's central aims, from fostering peace and recovery in countries affected by WWII, toward promoting development in the up-and-coming nations of the third world. The contrast is visible even in the language IFYE pamphlets used to tout their programs: in 1955, IFYE was "work[ing] for peace all over the world," while in 1962, it was "play[ing] an important part in the growth of 4-H-like youth programs in newly developing countries."<sup>34</sup>

Extension's increasing focus on the nation, and on communicating a set of *American* rather than rural values, is apparent in the ways IFYEs were used to share information about different countries across national boundaries. U.S. delegates went abroad with a set of color slides of their home communities to illustrate talks about rural life in America. IFYEs gave these speaking engagements in front of local farm clubs, church groups, businesses, and service organizations, spreading a State-Department-approved picture of everyday

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34. IFYE: *A Program for Developing International Understanding*, see n. 21; IFYE: *International Farm Youth Exchange*, see n. 22.

life in the United States. At the same time, IFYEs were collecting information about other countries. The program's administrators made sure outgoing delegates were equipped with a camera so that they could capture images of their travels and document the farm life they experienced. IFYE's form of international understanding thus happened always from the American viewpoint, mediated by the delegates, the State Department, and the images that circulated through the program.<sup>35</sup>

These responsibilities to spread visions of rural life in different nations continued after the exchange was over. When delegates returned home, they were suddenly thrust into the spotlight as the resident experts on foreign lands, and were treated as such, both by the IFYE organization and by their home communities. For months after their return, IFYEs were required to give talks, radio addresses, newspaper interviews, and other public engagements to share what they had learned during their time abroad. One pamphlet touted that, as of March 1, 1954, former IFYE delegates from the United States had given 30,210 talks to more than 2,980,000 people, had been on 5,000 radio and television broadcasts, and had written 22,500 newspaper and magazine articles on their experiences.<sup>36</sup> Joann Campbell alone spoke on her experiences in Finland to 150 different groups in her hometown area during the two years following her return.<sup>37</sup> Often, IFYEs were rehearsing their roles as foreign affairs experts while still abroad. Local newspapers published their letters home, and friends, neighbors, and sometimes the rural folk of an entire state would follow their travels and experiences with attention and interest. Campbell's series of articles for her hometown paper was later published as a book along with her letters home to family. Her descriptions of Finnish farm conditions, practices, culture, and home life paint a rich picture—one which at times emphasizes the commonalities of rural experience shared by farmers in different countries, and at others remarks upon the stark differences between Finnish

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35. "Group IV Predeparture Orientation Program: 1954 Outbound United States Delegates," 1954, FF54-179.

36. *IFYE: A Program for Developing International Understanding*, see n. 21.

37. Jones, *Letters from Finland*, see n. 23, p.1307.

and American agriculture in the 1950s. Through the exchange, Joann became an embodiment of America while in Finland, and a stand-in for Finland when she returned home.<sup>38</sup> But her knowledge also qualified her to make judgments about what she saw, even if she was not trying to change her hosts' ways of doing things.

So far, this chapter has largely tracked the activities of IFYE delegates: those traveling from the United States to foreign countries. But what about the so-called exchangees: the young people who traveled from other nations to visit America? Their stories are harder to capture, but overall they were older than the usually college-age former 4-H'ers that constituted the American IFYE delegations. Exchangees were by and large already employed as technical experts in agriculture or home economics in their home countries, and had bachelor's (and often master's) degrees in these fields. Their U.S. itinerary always featured several visits to American land-grant colleges, and often involved an aspect of technical training. The design of exchangees' schedules suggests IFYE's desire to showcase the American model of rural development these institutions embodied.<sup>39</sup>

The proportion of delegates to exchangees also is suggestive of IFYE's growing interest in national economic development. Each year, the program consistently brought more rural young people to the U.S. than it sent abroad. Furthermore, although the number of exchangees coming to America continued to grow over the years, the number of outgoing delegates leveled off in the 1950s. This disparity is likely related in part to the growing number of countries participating in the exchange, but it also indicates that the IFYE program had begun to feel American young people might have less to learn from other countries than foreign youth could learn from U.S. agriculture. So, IFYEs still crisscrossed the oceans as cultural exchangees, but by the 1970s there were far more foreign students coming to the U.S. for training through 4-H programs than

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38. *IFYE: A Program for Developing International Understanding*, see n. 21.

39. "International Farm Youth Exchange Apps., 1949–1969," see n. 16.

there were American youth being sent abroad through IFYE. America's "grassroots ambassadors" could still profit *personally* from learning about other cultures, but it was becoming less important *economically* for them to learn about other ways of farming. The openness to exchange that marked the immediate aftermath of WWII was replaced by a confidence that the United States' past held the key to worldwide development in the future.<sup>40</sup>

This shift in focus is also apparent in the ways IFYE materials portrayed foreign exchangees from the 1960s onward. In these documents, the incoming IFYE came to embody the American perception of the developing nations. Pamphlets like "The IFYE and Your Family"—directed at American farm families interested in hosting an international student—assumed that exchangees were coming from conditions of poverty or privation, that they were ignorant of modern amenities, that their incomplete grasp of modern American living made them "younger" and more childlike. "If you are his first host family, he will have seen just enough of the U.S. from hotels and buses to be convinced that he will never really be a member of an American family," the pamphlet read. "The tremendous numbers of automobiles and taxis, the forests of neon signs and billboards, the fast pace of urban life, the vast countryside—these and many other things will jolt him hard." The brochure encouraged families to "[m]ake sure he knows how to operate our everyday appliances, including hot and cold water, bathroom, refrigerator, stove, light switches, locks, and so forth." Finally, it recommended having the younger children act as language teachers and interpreters, as their youth often made them better than adults at communicating with IFYEs. Foreign youth thus came to represent developing nations, in ways that paralleled delegates' embodiment of America and their host nations, but that consistently took the American point of view.<sup>41</sup>

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40. *The International Farm Youth Exchange: A People-to-People Program* (Washington, DC: National 4-H Club Foundation, 1958). IFYE Records, Box 1, Folder "IFYE News."

41. *The IFYE and Your Family* (1964). Records of the International 4-H Exchange Program, 1955–1999. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park. Record Group 33 (Records of the Federal Extension Service), ARC ID 2133236 P, Entry 20, Box 1, Folder "IFYE Program Management – Festival/Budget Info." The quotes are from pp. 7 and 8, respectively.

The relationships between the United States and the developing world were also worked out within the context of the exchange and the homestay. Anxieties about race, labor, and the proper relationship of developer and developpee were manifest in individual exchanges in ways that reflected the situation at the national and international levels. As the third world emerged as IFYE's primary target, the experiences of delegates, exchangees, and hosts began to call into question the notion that rural people were everywhere the same. The degrees of difference that became apparent in individual exchanges beginning in the 1950s escalated the potential for misunderstandings—misunderstandings that could jeopardize the American development project. IFYE's administrators stepped in with a firm hand to make sure that these difficulties did not compromise the nation's larger mission overseas.

As IFYE set its sights on the global south, a new set of thorny problems arose around race. As Thomas Borstelmann has shown, racial segregation and disenfranchisement in the United States continually undermined the nation's attempts to broaden its influence across the globe by portraying its own society as free and democratic. As representatives of the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa encountered the color line in America on their diplomatic visits, they discovered that the rhetoric of openness and equality that characterized the United States' self-representation abroad did not quite square with the reality on the ground. The Soviets seized upon this contradiction as a way of attacking the United States, arguing that American claims of freedom for all were simply untrue, and promoting communism as the true path toward racial equality. The U.S. government was quite aware that its own policies at home were compromising its efforts overseas, and made every attempt to ensure that IFYEs' interactions with foreign nationals would not complicate the situation further. Indeed, the USDA and the State Department, who ran the orientation program for departing IFYE delegates in Washington, and IFYE's organizers at the state and national levels worked hard to ensure that IFYEs would not be put in a position where they would need to address racial questions head-on. This reluctance to trouble the color line resulted in an exchange program that was just as

segregated as 4-H at home.<sup>42</sup>

We can perceive this anxiety about the potentially explosive racial dimensions of the IFYE program in a series of letters sent between leaders of the USDA Extension Service and the directors of extension in Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina in early 1951. The Mississippi leadership was the first to approach the federal Extension Service about having some of its “Negro boys” participate in IFYE; but it appears that all four states had previously discussed the possibility of coordinating a “Negro International Farm Youth Exchange” that would operate in tandem with the white program. This negro IFYE would continue a long tradition of the transfer of ideas and practices of development for segregated racial advancement between the southern United States and European colonial possessions in Africa, in particular the spread of the Tuskegee model of industrial education and manual labor. This continuity was apparent in the leaders’ conversation about where black delegates might be sent: Liberia was the only country considered at first, and the bulk of the correspondence consisted of the federal leaders explaining to the state directors that “the exchange depends on our ability to work out arrangements with the cooperating country.” Liberia appears not to have been very enthusiastic about the program, as Mississippi only sent one black delegate abroad over the course of the next decade. Ulysses S. Foeman, Jr. traveled to Nigeria in 1953, but his name only intermittently appeared on IFYE rosters alongside the names of the state’s white delegates. Although a truly separate “Negro IFYE” never materialized in any formal sense, the few black club members to travel overseas as a part of the exchange were invariably sent to “black” countries, such as those in Africa. Neither the states nor the federal extension administration had any desire to trouble the waters of race on the global stage.<sup>43</sup>

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42. Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

43. On the relationships between the programs for black advancement in the U.S. South and the Global South, see: Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Jack Temple Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning: Race and Reform in the Progressive South* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1972); Debra A. Reid, *Reaping a Greater Harvest: African Americans, the Extension Service, and Rural Reform in Jim Crow Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007); Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011). On the Tuskegee model,

Indeed, it could be argued that IFYE did more to reinforce racial segregation on the world stage than it did to break down barriers. Allen Hayner, Jr. served as one of New York State's IFYE delegates in 1959. He traveled to the Union of South Africa, where he stayed "on farms with whites or Europeans as they are commonly called." His experiences of the country were thus restricted to the world of the white ruling class; this perspective was reflected in his letters, which mentioned people of color only as population statistics, as servants or entertainers, or in passing descriptions without comment. "Europeans are supreme in the Union and the other races are subordinate to them," Hayner explained to his readers at home. His descriptions of South Africa under apartheid normalized the system of racial segregation and subordination as simply a fact of life, a cultural difference worthy of mention but not of comment or question.<sup>44</sup> Hayner reserved his judgments for South African agriculture, which he felt could stand for some American-style improvement. Likewise, Bruce Keeney, another 1959 New York State delegate, spent his entire time in the Dominican Republic staying on large *fincas* with prosperous landowning families, waited on by servants, and touring the estates and sugar refineries like a manager. This was an enormous contrast to the experiences of Joann Campbell, who emerged from the fields each day with blisters on her hands, and awoke every morning at dawn for milking to discover new bedbug bites. The impression IFYEs took away of their host countries

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see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). For the correspondence, see: Warren E. Schmidt to Thomas M. Campbell, Feb. 19, 1951, ESGC, Box 84, "Foreign Relations, International Farm Youth Exchange, Feb. 1 to Mar. 31, 1951" folder; Warren E. Schmidt to P. O. Davis, Feb. 13, 1951, ESGC, Box 84, "Foreign Relations, International Farm Youth Exchange, Feb. 1 to Mar. 31, 1951" folder; Warren E. Schmidt to L. I. Jones, Feb. 13, 1951, ESGC, Box 84, "Foreign Relations, International Farm Youth Exchange, Feb. 1 to Mar. 31, 1951" folder; L. I. Jones to M. L. Wilson, Jan. 16, 1951, ESGC, Box 84, "Foreign Relations, International Farm Youth Exchange, Feb. 1 to Mar. 31, 1951" folder; Warren E. Schmidt to W. S. Brown, Feb. 13, 1951, ESGC, Box 84, "Foreign Relations, International Farm Youth Exchange, Feb. 1 to Mar. 31, 1951" folder; W. S. Brown to M. L. Wilson, Jan. 24, 1951, ESGC, Box 84, "Foreign Relations, International Farm Youth Exchange, Feb. 1 to Mar. 31, 1951" folder; Warren E. Schmidt to D. W. Watkins, Feb. 13, 1951, ESGC, Box 84, "Foreign Relations, International Farm Youth Exchange, Feb. 1 to Mar. 31, 1951" folder; D. W. Watkins to M. L. Wilson, Jan. 25, 1951, ESGC, Box 84, "Foreign Relations, International Farm Youth Exchange, Feb. 1 to Mar. 31, 1951" folder. For the Mississippi IFYE rosters, see: "List of Mississippi IFYE Delegates, 1951–1963," 1963, Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service Cooperative Extension Service 4-H Club, Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville, A88-27 (henceforth cited as MCES4H), Box 1, I.F.Y.E. Delegates 1951–1961 folder; "Mississippi IFYE Delegates 1951–1963," n.d., Box 2, Folder F-88.

44. Allen Hayner Jr., "IFYE Letters," 1959, Palm Papers, Box 5, Folder 55.



could be incredibly accurate or vastly distorted, depending on where they stayed. Clearly it was not just carrying out labor that was important, or experiencing life as it was lived by the majority of the population in a country, but rather learning how other white farmers did things the world over.<sup>45</sup>

Labor proved another potential area of misunderstanding. The position of visiting IFYEs in the American household was one matter that received enormous attention in program materials. Families were to treat their exchangee as they would a visiting niece or nephew, but the work component—so integral to the IFYE experience—proved troublesome. Though IFYEs were supposed to be given clear responsibilities around the home and farm, “he *is not* and *should not* be considered as a *hired laborer*.”<sup>46</sup> A diagram helped to clarify where the IFYE stood within the family: neither “a hired person nor ... a guest,” the IFYE was clearly a source of confusion.<sup>47</sup> The continued emphasis on this point suggests that host families persisted in thinking of exchangees as more than just guests in their homes, and perhaps even as federally subsidized farm labor. The prospect of a cheap extra farmhand may have been just as enticing to American farmers as the promise of an “international experience.”<sup>48</sup> At a time when foreign agricultural labor was becoming more and more common on American farms, IFYE’s administrators had to explicitly instruct families hosting exchangees from Latin America and Asia not to see their guests as the juvenile equivalent of braceros.

Host families not only needed to be wary of overworking their IFYEs, they also needed to be careful about being too nice to them, particularly when it came to gifts. Pamphlets discouraged hosts from expressing their gratitude financially, or in the form of extravagant presents. “Too much generosity does not inspire them to become better citizens of their own country, but may make them dislike their own coun-

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45. Bruce Keeney, “IFYE Letters,” 1960, Palm Papers, Box 5, Folder 55; Jones, *Letters from Finland*, see n. 23.

46. *The IFYE and Your Family*, see n. 41, p. 4. Emphasis in original.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

48. This is borne out by remarks by former host families, as well as Joann Campbell’s experience on her second farm in Finland. Jones, *Letters from Finland*, see n. 23.

try,” one brochure read. “*This must not happen!*”<sup>49</sup> Kindness to individual foreigners on the part of individual Americans was no longer seen as fostering harmony among nations: indeed, it could run counter to those aims. By expressing their gratitude materially, hosts could undermine IFYE’s mission of making exchangees into leaders of development in their home countries. The young—people and nations alike—were not to be coddled on the road to modernity.

Finally, the State Department worked hard to make sure that outgoing delegates were representing America properly, not only in the presentations they made, but in their person and outlook. This meant making sure that the American IFYEs selected had no potentially subversive ties that would misrepresent the U.S. commitment to capitalist democracy. Lois Linse Gleiter, 1951 delegate from Wisconsin to Chile, experienced the challenges of being the first female IFYE delegate to Latin America in the midst of the escalating Cold War. Her story is illustrative of the IFYE program’s political sensitivities in the context of McCarthyism. Gleiter had grown up in a progressive farming family that was heavily involved in the local Farmer’s Union, one of the more left-leaning farm organizations. In fact, Lois was admittedly more of an FU kid than a 4-H kid. The competitive aspects of 4-H programs didn’t appeal to her, and clashed with her family’s values of cooperation and solidarity. She heard about IFYE after she graduated from the University of Wisconsin and attended the Encampment for Citizenship in New York City, a gathering of young people from different social, cultural, and racial backgrounds sponsored by the New York Society for Ethical Culture. She submitted her application, and was accepted to travel to Chile. Unfortunately, the Encampment became an early target of Senator Joseph McCarthy’s virulent anti-communism, and Gleiter’s attendance at the camp put her exchange in jeopardy. The program’s administrators were concerned that, because of her association with this potentially subversive group, she might not be a proper representative of the United States. Lois was so upset about McCarthy’s misrepresentation of a program about which she felt so passion-

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49. *The IFYE and Your Family*, see n. 41, p. 16. Emphasis in original.

ately that she traveled to Washington, DC to speak directly to the IFYE administrators and convince them of her fitness as a delegate. Whether they were moved by what she said or simply by her fluency in Spanish—a rare qualification—Gleiter was eventually allowed to go; but the concern with which the program viewed her left-leaning political commitments illustrates the lengths to which IFYE’s administrators sought to control the message of the program.<sup>50</sup>

These issues around race, labor, and the proper relationship of host and guest suggest that the aim of 4-H’s international programs, like many development projects in the postwar period, was “self-help”: helping other people and other countries help themselves. IFYE did this by cultivating the skills of delegates, exchangees, and hosts, as well as helping to build the institutional structure in which they operated. Unsurprisingly, the Extension Service saw itself as the ideal model for fostering development the world over. According to extension specialists, its nature as an organization based in localities while also having coordination from the top, its flexibility and orientation around specific local problems, and its diffuse organization made it adaptable to any context, agricultural or otherwise, in any region of the globe. In many ways, IFYE was a program designed to help implement extension in other countries—hence the program’s focus on exposing delegates and exchangees to 4-H-type youth programs and rural life organizations in other countries.<sup>51</sup>

But the self-help that 4-H—and international Extension programs more broadly—sought to impart was increasingly of a particular kind. Specifically, it aimed to set developing nations on the road toward advanced capitalist economic growth, using the American experience of progress as a model for economic growth elsewhere. This played out against a background of the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union over which power would gain the upper hand in the global economy. Programs like IFYE became an important part of the American arsenal in Cold War geopolitics, as they began to articulate not a model of

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50. GleiterOH; Algernon D. Black, *The Young Citizens: The Story of the Encampment for Citizenship* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1962).

51. *Contribution of Extension Toward War-Torn Countries*, see n. 4; *Extension Around the World*, see n. 4.

rural improvement, but an American model of development that saw capitalism as the necessary partner of democracy, and that positioned agricultural production as a means toward national economic growth. This idea took the American past as the template for the developing world's future.<sup>52</sup>

The shift away from the development of rural communities toward national development accompanied a shift toward economics as the primary measure of development. In the context of 4-H and IFYE, these measures were primarily of things like agricultural output, commodity prices, crop yields per acre, and the degree of adoption of “modern” agricultural technologies like machinery, irrigation, hybrid seeds, and fertilizers. A set of theories developed largely within the field of economics gained political sway: books like W. W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* posited a hierarchy of nations, based on the state of “development” their economies had reached, and tied the development of agriculture from “traditional” methods to modern, industrialized methods directly to economic development. As the subtitle to Rostow's book suggests, these ideas were related to the growing Cold War context of 4-H activities in the third world. These areas were strategic in the global struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union for political and economic influence, and rural development schemes provided an important way for the United States to gain a foothold in these areas, while building a foundation for the future by making rural youth into development leaders. By the 1960s, the relationship between population growth in certain parts of the globe and the ability of world agriculture to provide a food supply for this expanding multitude compounded these Cold War anxieties, leading to the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>53</sup>

Rostow and the policymakers he influenced believed that the U.S. offered a template for successful national development the world over. This was very much in line with the kinds of ideas 4-H had been premised

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52. Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Rostow, see n. 33.

53. Rostow, see n. 33; John H. Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution: Wheat, Genes, and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

on from the beginning: the progressive notions of development as growth and maturation; the appeal to the American past—especially its agrarian past—as a guide to the future of the nation. However, these postwar theories of modernization and development differed in important respects from the complex paths toward modernity 4-H had been formulating and negotiating for nearly half a century. Most notably, the end state, the developed modernity Rostow and others envisioned, was explicitly *non-rural*—in fact, modernization was dependent on forcefully progressing national economies *away* from the land and toward a Western urban-industrial end state. “Traditional” (or underdeveloped) societies and nations were, in Rostow’s formulation, inherently rural and agrarian and needed to be ushered swiftly away from that traditional past (and all its non-scientific trappings, attitudes, and ways of life) and toward the urban-industrial future. In this intellectual and political environment, 4-H’s mode of development began to be unmoored from its rural roots and mission.

The ascent of the Rostovian view—and the decline of the sense of commonality among rural people everywhere—was hastened by the increasingly common experiences of difference that occurred as international extension efforts encountered the global south. For many young people traveling overseas to do extension work, the sheer distance, both culturally and geographically, of living in rural places, increasingly in the third world, brought out a sense of judgment and superiority rather than a feeling of common purpose. The experiences of Billy Heikkinen, a Peace Corps Volunteer from northern Wisconsin tasked with setting up 4-S clubs (the Brazilian equivalent of 4-H) in Minas Gerais, Brazil in 1964–1965 are illustrative. Heikkinen spent a great deal of ink expressing his frustrations with the backwardness of local people, the abysmal conditions of the roads, the poor quality of food and sanitation, and the old-fashioned state of farming technique. There is no sense whatsoever in his letters that American agriculture had anything to gain from the Brazilian experience—rather, Americans could only improve a country whose farm methods were sorely lacking, and whose agricultural products were far inferior to those of America. Writing to his young cousin back in Wisconsin,

Heikkinen mocked the local livestock, saying, “I hope your chickens are better than some we have here. The ones we have are skinny and run around without feathers.” The implication that an American school child could raise better poultry than a Brazilian adult who farmed for a living clearly demonstrates the low regard with which Heikkinen held his local charges.<sup>54</sup>

The sense of being transported into the pioneer past was a common refrain among PCVs and IFYEs alike.<sup>55</sup> Like Heikkinen, IFYEs continually made comparisons between the often old-fashioned or rudimentary techniques and tools of their hosts, both in the field and in the home. Assessments of the local agriculture and how it compared to farming in the U.S. were typical in IFYEs’ letters home. Allen Hayner, 1959 delegate South Africa, after describing maize cultivation in the area outside Johannesburg where he was living, observed that “[t]he yields ... might be increased. Fertilizer companies are presently taking the lead in this research. However, a researcher’s paradise exists in the Union in this particular segment of agriculture. There is much to be learned and much to be done. A willing, patient, and capable hand could do much for the prosperity of [this area].”<sup>56</sup> The fact that IFYEs tended to make these kinds of comparisons in their public correspondence—letters they knew were destined for a wider audience than mom and dad—suggests that they felt that making these assessments was in a sense part of their assignment. Indeed, as Hayner’s mention of fertilizer company research indicates, these were not just idle musings to entertain the folks back home. This on-the-ground knowledge of agricultural conditions—and how they stacked up against those in the U.S.—was extremely valuable to corporations with business interests in these parts of the world. For a fertilizer company like the one Hayner mentioned, a difference in corn yields meant one important thing: a potential market for its products. This was no mere coincidence: by the time Hayner was penning his letter

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54. William Heikkinen to Dan, 11 February 1964. William Heikkinen Letters, 1962–1965, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, #4/14/SC93 (henceforth cited as Heikkinen Letters). For more on this “frontier narrative” in Peace Corps work, see Fritz Fischer, *Making Them Like Us: Peace Corps Volunteers in the 1960s* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998).

55. Ibid.

56. Allen Hayner, Jr., Letter #5, “The Mealie Triangle.” Palm Papers. Box 5, Folder 55.

home, IFYE could boast a roster of corporate sponsors that included the guiding lights of American industry and agribusiness. The increasingly close ties between this exchange program and private corporations make clear the connections between American-style rural development, economic modernization, and national progress in the postwar era.

#### BROADENING TOMORROW'S MARKET

The linkages among business, farming, politics, world trade, and Cold War ideology were on display each year as IFYE delegates returned to the United States. The Grocery Manufacturers of America (GMA), a trade association of some of the largest players in the American food industry, held its annual meeting in New York City in the late fall, just about the time that the summer crop of American IFYEs arrived on their return journey to New York Harbor—and each year, without fail, the GMA would host a “Welcome Home” breakfast at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, where the delegates would be feted by the corporate sponsors and Extension officials who had made their trips possible. After dining, this comparatively intimate group of around 125 would enter the hotel’s Grand Ballroom, where 1,000 GMA representatives would greet the IFYEs as they took the stage, sang a “Song of Peace,” and told of their experiences abroad.

Each year, above the singing delegates, the GMA organizers hung an enormous banner, as tall as the young men and women on stage, which read “The Life Line of America: The Line of Essential Processes Between Food in the Field and Food on the Table.” This motto was accompanied by images of each step in this production line: a farmstead, a man at a desk, a factory, a train, a warehouse with a truck leaving it, a neighborhood grocery, and, finally, a family seated around a table for a meal. In 1950, the third year of both IFYE and the GMA’s Welcome Home Breakfast, there hung beneath this banner another, smaller banner, which proclaimed the joint goals of these organizations: “For Peace... For Progress...For Freedom!”

In 1954, this secondary banner stated their aims more simply: “Broadening Tomorrow’s Market.”<sup>57</sup>

These photographs proved a potent symbol of how the Cold War might be fought through agricultural development—a fact which was not lost on Dan Gerber, president of Gerber Products Corporation, makers of baby foods. In 1955, Gerber distributed a pamphlet to his fellow GMA members, soliciting their financial support for IFYE. On the cover he placed the image of the 1954 delegates, standing beneath the GMA “Markets” banner, singing their song and telling their stories to the conference attendees. At the moment America’s food industry executives—from General Mills to Ralston Purina to H.J. Heinz—were flipping through Gerber’s pamphlet, contemplating making their own “investment in peace,” as Gerber put it, IFYE was not only extending the hand of goodwill to European allies, it was also expanding international markets for American goods in dozens of countries, from Germany to Uruguay, Morocco to the Philippines. In this context, food, agriculture, and economic and political power were inextricably linked.<sup>58</sup>

The GMA’s growing support for IFYE over the course of the 1950s is indicative of a broader trend toward public-private partnerships in international development work. The Extension Service was no exception: as IFYE expanded in the 1950s and ’60s, so did its need for vast sums of money to finance such a large and expensive exchange. To raise the necessary funds, IFYE’s administrators turned increasingly to private sponsors. Almost as soon as the program got off the ground in 1948, IFYE was no longer run solely by the Extension Service, but was administered by a new organization, the National 4-H Club Foundation, designed to be 4-H’s nationwide private fundraising arm. The 4-H Foundation went about its business with zeal and alacrity, attracting big donors from the start. The Ford Foundation was IFYE’s primary sponsor until the mid-fifties, spending nearly \$1.3 million on the program as a whole between 1951 and 1955, supplemented by smaller (though substantive) grants aimed at setting up IFYE in particular countries, mainly

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57. University Photograph Collection, 4-H Photos, Folder 1. Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman. *About Our Youngest Ambassadors*, see n. 27.

58. Ibid.



India, Pakistan, Burma, and the Middle East. By the time the Ford Foundation ended its sponsorship of the exchange in the late 1950s, it had spent over \$1.8 million on IFYE-related programs, including funds for IFYE evaluation conferences, and special training programs for foreign youth in the United States.<sup>59</sup>

But as Ford stepped down its donations in the late 1950s, other organizations were quite ready to step in—as Dan Gerber’s pamphlet, sent out at precisely this moment, indicates. “This is our opportunity to make a ‘blue-chip’ INVESTMENT,” Gerber wrote to his food-industry colleagues, “one that will pay off in dividends for our country, our business, and our future.” Helping develop markets and economies around the world was clearly good for business, and agriculture was the foundation of it all. The purpose of IFYE, by the 1960s, was primarily to support these larger aims of global economic development, which reflected a shift in thinking about how peace would be achieved. The United States needed to expand its influence overseas not only politically, but economically as well. Promoting democracy and promoting private ownership became allied concerns, and they were enacted in the rural landscapes of the third world.<sup>60</sup>

Corporate sponsorship for 4-H activities was not a new phenomenon in the 1950s. Agricultural implement manufacturers, seed companies, fertilizer firms, and other farm industries had long been courting 4-H boys and girls as potential customers, with the hope of developing brand loyalty that might last a lifetime. As we saw in chapter two, the National Boys’ and Girls’ Club Service Committee had been soliciting private donations for club work since 1924. But the advent of the Foundation signaled a heightened effort in 4-H fundraising on a global scale. The private funds flowing into 4-H programs in the wake of World War II were expanding to a much greater extent, under these new institutional structures, in a more highly coordinated fashion, than those that the National Committee had managed. As 4-H spread across the globe in the

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59. *Working Together for 4-H* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1962). *Private Support for 4-H* (National Archives and Records Administration RG 33 (Records of the Federal Extension Service), n.d.). Grants 51-290, 52-080, 53-128, 53-200, 54-065, 54-066, 54-179, 55-020, 55-037, 55-049, 57-080, 57-080, 58-013, 58-014, 58-025, 58-026, 58-070, 58-081, and 59-032, Ford Foundation Library and Archives, New York, NY.

60. *About Our Youngest Ambassadors*, see n. 27.

wake of World War II, these companies took notice. At play was a huge, relatively unexploited market: rural young people in other countries, particularly the “developing” nations whose leaders were eager to import American-style commercial and industrial agriculture. These were the markets of the future, and programs like IFYE were an opportunity to tap into them.

As IFYE expanded in the 1950s, its administrators at the 4-H Foundation were conscious of the need to likewise expand corporate donations, and in 1953 they assembled what they called the Builders Council, “a group of nationally known business leaders who give voluntarily of their time and influence for the purpose of developing financial support for the programs of the Foundation”—the most costly of which was IFYE. The council brought together representatives of the banking, feed, fertilizer, grocery, and farm cooperative industries—Gerber himself was a key member—and in 1955 the Foundation boasted that they were seeking to enlarge the Builders Council by soliciting members of the cotton, farm equipment, and meatpacking industries, as well as “attempting to organize a broad campaign among 1,000 firms not closely related to agriculture.”<sup>61</sup>

As the makeup of the Builders Council indicates, IFYE had a natural set of supporters in the American business community. From 1950s to the 1970s, there were essentially two kinds of private financial sponsors of IFYE that sought to capture the burgeoning agricultural marketplace it represented: processors of farm products (such as Philip Morris, General Foods, Land O’Lakes, Ralston Purina, Continental Grain, Archer Daniels Midland, Food Machinery Corporation, Gerber, and the GMA) and manufacturers dealing in the goods and tools of industrial agriculture, especially farm machinery (Massey-Ferguson, International Harvester, the Ford Motor Company, Goodyear, Reynolds Metal) on the one hand, and petrochemicals (Shell, Standard Oil, Geigy Chemical, Exxon, Occidental Petroleum) on the other. They saw the poten-

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61. Proposal to the Ford Foundation for the Continued Support of the Regular Program of the International Farm Youth Exchange, Grant 55-020, Ford Foundation Library and Archives, New York, NY. Quotes are from pp. 1 and 7.

tial—hinted at in IFYEs’ letters home—to expand their operations into countries looking to modernize (or perhaps Americanize) their agriculture. These companies had marketed their products to farm youth for decades by sponsoring 4-H club projects, prizes, and awards; IFYE offered a way to reach a global audience of potential young consumers. It is not surprising, then, that donations from these large American companies helped to direct 4-H’s programs toward developing nations. Goodyear sponsored programs in the Philippines, Continental Grain in India; the list of companies and their corresponding countries reads like a map of U.S. political and economic influence and interest in the free and third worlds.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time that private corporations were focusing their attention on rural youth worldwide, IFYEs themselves were being instructed in the ways in which increased global trade might foster peace, prosperity, democracy, and rising standards of living the world over. At their pre-departure orientation program in Washington, the 1954 outbound delegates discussed “The American Way of Life” and “Why and How Technical Assistance,” learned about “Characteristics of Non-Industrial Countries” and “The Development of U.S. Agriculture,” and watched a film entitled “World Trade for Better Living,” followed by a discussion of world trade led by a USDA specialist on foreign agriculture. Clearly both the United States Government and IFYE’s corporate sponsors wanted to make sure American delegates understood how the interests of peace and democracy could be served by agricultural and economic development.<sup>63</sup>

But although IFYE received a great deal of corporate sponsorship, as the years went on, companies were eager to have their donations translate directly into quantifiable, observable progress, measurable in agricultural output, profits, or GDP. In this environment, IFYE’s lingering emphasis on cultural exchange and goodwill seemed more a distraction than an asset. Consequently, donors in the business community became more interested in funding technical exchanges and training programs for foreign nationals, in particular

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62. IATP, Boxes 1, 4, and 5.

63. “Group IV Predeparture Orientation Program,” see n. 35.

parts of the world. The Ford Foundation's shift from general funds to regional program support prefigured a growing specificity in IFYE's later corporate sponsorship: many potential donors had not *international* interests per se, but interests in particular *parts* of the world, or particular countries. By the late 1960s and 1970s, the 4-H Foundation was soliciting donors for targeted, country-specific, technical training programs. These aimed at instructing foreign rural youth in particular phases of agricultural production, in order to increase output of products American companies would buy, rather than at creating rural leaders for future independent development. These agricultural training programs often had the effect of tying the development of particular nations to U.S. corporations.<sup>64</sup>

By the 1970s, then, IFYE was only one among a panoply of international extension programs, most of which were focused on technical training for foreign nationals. The story of IFYE—from promoter of peace and cultural exchange to Cold Warrior and market researcher and developer—offers a glimpse of the complex relationships among state entities, multinational corporations, farm families, international foundations, development workers, and other entities jockeying for influence on the global development scene.

The story of IFYE, from its roots in postwar reconstruction in Europe, to its mobilization as a instrument of Americanization and economic development demonstrates how the farm family became central to development efforts both at home and abroad in the wake of the Second World War. As the most conducive site for fostering understanding among rural people, the farm family came to symbolize a set of universal qualities shared by all those who lived on the land. The family became the place where the activities of common labor could be translated into developmental activities that would strengthen the ties among farmers and nations. IFYE also demonstrates how the actions of individual rural youth came to stand in for the nations they represented and visited, as delegates taught their hosts about America and their compatriots about their travels, and as exchangees contrasted their home countries with America and brought tales of

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64. IATP, Boxes 1, 4, and 5.

the United States overseas. The publications put out by the exchange, and the testimony of those who participated, indicates that this process was often contested and fraught, particularly when it touched on issues of race, labor, and the roles of the United States overseas and of foreign nationals in American agriculture. As delegates increasingly encountered the third world, they found the notion that rural people everywhere shared a culture of rural life less and less tenable. When faced with these stark contrasts, many American youth found themselves ready to evaluate foreign agriculture, and recommend practices that would modernize it along U.S. lines. This was a welcome development for IFYE's growing list of corporate sponsors, who, alongside economic theorists and political leaders, helped articulate a more explicitly capitalist mission for international 4-H programs, one that tied competition, free markets, and private ownership to the practice of democracy. Rural development took a backseat to American development, and American development became not just democratic, but capitalist as well.

But although IFYE illustrates the growing dominance of the family, nations, and markets as the important sites of development, it tells us little about the ways in which the rural community was conceived during this period. Although the community faded in prominence as a developmental category, it did not disappear entirely, as attested to by the appearance of programs that aimed at "community development" in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. The remainder of this chapter steps back to consider the fate of the communitarian ideas that found expression in conservation and health projects in the U.S. during the 1930s and '40s, by following the rural social scientists who were central to their formulation. In the years following the Second World War, these men also found an opportunity to exercise their programs on the international stage, by helping the governments of developing nations set up extension and rural development programs. The paradigm of community development grew out of extension work in the rural United States, but found its most lasting expression overseas.

## INTERNATIONAL EXTENSION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The postwar period saw a flurry of activity among extension specialists eager to share their program for rural development and their particular form of educational advice with the world. In September of 1944, a group of extension specialists had gathered at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington to discuss how their work might be put to use in the service of agricultural reconstruction at war's end. The *Conference Report on the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques to the Rehabilitation of War-Torn Countries*—and its followup, 1949's *Conference Report on Extension Experiences Around the World*—were just two among several volumes published in the late 1940s that offered to interested parties an overview, summary, and description of the theory and practice of extension work, and instructions on how best to implement such a program for rural development. These books, largely authored by a group of rural social scientists associated with the USDA Bureau of Agricultural Economics, sought to offer to the world an institutional model for sharing scientific knowledge and practices for rural uplift, one that they increasingly touted as universal in application.<sup>65</sup>

Who were these groups that were interested in adopting extension methods, and for whom these books were ostensibly written? The authors anticipated a readership among extension workers within the United States interested in learning more about the philosophy, history, and best recommended practices of their organization; but they made clear in the way they framed the problem of extension education that their primary audience was international, specifically the governments of developing nations who sought to modernize their agriculture and improve the life of their rural populations. In the wake of the Second World War, as many New Deal programs were being scaled back in the United States, and especially in the period after 1953, when the USDA dissolved its Bureau of Agricultural Economics, America's rural social scientists

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65. In addition to the conference reports, see: Edmund deS. Brunner, Irwin T. Sanders, and Douglas Ensminger, eds., *Farmers of the World: The Development of Agricultural Extension* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945); Edmund deS. Brunner and E. Hsin Pao Yang, *Rural America and the Extension Service: A History and Critique of the Cooperative Agricultural and Home Economics Extension Service* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949); Lincoln David Kelsey and Cannon Chiles Hearne, *Cooperative Extension Work* (Ithaca: Comstock Publishing Associates, 1963).

found new opportunities to practice their communitarian style of development overseas. The postwar journeys of extension specialists show how the rural development model of the Extension Service contributed to the formulation of community development, one of the most important international development paradigms.<sup>66</sup>

The seeds of community development were planted with the emergence of rural sociology in the 1910s, particularly the ideas of people like Charles Josiah Galpin, whose *Social Anatomy of a Rural Community* laid the template for the community studies that characterized the discipline at the outset. The second generation of rural social scientists brought the family increasingly into the picture, but many retained an interest in the community as a central unit of rural life. Among this group were M. L. Wilson, whom we encountered in chapter three, and Douglas Ensminger. Both began their careers in state-level extension positions, and moved up into the federal extension bureaucracy. Together, their careers illustrate the ways in which American extension work contributed to the emergence of community development on the international stage.<sup>67</sup>

M. L. Wilson, a midwestern agricultural economist trained at Iowa and Wisconsin, had begun his career as a county agent in Montana, but came to Washington in the mid-1920s to join the USDA's Bureau of Agricultural Economics. He headed the Subsistence Homestead Program under the New Deal before serving first as Assistant Secretary and then as Under Secretary of Agriculture under Henry A. Wallace. In 1940, he became the head of the Extension Service, where he presided over both the 1944 and 1949 international extension conferences. In 1953, he left the USDA to become a part-time consultant for the Ford Foundation's Overseas Division, traveling extensively in Asia and the Near East, and helping advise the Foundation on setting up village-level and community development programs, including rural youth and

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66. On the emergence of community development, I would love to cite Daniel Immerwahr, "Quests for Community: The United States, Community Development, and the World, 1935–1965" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2011). Too bad it's embargoed! I eagerly await the book. For more on these ideas, see Jess Gilbert, "Rural Sociology and Democratic Planning in the Third New Deal," *Agricultural History* 82, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 421–438.

67. On the history of rural sociology, see: Dresser, see n. 5; Edmund deS. Brunner, *The Growth of a Science: A Half-Century of Rural Sociological Research in the United States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957).

young farmers' organizations. He helped his friend and colleague Douglas Ensminger, who had served as the chairman of both the 1944 and 1949 extension conferences and was in the 1940s a senior member of the federal Extension Service staff, secure a post as the Ford Foundation's Representative in India, where Ensminger stayed through the mid-1970s. Like Wilson, Ensminger was a USDA man with a social science background—rural sociology—and a midwesterner by birth, who had moved up through the ranks of state extension work in Alabama to his post in Washington. He became one of the foremost authorities on community development.<sup>68</sup>

Wilson and Ensminger each contributed a philosophy of extension work that helped transform the community studies of the Galpin years into the community development that emerged on the international stage in the postwar era. Wilson's idea was the "cultural approach" we encountered in chapter three, which positioned extension organization as a potentially universal instrument of development if carried out in active conversation with local needs. Wilson saw the local, cooperative design of extension work as inherently democratic and democratizing, as well as flexible and infinitely adaptable to different contexts and conditions. By organizing its program around the needs of local people, as articulated by those people themselves, and by working with them cooperatively to make plans, formulate solutions, and carry them to completion, extension was, in any location, a force for change that the free world could get behind. As Wilson and his colleague Edmund deSchweinitz Brunner explained, "extension teaching at its best... is a social process, not a system or a program to be administered. It is everywhere different but everywhere similar in the principles of its operation. The differences are those which grow out of variations in environment and culture. The similarities arise from the common needs and experiences of human beings."<sup>69</sup> This notion was rooted in a belief

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68. M. L. Wilson Papers, 1913–1970, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, Collection 2100 (henceforth cited as Wilson Papers); Douglas Ensminger Oral History Papers, Ford Foundation Archives, New York, 47019–47020 (henceforth cited as Ensminger OH); "Douglas Ensminger, 79, a Sociologist, Dies," *The New York Times* (June 8, 1989).

69. M. L. Wilson and Edmund deS. Brunner, "The Role of Extension in World Reconstruction," in *Farmers of the World: The*



in both cultural diversity and a fundamental universality that united humanity. This was particularly true of people who made their living from the land. Though different groups devised different means of sustaining their livelihood, depending on geography, climate, and other environmental factors, all those who tilled the soil shared a common set of interests and concerns. While cultures might differ and practices might vary, rural people everywhere were more similar than different. The “farmers of the world” were deep down one people, and extension could serve them all.<sup>70</sup>

Wilson’s cultural approach thus contributed directly to the postwar emergence of extension work as a universal model for rural uplift. But at the same time that extension specialists were touting the flexibility of their program, they were also admitting that, sometimes, local people didn’t quite know what they wanted. They were fatalistic or apathetic, due to the fact that they had never seen any possibility for a better life. On these occasions, extension work could also be a process of teaching these people to want certain things. The suggestions of extension workers, then, could also be a force for change in ways unimagined by the people whom they were tasked to serve.

This brings us to Douglas Ensminger. Ensminger’s most important contribution to community development—apart from his enormous role in shaping India’s influential village development program, and the vast amount of literature he produced on the subject—was in essence a means of intervening in the culture, a way of changing rural people’s outlook to make them aspire to new things. Ensminger defined this as process as “social education.” Social education was essentially teaching progress and development to those for whom improvement was not an experience or a defining feature of life. As Ensminger and his fellow Alabama rural sociologist Irwin T. Sanders explained,

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*Development of Agricultural Extension*, ed. Edmund deS. Brunner, Irwin T. Sanders, and Douglas Ensminger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), p. 193.

70. On the cultural approach, see M. L. Wilson, *The Cultural Approach in Extension Work*, Extension Service Circular 332 (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, Extension Service, May 1940). Brunner, Sanders, and Ensminger, see n. 65.

Extension education employs the principle of cultural variation and culture change.... It also emphasizes working *with* the people rather than *for* them and selects for treatment those problems which the people themselves recognize as important. At times, it goes a step further and teaches people to recognize as problems for solution conditions which they had accepted as inevitable or about which they had previously felt little concern. Thus extension education teaching people *what* to want as well as *how* to work out ways of satisfying these wants.<sup>71</sup>

Though it had not been defined as such, social education had in essence been part and parcel of extension's program for rural uplift in the United States since its inception. From the moment Seaman Knapp tried to convince cotton farmers that they wanted to grow corn, extension had been engaging in a form of social education, largely directed at persuading rural people that science had something to offer them. The apathy and stagnation that American observers of European peasants and third-world villagers found so frustrating echoed nothing so much as early extension workers' descriptions of their constituents. Indeed, Sanders and Ensminger had suggested this connection between apathy and lack of progress in a bulletin on rural communities they had authored while serving with the Alabama Extension Service in 1940. As the introduction stated, "Where there is no vision, people perish." In order for development to occur, whether in a southern county or an Indian village, the people needed to be made to see possibilities: they needed to be taught about progress.<sup>72</sup>

In the work they did after leaving the Federal Extension Service in the 1950s, Wilson and Ensminger mobilized the cultural approach and the techniques of social education they had formulated in the rural

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71. Douglas Ensminger and Irwin T. Sanders, "What Extension Is," in *Farmers of the World: The Development of Agricultural Extension*, ed. Edmund deS. Brunner, Irwin T. Sanders, and Douglas Ensminger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), p. 1.

72. On social education, see Douglas Ensminger, *A Guide to Community Development* (Delhi: Coronation Printing Works for the Ministry of Community Development, Government of India, 1957), chapter 3. Irwin T. Sanders and Douglas Ensminger, "Alabama Rural Communities: A Study of Chilton County," *Alabama College Bulletin* 33, 1A (July 1940). For more examples of community development in domestic extension work, see: *Community Development*, Publication 197 (5M) (State College: Mississippi Agricultural Extension Service, June 1953); H. S. Johnson, *Rural Community Organization*, Publication 209 (1500) (State College: Mississippi Agricultural Extension Service, January 1952). For overviews of community development overseas, see: Ensminger, *Guide to Community Development*, see n. 72; Carl C. Taylor, *A Critical Analysis of India's Community Development Programme* (Issued by Community Projects Administration, Government of India, and printed by the Government of India Press, September 1956); M. L. Wilson, *Community Development Programme in India: Report of a Survey* (Issued by the Community Project Administration, Government of India, 1956).

landscapes and (agri)cultural regions of the United States anew in rural places overseas. Their work was made possible not by the United States government, but by the Ford Foundation, which had taken an enormous interest in international affairs. Ford's support for extension work extended far beyond IFYE to include the village development program in India, and a host of projects in the Near and Far East, from Iraq to Burma, many of which Ensminger helped to coordinate. The foundation's plan also included domestic activities related to international development, such as the tour of land-grant colleges they sent Wilson on in an attempt to set up a postgraduate program for training international extension and community development experts. As the next chapter will show, these international connections proved critical to the formulation of a new set of domestic extension programs focused on urban areas.<sup>73</sup>

The Ford Foundation was an important nexus of community development thinking. Because of its simultaneous grantmaking activities in both international agricultural development (through programs like IFYE) and domestic urban improvement (through programs like urban extension), the Ford Foundation increased the likelihood that international development and urban renewal workers would encounter one another's ideas and techniques. What is more, foundation officers themselves helped forge links among international rural and domestic urban programs, by observing similarities between the kinds of work being done in these two situations. And, because they controlled the purse strings, once they had decided that urban extension and international community development were parallel activities, they could shape and even to some extent dictate how successful (read: grant-receiving) urban programs would go about their business.

One of the Ford Foundation's pet projects in India—and the guise under which extension returned to the U.S. to be taken up in cities—was the paradigm of community development. Community development was a set of methods for bettering village life, pioneered by the Indian government under Nehru in the late

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73. Wilson Papers; M. L. Wilson Collection, 1935–1960, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, Accession 00003 (henceforth cited as Wilson Collection); Ensminger OH.

1940s and 1950s, with the assistance of American experts. While recent scholarship has drawn out the connections between international development work and domestic policy on poverty and hunger, historians have by and large not recognized the rural, agricultural roots of community development as practiced both in the developing world and at home.<sup>74</sup> By following the career of extension work as it was adopted both by international development experts and urban reformers in the postwar years, we can more readily discern the common, rural roots of these programs, and in turn see how the international and urban perspectives transformed extension work during this period.

The phrase community development came into being as a part of a pilot project, led by Nehru's government in India and carried out by a group of American experts and Indian villagers in Etawah, a community in the province of Uttar Pradesh, beginning in the late 1940s. Albert Mayer, a New York real estate developer with extensive experience in public housing, was, due to a set of personal connections, chosen by the Indian government to head up the project. Mayer's account of the program, which he published in the late 1950s, describes in detail the aims, challenges, and on-the-ground initiatives that soon became the template for India's nationwide village development program.<sup>75</sup>

Although Mayer's experience was almost entirely urban, he read up on rural development as it was being practiced internationally in the immediate postwar period. "I started studying, consulting all sorts of people and sources," he wrote, "for example, Loomis' *Studies of Rural Social Organization in Europe, the United States, and Latin America*, of Ensminger, Brunner, and Sanders' *Farmers of the World: The Development of Agricultural Extension*... From M. L. Wilson, Carl C. Taylor, and Douglas Ensminger of the United States Department of Agriculture there were both practical assistance and a sense of direction."<sup>76</sup> These were all works of rural

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74. See: Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Immerwahr, see n. 66.

75. Albert Mayer, *Pilot Project, India: The Story of Rural Development at Etawah, Uttar Pradesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

sociology, anthropology, and extension practice that had formed the foundation for the Extension Service's activities abroad, as described in the previous chapter. Indeed, the experts Mayer consulted were not only longtime USDA employees, they were also, more specifically, veterans of the Extension Service, at the state, federal, and international levels, who had been instrumental in adapting domestic rural extension to the international context in the wake of the Second World War. Mayer thus took a great deal of his guidance and inspiration from extension work as practiced in rural America and in other countries.<sup>77</sup>

Mayer's debt to agricultural extension went beyond theory: it was manifest in the practices and people his project involved. While they recruited most of the project staff from the local area, beginning in the spring of 1948, Mayer and his associates also employed a set of rural life specialists from the United States, among them Horace Holmes, an agricultural extension agent from Tennessee. Holmes was the only one of these experts to remain with the project for the first two full years. "Holmes brought to our work his experience as a county agent of the United States Department of Agriculture's extension program... The significance of his contribution is illustrated in part by some of his reports and stirring talks to his trainees," excerpts of which Mayer included in his book on the project. It is worth noting that, after his time with the pilot project, Holmes went to work for the Point IV program in India.<sup>78</sup>

India's program, spearheaded by Mayer, was subsequently adopted all over the country, with financial assistance from the Ford Foundation. The Foundation's representative in India was none other than Douglas Ensminger, the aforementioned extension rural sociologist, who in effect inherited Mayer's program, the one his ideas, advice, and writings had helped shape.<sup>79</sup> Ensminger published one of the earliest guides to community development, which he saw as essentially the same as extension work. Indeed, in his book, he

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77. *Contribution of Extension Toward War-Torn Countries*, see n. 4; *Extension Around the World*, see n. 4; Brunner, Sanders, and Ensminger, see n. 65; Sanders and Ensminger, see n. 72; Wilson Papers; Wilson Collection.

78. Mayer, see n. 75, p. 36.

79. "Douglas Ensminger, 79, a Sociologist, Dies," see n. 68; Ensminger OH.

used the phrases “community development” and “extension education” interchangeably. While he never defined “community development” explicitly, by defining process and method in terms of extension principles, practices, and goals, he essentially made them equivalent. S.K. Dey, the Indian Minister of Community Development, had a slightly more specific definition:

Community Development is a phrase which has gained wide currency in recent years. In the advanced countries of the world it has meant activities of people in local groups and communities wherein they gather together over common specialised interests through which they find democratic expression for their energy and aspirations. In the under-developed countries, the concept has grown beyond the borders of specialisations. India's programme of Community Development ...encompasses Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Irrigation, Cooperation, Public Health, Education, Social Education, Communications, Village Industries, Panchayats and Local Self-Government, in fact, all aspects of life that relate to the 82 per cent of India's teeming population [living in villages].<sup>80</sup>

Dey's definition highlighted the technical aspects of the program as they applied to different phases of village life, but Ensminger's subsequent chapters focused less on the nitty gritty of solving particular problems, whether agricultural, home economic, or civic, and more on the human aspects of getting people to change their practices. “[E]xtension is education and... its purpose is to change attitudes and practices of the people with whom the work is done. The guiding philosophy of extension work should always be the development of the village family in its relationship to the village and the rest of its world.”<sup>81</sup> Extension work and community development were thus closely linked, if not equivalent.

While there was a fair bit of discussion in the late 1950s about the differences—and whether there were any—between extension work and community development, most analysts decided that there were more similarities and commonalities than there were meaningful divergences. In general, extension work tended to focus more on the individual and the family as the units of development, while community development emphasized the group; and extension was less centralized in its organization and less closely tied to govern-

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80. Ensminger, *Guide to Community Development*, see n. 72, p. 1.

81. *ibid.*, p. 6. Emphasis in original.

ment than community development programs tended to be. Nonetheless, commentators saw both processes as having the same goals and almost identical methods, and that trying to differentiate one from the other was almost completely beside the point. In its most general sense, then, community development, executed through extension work, involved “changing the outlook of village people and ... motivating them to want and to accept improved and new ways of living as well as improved and new ways of making a living.”<sup>82</sup>

Changing people’s outlooks and attitudes was the aim of what Ensminger and Dey called “social education” (and what also appeared as “social work education” in other formulations), and it formed the foundation of the Indian community development and extension program. It essentially involved teaching a new worldview to the subjects of development, whether individuals, families, or communities. It was how one began the development process, the means of unleashing the forces of modernization on a group of people standing outside the flow. Underdeveloped people were in a way seen as outside of history: they did not change, they were bound by tradition, and they saw no future different from the past and the present. Social education was a rather fuzzy term for teaching these people about change, about possibility, about ambition: in other words, teaching them a set of western values that would be important assets on the road to modernization, industrialization, and economic development.

While the concept of social education—the idea that, to improve local conditions, reformers needed to first effect a change in local attitudes and desires—was hardly a new aspect of extension work, it had never before been articulated in such a coherent manner, nor inhabited such a central place in extension teachings. As we saw in chapters one and two, at the turn of the twentieth century, progressive reformers were fixated on helping rural people adopt modern ways of thinking and behaving alongside improved techniques and practices—the two went hand in hand. But, while they often spoke of “awakening” the country people to

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82. Joseph DiFranco, “Differences between Extension Education and Community Development,” October 1958, Wilson Papers, Box 14, Folder 5; Arthur Theodore Mosher, *Varieties of Extension Education and Community Development*, Cornell University Comparative Extension Publication 2 (Ithaca: Rural Education Department, New York State College of Agriculture, 1958). The quote is from Ensminger, *Guide to Community Development*, see n. 72, p. 13.

the prospects and opportunities of modern living, they expected to do so by way of these modern methods. Through demonstration, a county agent might prove to the community that a new farm management plan was practicable, or that cultivating a garden was a wise investment; and a change in attitudes would come about through witnessing and personal contact. The technique came first, the attitude second. But in international development work, changing attitudes and outlooks was the first and fundamental step, the one upon which all subsequent work was founded. The conversion process happened first, and the new and improved methods would follow. In the community development paradigm, shocking “traditional” people out of apathy, awakening them from centuries of stagnation, was the primary goal. Once they experienced this change in outlook, they would naturally be more inclined to take up modern methods, be they social, economic, or political.

The Ford Foundation’s financial support helps to explain why the community ideas that fell out of favor in programs like IFYE, administered by the U.S. government, were more readily retained in the international extension efforts of former USDA employees like Wilson and Ensminger. Although the Ford Foundation was interested in promoting democracy around the world, it went about it in a different way from the State Department and the USDA. For this international philanthropy the stakes were somewhat different. It may have been an ally in the cold war struggle for American hegemony, but it was not the primary combatant, and its interest in fostering international peace and understanding endured, even as it encountered the third world. It did not feel the same pressure to de-emphasize the community aspects of its development programs as a means of contrasting them with Soviet schemes. Eager to get its hands on experts who might be able to carry out its overseas mission, the foundation turned the demise of the BAE into something of a revolving door for extension specialists seeking a second career. Ford thus provided a context for communitarian rural sociology to globalize. Abroad, insulated somewhat from the congressional reaction against New Deal programs, these rural experts turned extension work into community development.



The main difference between the international extension programs that retained a community focus and the development efforts that went the way of IFYE had to do with how they positioned the rural in relation to the rest of society. As the case of IFYE showed, over the course of the 1950s and '60s, many rural development efforts began to see the increase in agricultural output and material consumption as the primary measures of improvement, in ways that reflected an increasing belief that a modern society could not be a rural society, and that farming was not so much a way of life as it was an economic sector that supported more important industrial transformations. While improving rural life for rural people ceased to be the central goal of most of the U.S.'s modernizing missions overseas, the village development programs formulated in India in cooperation with American extension experts and the Ford Foundation continued to believe that most Indians would live in villages, and would support themselves through agriculture. While increasing agricultural yields and productivity was certainly a major goal of Ford projects in Asia, the program's leaders continually spoke of the quality of life of village people, and equated India's villages with the nation itself. In these international extension efforts, then, rural modernity survived in one form, even as it was disappearing as a category at home.

### CONCLUSION: ENDLESS DEVELOPMENT?

The years following the Second World War saw the emergence of a new theory of development, in which the negotiation of an alternate future for rural people, developed in rural landscapes according to rural needs, and centered on farming as a culture and way of life, began to disappear as an aim. The new view of agricultural development that arose in its place was expressed concisely in 1949 by a representative of the new Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations at the second extension conference on postwar international work.

Real progress consists of an increase in agricultural production per person on the land. This leads to improved nutrition among rural people, more products for sale to city people, and more and better manufactured goods for use in farm living and production. These, in turn, lead to a further increase in production per person on farms. Improvement, once started, tends to continue indefinitely. There is no end-point in agricultural development.<sup>83</sup>

The FAO's depiction of endless development provides an interesting counterpoint to the ideas of community, conservation, health, and wholeness that characterized the previous chapter. Nowhere in this description was there any reference to the well-being of rural life on its own terms, or the state of the land upon which farmers depended. Health was measured by nutritional factors, and conservation was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps most surprisingly, no mention was made of how expanding farm production might affect prices and individual farmers' ability to survive in this new world of endless growth—a lacuna that represented the photonegative of the critiques of capitalist production and expanding output that agricultural experts felt had led to the Great Depression. The contrast between this ascendant view of rural development as agricultural development alone, and of the increase in farm production as the driver of a positive feedback loop of prosperity, consumption, and ever-expanding economic growth, and the view it replaced, of rural improvement focused on the health of rural communities and their inhabitants, both human and nonhuman, could hardly have been greater.

Between its articulation in 1949 and the publication of Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* in 1960, extension work became an international phenomenon, due in part to the communitarian focus that was fading from the spotlight. When Truman announced his program for postwar international relations in 1949, he was essentially describing an extension service for the world. The FAO itself was merely one example of this explosion of extension efforts across the globe: that same year, Norris E. Dodd, the FAO's Director General, described his organization as “an international extension agency.”<sup>84</sup> Extension could make claims to

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83. Ralph W. Phillips, “Essential Steps in National Agricultural Development,” in *Conference Report on Extension Experiences Around the World* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951), p. 6.

84. Brunner and Yang, see n. 65, p. v.

universality because of the cultural contributions of communitarian rural social scientists like M. L. Wilson, and the elaboration of extension techniques such as teaching downtrodden people to aim for new heights into concepts like Ensminger's "social education." These notions assumed both a degree of commonality among rural folk the world over, and a degree of difference that would require teaching new ways of thinking and behaving. Furthermore, extension's template for development could attract the attention of both the U.S. government and the Ford Foundation because of its democratizing nature, which became an important weapon in waging the cold war in the rural landscapes of the third world.

But in Wilson's and Ensminger's descriptions of extension's democratic structure, culturally pluralist philosophy, and developmental aims, were the seeds of a set of ideas that helped to destabilize the community approach they everywhere espoused, and that changed the practice of rural development in the postwar years, as we saw with IFYE. As the authors of the new postwar outpouring of extension books like *Farmers of the World* admitted, and as experiences around the world amply demonstrated, rural people were not everywhere alike. Rather, for the purposes of extension work, they fell into three categories: nonliterate peoples, peasant societies, and Euro-American types. This classification, despite its articulation under a mantle of rural universalism, implied a hierarchy, a progression of societies across history in which the Euro-American type was clearly the end point. As extension broadened its gaze from the war-torn countries of Europe to the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa, the notion that rural people everywhere were all the same was increasingly difficult to sustain. Small differences in social organization and land tenure that Americans observed in Europe widened into chasms when they were confronted with the differences of race, caste, religion, custom, and practices that obtained in the developing world. The career of IFYE illustrates how the classifications that appeared in *Farmers of the World* were turned into a narrative of development, in which nonliterate peoples became peasants, and peasants became modern agriculturists, and modern agriculturists supported the technological and economic transformations that turned their countries from agrarian soci-

eties into urban-industrial nations. This view was the result of the new model for postwar economic stability, premised on expanding consumption to meet increased agricultural output, as well as the ascendance of modernization theory in economic thought. Under this new rubric for development, the role of agriculture was not to cultivate the land, but to jump-start a broader process of national economic growth that had its endpoint in cities, industry, and consumption. The rural not only supported the urban and the industrial, it was also directed toward them: built into this new narrative was a sense that farm people and rural life would fade ever more into the background, asymptotically approaching zero as per-farm production tended toward infinity. Implicit in this new telos for development was development's flip-side—underdevelopment—and a new doxology for agriculture—growth without end.

This shift away from rural modernity and toward a universal view of national economic development as American development on the world stage was apparent in 4-H's programs, both domestic and international. By the 1970s, 4-H considered itself very much an international movement; in addition to programs like IFYE, it could count youth clubs on the 4-H model in 76 countries around the world.<sup>85</sup> In 1973, the organization officially amended the 4-H pledge to reflect this global perspective. From then on, young people would pledge their heads, hearts, hands, and health not only to their families, their communities, and their nations, but also to their world.<sup>86</sup> This addition was in many ways the culmination of a long international orientation in 4-H club work that connected American rural development to development around the world, and used the 4-H experience as a template for fostering growth elsewhere after World War II.

For the young men and women who took part in the exchange, IFYE consistently proved to be a life-changing experience. The program offered a rare opportunity for rural youth—many of whom had never strayed far from their birthplaces—to travel, to see a world beyond the confines of their home communities.

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85. *World Atlas of 4-H*, see n. 16.

86. Thomas Wessel and Marilyn Wessel, *4-H: An American Idea, 1900–1980, A History of 4-H* (Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Council, 1982).

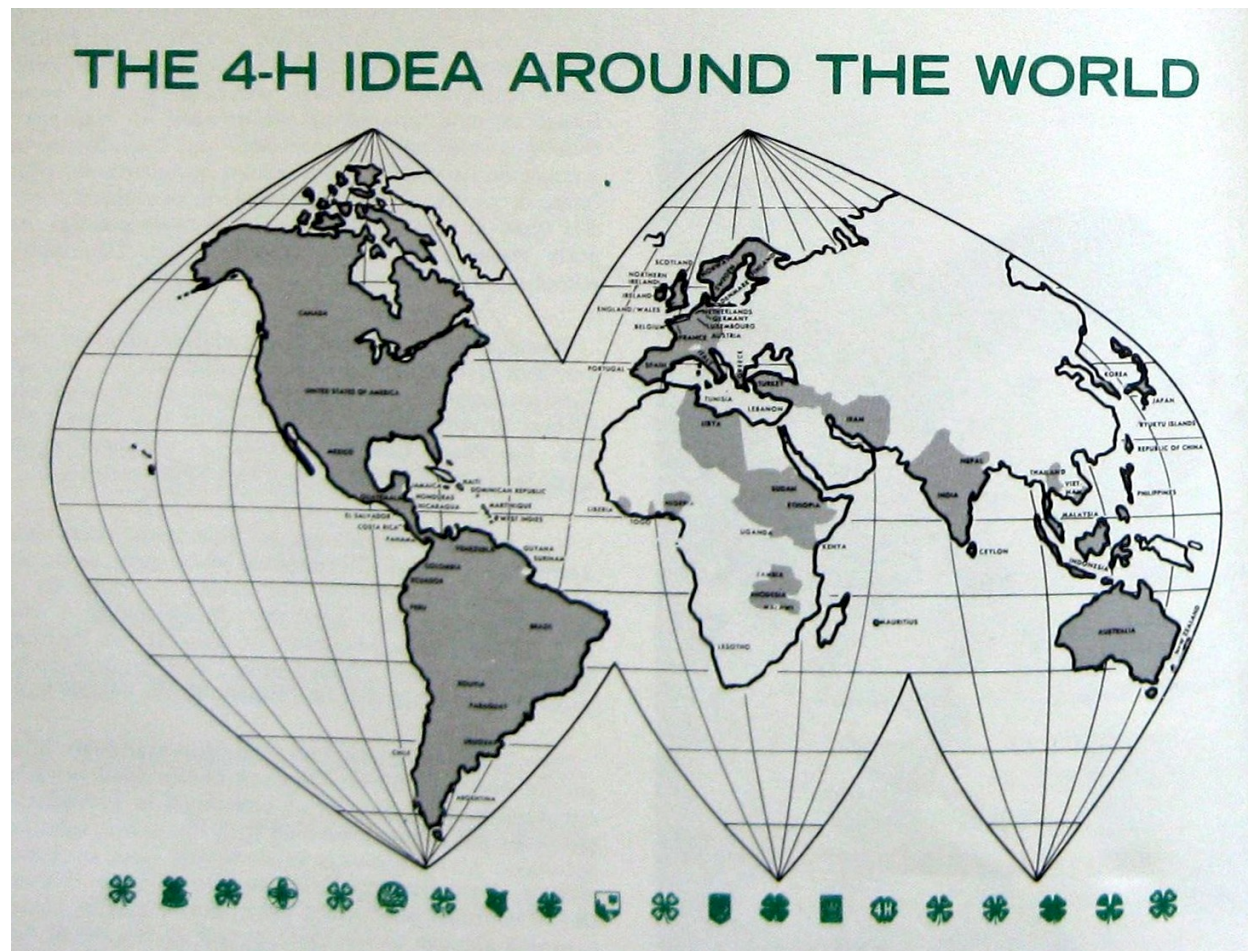


Figure 4: By the 1960s, the map of 4-H activities looked a great deal like the map of U.S. influence in the world. Source: Marilyn Wessel and Kathleen Flom. Begin with a 4-H International Night: Colorful “How-To” Ideas for an Added Dimension in your County 4-H Program. Washington, DC: National 4-H Club Foundation, undated (ca. 1960s). *International 4-H Programs, Volume II. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park. Record Group 33 (Records of the Federal Extension Service) (henceforth cited as I4H II).*

And the things IFYEs saw and did often transformed their futures. Some discovered a passion for travel; others later adopted children from other countries; many went on to careers in international affairs, becoming development experts themselves. Though they expressed it in different ways, IFYEs on the whole came away from their exchanges with a newfound international sensibility that shaped the rest of their lives. In this respect, IFYE remained quite true to its Cornell creators’ aims back in 1946.<sup>87</sup>

87. Joann Campbell and her husband went on to adopt Korean twins; the Tenneys adopted internationally and repeatedly hosted exchange students; nearly every former IFYE to whom I spoke had spent some part of his or her career in international

But this legacy also had an important practical effect that was very much by design. In many ways, IFYE and other 4-H leadership programs like it were aimed not only at the concrete goals of rural development in the U.S. and elsewhere, but also at training the next generation of Extension specialists for the growing number of positions in agencies of international development, as well as the extension-type programs the USDA was helping set up around the world. From the 4-H club leader to the state club agent, the national coordinator to the international ambassador, 4-H and IFYE were training the development leaders of the future, both in the United States and elsewhere. 4-H's international programs positioned rural youth as the important diplomats of the postwar era: IFYEs could promote peace and understanding *because* they were young, because, like the countries to which they increasingly traveled, they were at an earlier stage of "development." Under this evolutionary model, the "traditional" societies of the world could benefit from the same scientific training that Extension had brought to American farmers in the first half of the 20th century. 4-H could therefore look to America's past to guide its hand in aiding the developing world in the future—and its "grassroots ambassadors" became the shock troops of modernization.

Thus, just as 4-H had attempted to convert American farm youth to scientific agriculture in its early years, after the war it looked to do the same for youth in other countries. However, as it moved onto the global stage, 4-H and its international programs in turn reshaped the way 4-H conceived of itself at home. America's cities and industries were growing quickly, but the decline of urban centers due to the flight to suburbs—not from rural areas but from the cities themselves—was not foreseen by wartime thinkers. In this new postwar context, the concerns of rural America in the early 20th century—poverty, poor health, declining incomes—were fast becoming urban problems as well, particularly for a population 4-H had largely ignored: the minority poor. Although the movement toward family, nation, and market that characterized

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development work. Jones, *Letters from Finland*, see n. 23; *Interview with Richard and May Lou Tenney*, see n. 17; *Telephone interview with Sue Benedetti* (2009).

postwar development thinking and practices tended to downplay the role of the community, as the case of community development shows, the rural sociological ideas of culture and community that we saw in chapter three endured in certain international development efforts. These programs were rediscovered by American urban reformers in the 1950s and '60s, and re-imported as a part of urban renewal programs. Extension itself began to look to urban areas as well, seeing these places as equally ripe for "development" as rural places overseas. By the 1960s and 1970s, then, 4-H was no longer just a corn-and-canning club for farm kids. It was a "youth development program," one that could be implemented to improve young people in any landscape, in any part of the world. After World War II, America's farm boys and girls went around the world, came back, and landed not in rural villages, but in the cities, and the suburbs.

## 5

## Foreign Aid in Reverse:

## Urban Extension and the Underdeveloped City

For it was as if East Harlem, in effect, had been decreed a backward and deprived country, financially apart from our normal national life.... Eventually, much as the generosity of a rich nation might well extend massive aid to a deprived and backward country, into this district poured massive 'foreign' aid, according to decisions by absentee experts from the remote continent inhabited by housers and planners.<sup>1</sup>

—Jane Jacobs, 1961

In our cities, the complexities of modern living, the drawn-out tensions of the cold war, and the apparent remoteness from sources of power and decision have diminished the capacity of many urban people to deal effectively with their environment and have left an apathy as stultifying as that found by Mayer in Etawah. What I am proposing is simply that we go after this fog of apathy with a good strong gust of extension—the old fashioned kind—that was sharpened, adopted, and found so productive in Etawah in faraway India. It is the kind that includes not merely better agricultural and home managing methods, but fundamental awakening and alerting of the hearts and minds of people—the exciting, challenging kind that inspired the nation's first county agents a half century ago.<sup>2</sup>

—Bernard E. Loshbough, 1961

## INTRODUCTION: EXTENSION'S MAGIC TOUCH

In April of 1961, Bernard E. Loshbough, the executive director of a Pittsburgh urban renewal organization called ACTION-Housing, spoke to a gathering of extension workers at the Southwestern Regional Administrative Conference of the Pennsylvania State University's Cooperative Extension Service. His remarks outlined a vision for extension work that could meet the challenges of the postwar era. "[T]he rural community and the urban community are fast disappearing as separate entities," Loshbough observed. "These

1. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Modern Library, 1961; 1963), p. 307.

2. Bernard E. Loshbough, "Rural Extension Techniques Getting Try in Pittsburgh Self-Help Renewal Area," *Journal of Housing* 18, no. 4 (May 1961): 199–203, p. 202.



communities—rural and urban—are rapidly becoming one homogenous society, spurred by the same goals, buffeted by the same business cycle, informed by the same television commentators, and interlaced by the same expressways.” City and country people in America were alike as never before.<sup>3</sup>

But these changes were not without their problems—in fact, postwar conditions posed a new set of challenges, both for urban reformers like Loshbough and for the extension workers to which he spoke. With the drastic demographic changes the United States experienced in the wake of the Second World War—the massive influx of people to cities and suburbs, the decline of urban infrastructure and the physical environment of city centers, the rise of delinquency and racial tensions, the prevalence of poverty in the midst of affluence and abundance—both rural and urban reformers had something to worry about. As Loshbough pointed out, these were conditions the Extension Service had in part helped to create, by increasing American agricultural efficiency and “making it possible for fewer farmers to produce more food.” But, now that urban and rural reformers had similar interests, they could benefit by pooling their knowledge and resources. The two groups had a lot to learn from one another.<sup>4</sup>

To illustrate what he was envisioning, Loshbough told the story of Albert Mayer, the New York real estate developer we met in chapter four, whose pilot village development project in Etawah, Uttar Pradesh, India had attracted so much attention, not just in international development circles, but among urban planners as well. Mayer’s innovation—to create “a new social and economic atmosphere” alongside an improved physical environment—was, Loshbough observed, not really an innovation at all: it was what county agents had been doing in the United States since the early 1900s. During the four years he himself had spent in India working with extension agents on these community development projects, he had seen “their magic touch at work. I watched it awaken a desire in people for a better life; help them help themselves to acquire new skills; and

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3. Loshbough, “Rural Extension Techniques,” see n. 2, p. 199.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

assist them to use these skills cooperatively” to improve their communities. “Think what could be done in the rich and educated land that is America, if the Etawah approach—the traditional agricultural extension approach—could be put to work in all parts of our nation.”<sup>5</sup>

In the 1960s, the Extension Service had begun a concerted effort to include urban areas in its purview, and Loshbough’s appeal was emblematic of extension’s growing focus on non-rural places and people. This movement was partially the result of changing demographics: as Loshbough pointed out, and as his audience was no doubt painfully aware, only 30 percent of Americans still lived in rural areas, and that number was declining rapidly. Even in Pennsylvania’s most remote counties, extension staff were finding themselves spending a quarter of their time on urban problems; in the counties that were home to Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, rural issues had effectively ceased to be part of their purview.<sup>6</sup>

But the mass migration to metropolitan areas—and, in the postwar period especially, their fringes—was not the only driver of the USDA’s increasing interest in cities. International programs like IFYE forced 4-H and extension more broadly to reconsider their domestic role and revisit their founding principles. In particular, 4-H’s sojourn abroad had opened the organization up to new ways in which it might put its methods to use in helping groups of people “make the best better.” If the Extension Service—and 4-H especially—was aimed at developing human and natural resources for the good of the nation, particularly in places that were lagging behind the curve of progress, then in postwar America, the problems of “underdevelopment” were on stark display in the nation’s cities. Poverty, ill health, tenancy, declining incomes, children and families in distress: these hallmarks of rural distress at the turn of the twentieth century were by the 1950s nowhere more apparent than in the declining centers of American cities.<sup>7</sup>

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5. Loshbough, “Rural Extension Techniques,” see n. 2, pp. 201–202.

6. Ibid., p. 199.

7. Roger Biles, *The Fate of Cities: Urban America and the Federal Government, 1945–2000* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011); Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933–1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City* (Columbus:

This chapter takes a step back from 4-H in particular in order to follow efforts to establish extension work more generally in urban areas in the postwar period in ways that, as Loshbough suggested, drew heavily on the lessons it learned from its activities abroad. More than being contemporaneous with international programs, urban extension was a direct result of the same impulses, as well as a domestic proving ground for postwar ideas about development. Drawing on the experiences of IFYEs, extension leaders, and administrators involved with international programs, the Extension Service trained a new, globally educated eye on the domestic arena, and saw opportunities for it to broaden its influence at home as well as abroad. As it expanded into cities and suburbs, extension work continued to draw on the funding streams that had proved so advantageous in supporting its international work, in particular the Ford Foundation, as well as a blend of public and private financing. And, like its international programs, urban extension depended on a “cultural” approach to dealing with people that took into account the differences between the canonical rural American family—presumed to be white and middle-class—and the people it worked with—often poor and of color—as a basis for initiating programs. In so doing, it assumed a set of similarities between these groups that was upheld by analogy, theory, and policy.

In addition to the superficial similarities between third-world peasants and American ghetto-dwellers—namely their poverty and the color of their skin—a new set of comparisons emerged that likened the attitudes, outlooks, and psychology of these two groups. New social scientific theories about poverty, racial strife, and juvenile delinquency drew strong analogies between the ways of life of destitute villagers in India and Mexico, and those of the American inner-city underclass, and even argued that poverty itself, more than ethnic or racial or national heritage, defined a culture shared by them all. This “culture of poverty” became a new tool for thinking about poor people worldwide, and suggested to Americans

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Ohio State University Press, 1993); Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940–1985* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

interested in urban reform that, like research on poverty itself, methods of working with third-world villagers might be fruitfully applied to the domestic urban context.

In particular, the paradigm of community development—which extension had a hand in elaborating internationally during the 1940s and 1950s—came to the forefront of urban renewal efforts in the 1960s and 1970s. It was used both by the Extension Service as it modified its programs and methods to better serve urban and low-income people, and by urban reform groups who sought to incorporate extension methods into their toolkit. Community development was an appealing model for dealing with urban issues for several reasons. Though heavily indebted to extension education's emphasis on assisting individuals and families with problems immediately related to their home life and livelihood, community development stressed social action to ameliorate a host of locally defined problems through building community organizations and making government more attentive to community needs. In a context where the family unit was often less stable than, or looked quite different from, the farmer-farmer's wife-farm children grouping extension agents were accustomed to, this group approach seemed more applicable. Community development was also better suited to the social patterns of inner cities, where the neighborhood was often the most salient feature of community life.

Central to these intellectual and programmatic developments around poverty, extension education, and community development were two entities with a vested interest in both international development and urban renewal: the Ford Foundation, and the federal government under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. The Ford Foundation, whose financial support was so essential to the establishment of extension in places like South Asia, and its absorption into the community development paradigm, played a key role in disseminating these models and methods. It did this by supporting academic research that brought together extension education, community development, and urban renewal objectives; by providing grants to community organizations like ACTION-Housing that aimed to field-test these methods, in the hope that they would become models for

federal urban renewal and anti-poverty programs; and by serving as a meeting ground for people working in the otherwise disparate sectors of agricultural extension, international development, and urban reform. In particular, contacts between its International Education Division (which funded such projects as IFYE and the Indian village development program) and its Public Affairs Program (which focused on domestic urban problems) helped introduce people like Bernie Loshbough to extension methods as applied in the international context.

The federal government's international and urban programs also served as a nexus of people and techniques that allowed these analogies—both theoretical and practical—between underdeveloped countries and inner cities to gain traction, and even become instantiated in programs and institutions. As urban problems mounted in the 1950s and '60s, they took on increasing importance as a national political issue, which led President Kennedy to place them front and center alongside national security concerns and the Cold War. Solving domestic urban problems—and the racial and economic problems they often stood in for or reflected—became an important aspect of federal activity in the '60s, as Lyndon Johnson ushered in his Great Society. Like the Ford Foundation, the U.S. government saw in international development a possible solution to these domestic problems as well. Community development thus became an important strategy for furthering democracy at home as well as abroad, and was incorporated into Great Society programs and the War on Poverty.

As community development's individual and neighborhood tactics replaced urban renewal's metropolitan approach as the primary framework for addressing urban problems, extension's efforts on the rural, international, and urban fronts came to resemble one another more closely, presenting instead a more unified picture of "extension education" that was neither rural, nor international, nor urban, but placeless and universal. While this vision had its own power—namely, a broad applicability that allowed it to spread far and wide—it ceased to function as an arbiter of rural modernity. Extension's vision of locally negotiated moder-

nity survived, but in a far different form, one that had shed its rural habiliments in favor of much more cosmopolitan attire.

There were two means by which extension lent its “magic touch” to the urban context. The first was through the Extension Service itself, which began to reexamine its rural mission in the wake of postwar demographic changes and an increasing demand for its services among urban and suburban residents. The second was through urban reform channels, most notably the Ford Foundation’s Public Affairs Program and its grantees, which aimed to promulgate a new vision of urban revitalization based on methods borrowed from extension. The former method pushed the Extension Service towards promoting better consumption alongside improved production in ways that reshaped its rural programs as well. Urban reformers’ adoption and adaptation of international extension methods, on the other hand, resulted in a community-focused product that was in many ways more similar to the ideas of Country Lifers in the early years of extension work. In the urban context, the ideals of rural modernity found a new home, though without their original rural trappings.

This chapter begins with an overview of the postwar demographic changes that brought urban affairs into the national spotlight, and the social-scientific thinking that arose in response. It then examines the two means by which extension ideas were incorporated into urban improvement work. It deals first with “extension in urban areas”—the Extension Service’s term for its slowly emerging efforts to bring its skills to bear on cities and suburbs. After outlining the process by which Extension decided that it could and should expand its purview to include all Americans, regardless of where they lived, it turns to the signature program for which the Extension Service received federal funding: the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, or EFNEP. EFNEP illustrates how efforts to address the global problem of hunger were incorporated into domestic food assistance programs, and demonstrates the growing consumer orientation of Extension and the USDA in this period.

Secondly, this chapter describes how urban reformers drew on international extension work—particularly community development—to formulate what they called “urban extension.” With the help of the Ford Foundation, organizations like Bernie Loshbough’s ACTION-Housing discovered extension work as refracted through the lens of international development, and implemented it for community action in inner-city neighborhoods. Although clearly quite different from early extension work at the dawn of the twentieth century, their efforts reflected a set of continuities with Country-Life concerns that resulted from their exposure to international, rather than domestic, extension in the 1950s and ’60s. It was in these domestic community development programs that important aspects of rural modernity and cultivationist development survived.

### THE POSTWAR CONTEXT

Given the demographic, technological, economic, and social changes that swept America in the wake of World War II, it is perhaps inevitable that extension work would find its way into cities. However, the process by which this happened was slow. Although extension officials began talking about the possibility of expanding their work into cities and suburbs as early as the 1940s, turning urban extension into a reality took time, money, legislative will, and popular support. Though the nation’s urban/rural balance had long since shifted away from farms, settlement patterns alone did not account for the emergence of urban extension work, nor did the occasional clamoring for the broadening of extension to city folk by private citizens, vocal philanthropists, and even elected officials throughout the 1940s and ’50s. It was not until the social, economic, and physical conditions in American cities had worsened so deeply, the ranks of the urban chronically poor had swollen so greatly, and domestic poverty, hunger, and racial conflict had become issues of national action and political import that the “urban crisis” of the 1960s left its mark on the Extension Service. Even as popular and political support for social welfare programs, such as those of the Great Society, burgeoned in the 1960s, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, notoriously conservative and slow to change, was far more

interested in disposing of the enormous surplus of agricultural commodities that had resulted from the post-war explosion of mechanized, chemical-intensive farming than it was in helping the nation's poor, urban or rural. It was not until after a legislative appropriation for extension work with low-income urban residents was passed in 1968 that extension in urban areas took a firm hold.

The adoption of extension as a model for urban reform was not only hindered by money and political will; it also was slowed by a lack of apparent commonality between what it was the Extension Service did and what city dwellers needed. The ability for extension workers and urban reformers to see the common interests and purpose Loshbough spoke of in his address at Penn State depended on a set of transformations in extension that resulted from its journey overseas, in particular to the developing world. There, as we saw in chapter four, it was received as a program for improving the lives of poor people of color living in conditions of hopelessness, destitution, and apathy, and giving them the motivation and desire for a better life for themselves and their communities, as well as the tools and knowledge to do so. It was not until the “urban crisis” of the 1960s that these parallels between the lives of the third-world peasant and the destitute ghetto dweller became so striking as to be unignorable—and to suggest similar efforts to ameliorate them.

Crucial to the discovery (or, perhaps, invention) of these parallels was a growing social-scientific literature on urban issues, developed largely outside the land-grant complex, but quickly seized upon by extension workers who were beginning to encounter segments of society that had been almost entirely outside their purview: the extremely poor, people of color, people living in deteriorating inner cities. As 4-H sought to adapt its programs to the urban context, it drew on literature about juvenile delinquency and poverty, two issues that received enormous academic attention in the postwar decades. This section outlines the changes in American demographics after World War II and the social scientific research that facilitated Extension's arrival in urban areas.



## COUNTRY, CITY, AND SUBURB IN POSTWAR AMERICA

World War II brought enormous changes to the American city. Wartime production had brought a surge in urban populations, as people—particularly African Americans leaving the South—flocked to northern industrial cities for employment in industries related to the war effort. This “Second Great Migration” of the 1940s led to a housing crisis in most urban centers, one that was particularly acute among people of color. Because of such formal discriminatory practices as redlining and restrictive covenants that barred blacks from many neighborhoods, and the more informal but uniform racism of higher rents, lower wages, and poorer facilities, most African Americans found themselves stuck in the most run-down enclaves of the city, under highly crowded conditions, without the ability to move to a more desirable location. As blacks moved into a low-rent area, whites generally left for other parts of the city, which they were able to do because their movements were not restricted by housing policy. Though low property values and dilapidated conditions were usually what enabled African Americans to establish a foothold in an area, not the other way around, many city dwellers—including housing officials, urban planners, and municipal representatives—came to see the presence of a single black tenant as the harbinger of a neighborhood’s inevitable decline, regardless of housing conditions. These concentrated but expanding ghettos came to signal for many white urban residents that the American city had reached its apogee, and was beginning to wane.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time that growing black populations were pushing many white urbanites to seek greener pastures, the suburbs at the edges of metropolitan areas were booming, offering for many middle-class whites an alternative to crowded city living. The new and rapidly expanding suburbs promised proximity to nature, home ownership, a clean and sanitary environment, uniformity—an affordable arcadia, an American Dream for the masses. With an automobile in every driveway, returning GIs and their families could have the

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8. Teaford, see n. 7; Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Biles, see n. 7; Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949–1962* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1964); Jacobs, see n. 1.

comfort of the country within an easy drive of the city. Government loans and other incentives, combined with new mass-production methods of construction that lowered prices, made home ownership attainable for a vast majority of Americans.<sup>9</sup> City dwellers were not the only ones migrating to the suburbs: many rural residents found their pull equally alluring. Although rural outmigration had not declined since the Depression, after the war it increased dramatically. Many people had found wartime jobs in cities and remained. Technological changes in agriculture, accelerated by the war effort, had reduced the manpower necessary to operate a large farm. With new machinery, farm consolidation, and the rise of agribusiness, many farmers were pushed out of business. Many farm families left the countryside in search of other employment, mostly in cities and suburbs. Those who wished to remain in a semi-rural environment usually ended up in suburban areas.<sup>10</sup>

The dawn of the atomic age also catalyzed suburban growth. In an era where a nuclear bomb could eliminate an entire city in a single blow, population dispersal became an important strategy for national defense. Eisenhower's National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956 was the ultimate expression of these common goals of decentralized settlement, automobility, and national security. The resulting interstate highway system, constructed largely over the course of the next decade or so, changed the ways Americans lived and moved around. Families could live in the urban fringe and commute to the central city to work; and, increasingly, industries also moved out of central cities, along the same lines of national defense, as well as the economic incentives of building in less densely settled areas with lower tax burdens for services. The national move towards decentralization, with federal subsidization, stimulated suburban growth across the country, and middle-class whites left the cities in droves for homes in the nation's new suburban developments. In

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9. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

10. David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 244-249.

the late 1940s and 1950s, then, the suburbs, not the cities, seemed to be the symbol of the future.<sup>11</sup>

As those of means—mostly middle-class whites—moved out of urban centers, those with fewer economic opportunities—mostly African Americans and other minorities, who had migrated to city centers during the war in search of work—remained. As central cities deflated and income left, so did businesses and industries, leading to a serious crisis in America's urban centers. Public transportation suffered drastic cuts in service, as streetcar lines were torn up to facilitate automobile traffic. Those who could not move were left in place. Poverty was rampant, and employment opportunities were few. The growing concentrations of African Americans, and a new influx of immigrants from places like Puerto Rico in the 1950s, changed the complexion of urban America. The new pattern was typified by, in Eric Avila's memorable phrase, "chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs."<sup>12</sup>

Municipalities and the federal government tried to step in to stem the tide of urban blight in the '40s and '50s, hoping to "redevelop" and "renew" central cities. However, most of their efforts were aimed not at helping those in poverty improve their own areas, but rather at razing "blighted" areas, relocating their residents, and building something new in their place, hopefully attracting a more "desirable" set of residents. Most of these efforts simply displaced communities, pushing a slum from one place to another, rather than improving living situations for poor minorities with few housing options open to them. By constructing new public housing projects, many urban planners hoped to address these problems, but even new projects rarely replaced the units lost by razing the land for their construction, and usually public housing ended up displacing more families than it housed.<sup>13</sup>

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11. Jackson, see n. 9; Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

12. Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

13. Miles L. Colean, *Renewing Our Cities* (Baltimore: The Lord Baltimore Press, 1953); Jacobs, see n. 1; Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer*, see n. 8; Avila, see n. 12.

By the 1960s, the urban crisis was so severe that many observers likened the urban ghetto to a foreign country. Race riots and violence ignited in a host of cities during the summer of 1965. Even Jane Jacobs, perhaps the most prominent critic of 1950s urban renewal programs, compared federal urban renewal efforts in downtrodden inner-city neighborhoods to foreign aid in developing countries: both, she argued, were administered by distant experts, more concerned with statistics and accounting than with on-the-ground needs and realities. “I hope we disburse foreign aid abroad more intelligently than we disburse it at home,” she quipped.<sup>14</sup>

Cities, the symbols of modernity and progress in prewar America, thus became in the years following World War II emblematic of decline, decay, and regression rather than pinnacles of the future—and they were increasingly likened to foreign spaces, both in terms of their tensions and problems, and in terms of their ethnic composition. Technological and demographic changes, Cold War defense policy, postwar reconversion, and federal housing aid—all favored decentralization, the suburbs, and the automobile. This ushered in a new set of community patterns in American cities, and led to decaying inner cities, their residents increasing mired in poverty, with rising rates of juvenile delinquency and crime. These were America’s new landless peasantry, in the midst of what was once seen as the triumph of industrial civilization.<sup>15</sup>

As one of the country’s most pressing domestic problems, the urban crisis attracted a great deal of attention, both welcome and unwelcome. Seeking to discredit the West in the intensifying Cold War, the Soviet Union pointed to racial unrest in American cities, and the broader problem of inequality in America, as evidence that the U.S. was hypocritical: despite what it professed, its freedoms were not for all. The federal government, interested in minimizing such unfavorable assessments, and seeing the management of the related crises of race and cities in America as important foreign as well as domestic policy issues, was

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14. Jacobs, see n. 1, p. 307.

15. Nico Slate, “Reflections of Freedom: Race, Caste, and the Shared Struggle for Democracy in the United States and India, 1914–1965” (Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, 2009).

ready to intervene to improve urban conditions. In the meantime, urban planners and reformers sought new ways to address the multiplying problems of the city, and new approaches that would encourage—or at least seem to encourage—the democratic participation of urban residents in urban renewal programs. It was in this context that extension methods emerged as a potent model for urban reform.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, 4-H club work in particular, and extension work in general, offered established methods for addressing two related problems that were of particular import in urban affairs in the postwar years. The first was juvenile delinquency, the symptoms of which—including gang activity, truancy, crime, violence, and drug use—were increasingly visible in the public eye beginning in the 1940s, and the causes of which were hotly debated in the postwar years. The second problem was the broader issue of urban poverty, which was on the rise due to the changing demographic and construction patterns described above. Encouraged by private citizens, legislators, and philanthropists to try their hand at applying extension methods to address these urban issues, extension administrators eventually found a way to make their work relevant to a new cadre of clients and reformers. As they did so, they relied on a growing literature on both poverty and juvenile delinquency that would shape both their own extension programs, and later federal strategies aimed at renewing America's cities.

#### YOUTH IN THE CITY: JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

In 1955, John Clark—president of the thread-and-zipper manufacturer Coats & Clark, long a sponsor of 4-H award programs—wrote to the Dean of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell with a proposition. Clark was convinced that 4-H club work had the potential to cure the urban ills of juvenile delinquency and poor living conditions that he observed in his home city of New York. In his letter, he pointed out that “there is a great mass of urban young people who are not being exposed to this program

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16. Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Slate, see n. 15.

or to an equivalent program of useful, broadening, educational training in crafts and skills.” He was ready to put forth \$25,000 a year for several years to help Cornell develop a pilot urban 4-H program in New York City or another suitable metropolitan area of the state. As the state club leader expressed it in a letter of intent he drafted in Clark’s name, “we think the 4-H Club program has the basic principles, philosophy and educational aspects that could help suburban and city youth in their adjustment to a more constructive outlook on life and toward society.” If the city was ailing, 4-H had the cure.<sup>17</sup>

Cornell eventually passed on Clark’s offer, but he shopped his money around to several other states, until he found a willing partner in the National Committee on Boys’ and Girls’ Club Work, the private 4-H fundraising organization in Chicago we have encountered before. By 1957, a program was up and running in that city, with the first club located in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, a working-class area adjacent to the stockyards. By 1961, Clark’s 4-H program was operating in public housing projects in an effort to keep kids in school and to combat delinquency.<sup>18</sup>

As John Clark’s proposal made clear, one of the main reasons that 4-H’s administrators saw an opportunity to expand into urban areas was as a corrective and perhaps even preventative of juvenile delinquency. The figure of the juvenile delinquent, famously portrayed in films like *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *West Side Story* (1961), loomed large in American life. In the postwar years, youth were as much a source of fear as they were of promise, and, to many adults, they represented a potential menace. Although juvenile delinquency was by no means an entirely new concern, it appeared to be growing at an alarming rate, and with more violent and destructive consequences that were disrupting urban life. A new set of social theorists emerged to document and uncover the causes of this sudden surge in antisocial youth behavior, building on

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17. John B. Clark to W. I. Meyers, 24 May 1955, Cornell Cooperative Extension Records, 1915–2004, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #21-24-1975 (henceforth cited as CCE), Box 84, Folder 10; Albert Hoefer to Joan Frye, 3 May 1955, CCE, Box 84, Folder 10.

18. The program continued as a separate, urban program until 1970, when Cook County got into the 4-H game and Chicago 4-H was subsumed by the county organization. Thomas Wessel and Marilyn Wessel, *4-H: An American Idea, 1900–1980, A History of 4-H* (Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Council, 1982), chapter 9.

earlier theories of adolescence and juvenile justice to formulate a new set of ideas about juvenile delinquency, which resulted in a new set of policies to address it.

Youth had been a subject of public debate and legal policy since Progressive-Era reforms targeting child labor and establishing juvenile courts to help reform rather than simply punish and incarcerate wayward youth. Social reformers, juvenile court judges, and child development professionals took part in creating a system that would treat children differently from adults, one focused on rehabilitation and guidance. Their ideas about the causes of juvenile delinquency drew on theories of adolescence that educators, scholars, and reformers had put forth at the turn of the century, such as the work of G. Stanley Hall. Though many authors were writing on adolescence in the first half of the twentieth century, they generally agreed that the teenage years constituted a distinct phase of human development, that they were marked by storm and stress as the child attained sexual maturity, transitioned to adulthood, and gained independence from parents, and that this “adjustment” was what needed to be shepherded and guided properly during this fragile period. Problems of adjustment—whether sexual, social, familial, moral, or vocational—could lead to stunted growth and permanent immaturity.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to these commonalities, early twentieth-century theories of adolescence held that the demarcation of the period itself was an artifact of civilization, and especially urban-industrial modernity. “Savage” peoples, without highly developed economies, industry, science, technology, or complex divisions of labor could teach their young all the skills they would need to become productive members of the group; as a result, they attained sexual maturity around the same time that they became integrated or apprenticed into the com-

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19. For more on theories of adolescence and adjustment, see Granville Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904); Granville Stanley Hall, *Youth: Its Education, Regimen, and Hygiene* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1907); Leta S. Hollingsworth, *The Psychology of the Adolescent* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1928); Grace Loucks Elliott, *Understanding the Adolescent Girl* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930); E. DeAlton Partridge, *Social Psychology of Adolescence* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1938); Bert I. Beverly, *In Defense of Children* (New York: The John Day Company, 1941). For more on juvenile justice, see Benjamin Barr Lindsey, *The Problem of the Children and How the State of Colorado Cares for Them* (Denver: The Merchants Publishing Co., 1904); Sharon Carroll, “Elizabeth Lee Vincent Oral History Transcript,” 1964, New York State College of Home Economics Project Oral Histories, 1963–1964, #47-2-O.H. (Henceforth cited as NYSCEPOH), O.H. 108.

munity economy. Children in industrial societies, by contrast, needed to acquire a host of specialized skills, as well as a formal education, in order to become productive citizens; this process took much longer, and required youth to remain in the home, dependent upon their families for their well-being, long beyond the time that humans would “naturally” gain independence. This lag between biological readiness for adulthood and the attainment of economic independence led to all kinds of stress for the adolescent in an industrialized society. In urban areas, the problem was even more severe: while rural youth generally could lend a hand with farm chores, the city’s sharp separation between home and work life meant that children had little opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the family’s livelihood. This could lead to severe frustrations and problems of adjustment.<sup>20</sup>

Although the troubles of adolescence and the problem of delinquency were seen as unique to the West, there were uncanny parallels between American anxieties about the adolescent transition and the political transitions of developing and newly independent nations. Like young adults, these nations themselves were emerging as newly independent entities from under the watchful gaze of their paternalist colonizers; and they, like Western adolescents, stood at an important crossroads. Would they continue on a path towards productive economic (capitalist) engagement with the world, or would they fall prey to subversive (communist) influences, or otherwise fail to properly adjust to the global market society? In these senses, while the delinquency of youth in developing nations was not a primary concern, the potential “juvenile delinquency” of those nations themselves was at stake. This was just one of the ways in which ideas about international development pervaded discussions of urban issues in the postwar U.S.

Because the problems of adolescence were generally more severe in the urban industrial context, it followed that juvenile delinquency was most prevalent there as well. Indeed, the social scientists who worked on juvenile delinquency largely studied it in the urban context. And delinquency had racial and ethnic overtones

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20. Hollingsworth, see n. 19; Elliott, see n. 19; Partridge, see n. 19.



as well. Many of the foundational studies of street society focused on immigrant ethnic enclaves within cities; later work on both delinquency and poverty built on these ideas to argue that, like ethnic neighborhoods, gangs and lower-class people had cultures of their own that were not disorganized, but rather illegible from outside: they made marksense from within. In this sense, too, delinquency was othered in ways that had powerful resonances with development discourse on the international scene.<sup>21</sup>

But while groups such as the Irish and Italians appeared to have been relatively successful in attaining a higher social position, moving themselves consistently upward and out of poverty, darker-skinned groups such as blacks, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans did not seem to be following this pattern in the postwar period. Indeed, former ethnic neighborhoods were becoming “gray areas”—marginal places that were often white neighborhoods that were turning black. Upwardly-mobile white immigrants and second-generation people were moving out of tenement blocks and into better neighborhoods—or sometimes even to suburbs—and blacks and hispanics were moving into these lower-rent districts. At the same time, the processes of gradual assimilation, political enfranchisement, and increasing financial means that had enabled Irish and Italian immigrants to lift themselves out of poverty—the slow achievement of the American dream that many urban social theorists thought was the natural way of things—did not seem operative among these new groups. More direct state intervention seemed necessary.<sup>22</sup>

One of the most influential postwar works on juvenile delinquency was Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin’s *Delinquency and Opportunity*. Like other theorists, Cloward and Ohlin saw juvenile delinquency

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21. See, for example, William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), which took as its subject Boston’s North End. The North End would also figure prominently in Jane Jacobs’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Cloward and Ohlin, authors of an influential book on delinquency (see below), used Whyte’s study as one of their key sources.

22. For more on gray areas, see Alice O’Connor, “Community Action, Urban Reform, and the Fight Against Poverty: The Ford Foundation’s Gray Areas Program,” *Journal of Urban History* 22, no. 5 (July 1996): 586–625; *Metropolis* (New York: The Ford Foundation, 1959). The term “gray areas” is rarely explicitly defined, but appears to have two interrelated meanings: one reflecting the generally depressing character of these parts of cities, and the other reflecting their changing racial composition. The latter meaning is generally implicit, but one observer in 1962 made it explicit, saying “gray areas are so because they are white turning black.” *Urban Extension: Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Urban Extension Conference* (Pittsburgh: ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1962), p. 76.

as a signature product of industrial societies, and one that was particularly severe among lower-class adolescent urban males. However, their theory was distinct in how it focused not so much on the behavior of specific delinquent individuals, but on the formation of particular types of group behavior, which they labeled “delinquent subcultures.” These subcultures—organized around criminal, violent, or retreatist behavior, or some combination of the three—had their own values and hierarchies, and were characterized by a set of goals and incentives that were separate from those of the wider society. The reason these subcultures formed where and among whom they did, Cloward and Ohlin argued, was because of a marked lack of social and economic opportunity for the people living in those places—mostly immigrants and minorities, mostly urban, mostly poor. Cloward and Ohlin made a further point: democracy itself was a culprit. The spirit of achievement, the value of advancement, and the ideal of equal opportunity that went hand in hand with American life, regardless of class status, were what caused lower-class individuals to have the same strivings as middle- and upper-class people. But while their aims were the same as the more fortunate, the poor had far fewer opportunities to attain those goals; as a result, many of the paths to achievement that they saw others pursuing were effectively closed to them. Delinquent subcultures were essentially a way around this seemingly insurmountable hurdle: when legitimate means for advancement were shut off, lower-class groups could turn to alternative, delinquent means, often criminal.<sup>23</sup>

The implications of this idea for the poor—both at home and abroad—were clear. If people’s aspirations outstripped their means, they might turn to unofficial ways of achieving them. This was of special concern for community developers who aimed to teach the huddled masses of the third world to want new things through a process of social education as described in chapter five. If they did not also ensure the means for acquiring or attaining these new needs and wants through increasing those people’s ability to consume, as

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23. Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960).

well as making available products for them to buy, serious international problems could result, and entire citizenries turn to illegitimate, criminal, or even communist means of reconciling their desires and their opportunities.

Also inflecting theories about juvenile delinquency in the 1950s and '60s was the sense that young people themselves were not only behaving in new, incomprehensible, and disruptive ways, but that these behaviors marked the emergence of a distinctive “youth culture” in the United States—a culture that, like delinquent subcultures, was unknowable from the outside, even foreign. American youth appeared to many adults to be in revolt, often in terrifying ways that seemed to threaten adults and even the fabric of society.

Indeed, ideas about juvenile delinquency as a “cultural” (or, in Cloward and Ohlin’s case, “subcultural”) phenomenon were representative of a broader trend in social scientific and policy thinking about cultural groups. As we saw in chapter five, at the close of World War II, anthropological ideas about “culture” had infused the Extension Service’s programs for international agricultural development, a trend that was shared by other government agencies involved in international affairs, including the Point Four program. In these definitions, cultural groups were defined by their outlook and behavior as much as by their background. This idea of “culture” could encompass farmers all over the world, or young people across the United States, or the poor and disadvantaged all over the globe, of city and country alike. Indeed, as we shall see, one of the most critical shifts that took place in extension’s postwar activities was how it defined its clientele; the emergence of an idea about the culture of poverty offered an important replacement for ideas about “farmers of the world.”<sup>24</sup>

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24. *Conference Report on the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-Torn Countries* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1945); *Conference Report on Extension Experiences Around the World* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951); Edmund deS. Brunner, Irwin T. Sanders, and Douglas Ensminger, eds., *Farmers of the World: The Development of Agricultural Extension* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945).

## BATTLING POVERTY WITH THEORY AND PRACTICE

The concept of a distinct culture common to people who were alike, not in ethnic, racial, or national heritage, but in terms of their conditions of life, became a central tool in thinking not just about poor urban youth, but about poor people more generally. An emerging set of theories about the psychological effects of poverty and the “culture” it produced shaped much of postwar Americans’ thinking about the problem of poverty, which by the 1960s seemed so horribly shocking amidst American affluence as to be nearly unbelievable. Most importantly, these ideas found receptive ears in the halls of Congress and on Capitol Hill, where Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty was just beginning in 1964. The “culture of poverty” thus came to shape one of the largest public initiatives in U.S. history which reshaped structures of government funding, welfare and public assistance, health care, and education. The War on Poverty and the Great Society of which it was a part dramatically recast the role of the federal government in urban affairs in particular, highlighting the poor and disadvantaged members of American society residing in inner cities. For government agencies like the Extension Service, and the Department of Agriculture more generally, it was both a challenge and an opportunity to shift their programs to better serve this segment of society. However, in order to do so, Extension needed to arm itself with strategies that were suited to the needs of the urban poor, based on these new theories about poverty and development that were emerging in concert with federal and philanthropic attention and funds. Nutrition emerged as one of the most important ways in which traditionally rural organizations like Agricultural Extension were able to keep their work relevant and to stay under the umbrella of urban-improvement and anti-poverty funding and legislation.<sup>25</sup>

The culture of poverty was attractive to policy makers and program planners for a number of reasons. It

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25. Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union, 8 January 1964,” in *Public Papers of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963–1964* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1965); Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Norwood Allen Kerr, “Drafted into the War on Poverty: USDA Food and Nutrition Programs, 1961–1969,” *Agricultural History* 64, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 154–166.

helped explain problems like juvenile delinquency, and the existence of poverty in advanced affluent nations like the United States, because it offered reasons for why poverty might continue beyond the immediate disrupting conditions that made people poor. It also shifted the focus onto the individual family, rather than on social or economic conditions, and suggested more individualized approaches to addressing poverty issues, ones that did not require great social or economic upheaval or change. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the culture of poverty drew potent analogies between poor people the world over, and allowed policymakers and program administrators to draw on the emerging poverty expertise of international development workers, and apply it to the domestic context.

Unlike scholars of juvenile delinquency, who depicted their subject as a distinctly urban-industrial social problem, researchers studying the conditions of poverty saw similarities across cultural, geographic, and racial boundaries that pointed to a distinct “culture” shared by poor people everywhere. The idea of a “culture of poverty” was elaborated most famously by the anthropologist Oscar Lewis after decades of fieldwork and close study of the lives of poor families in Mexico. According to Lewis, poverty was characterized not just by conditions of want, privation, and financial need, but also by a distinct culture, one that was marked by apathy and indifference, feelings of powerlessness, disrupted family roles, risk aversion, orientation to the present and a lack of concern for the future, emotionalism and irrationality, distrust of those outside the immediate family or community, particularly authority figures and representatives of the state, and low self-regard. Parents passed these behaviors and tendencies on to their children, thereby perpetuating the culture of poverty in ways that were not addressed by solely economic welfare programs. In order to alleviate poverty, then, this cycle of cultural transmission would have to be broken.<sup>26</sup>

The existence of a “culture of poverty” separate from the broader culture was both a product of mod-

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26. Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1959); Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Random House, 1961).

ern democracies—in the sense that the poor’s feelings of helplessness, resignation, and disengagement resulted from the combination of uniform social expectations across income levels and poor people’s inability to achieve those expectations due to constraints on opportunity—and a critical problem for them—in that it “suggests class antagonism, social problems, and the need for change” in a supposedly egalitarian society premised upon active citizen participation in a common national culture. As Lewis put it, in words that echoed Cloward and Ohlin, “[p]overty becomes a dynamic factor which affects participation in the larger national culture and creates a subculture of its own.”<sup>27</sup> In order to live up to its democratic ideals, a nation such as the U.S. had a pressing need to alleviate poverty, thus incorporating the poor back into the body politic.

Lewis’s theory was based not only on the notion that poor people had a different set of values, and a different way of living, than other segments of society (such as the middle class), but also that these values, attitudes, and family structures were relatively consistent across ethnic, racial, and even national boundaries. As Lewis explained,

One can speak of the culture of the poor, for it has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members. It seems to me that the culture of poverty cuts across regional, rural-urban, and even national boundaries. For example, I am impressed by the remarkable similarities in family structure, the nature of kinship ties, the quality of husband-wife and parent-child relations, time orientation, spending patterns, value systems, and the sense of community found in lower-class settlements in London, in Puerto Rico, in Mexico City slums and Mexican villages, and among lower class Negroes in the United States.<sup>28</sup>

The people themselves might be different, but the social and psychological effects of poverty on them were surprisingly consistent.

Though different in their focus and emphasis, the theories gaining prominence in the 1950s and ’60s about the poor, the low-income, the underclass, the delinquent, and the underdeveloped shared certain core

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27. Lewis, *Five Families*, see n. 26, p. 2.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

assumptions or conclusions about their subjects. Less fortunate people, regardless of their particular location or context, were all insular, familial, apathetic and without ambition, emotional or irrational, risk-averse, and highly focused on the present. As a result, they were poor at planning for the future, or charting paths out of their situation in the long run; in the shorter term, they were bad at household budgeting and economy, and needed guidance in navigating the world. These ideas about the poor as a group—and the similarities among rural villagers abroad and low-income urban dwellers at home—shaped the kinds of programs the Extension Service began to offer in the 1960s. Most importantly for 4-H, the culture of poverty practically begged for an approach directed at youth, to break the “cycle” of apathy, low self-regard, helplessness, and want.

The popularity of Lewis’s theory helped show otherwise reluctant extension officials that they did in fact have a set of resources to draw on in dealing with the poor and disadvantaged: their international work. It proved that they might fruitfully apply the results of their operations abroad to developing new domestic programs with culturally similar groups, and assured them that drawing parallels between these groups had a basis in contemporary social science.

It is worth asking at this point why the Extension Service looked to international programs for precedent, instead of examining work it had done with poor and disadvantaged groups within American society—such as southern sharecroppers, migrant farmworkers, Native Americans, and others who had certainly fallen under Extension’s traditional rural purview. As we have seen, the Extension Service had largely focused its efforts on solidly middle-class farmers, those who were financially secure enough to try out new methods, allow their children the freedom to pursue their own projects, or volunteer their time as 4-H club leaders. So-called “Negro Extension” certainly had the experience with the disadvantaged that would have been relevant to developing extension work with low-income people of extremely limited means, but the black organization that existed as a segregated entity in the South prior to 1964 was almost completely dismantled

in the 1960s and '70s as the Extension Service integrated its activities by absorbing Negro Extension under white extension work, often eliminating positions, employees, and records, and severing local connections in the process. Integration essentially erased black extension work in the South, and the particular expertise black extension workers had developed by serving poor African-Americans was almost entirely lost. This meant that international work in the “underdeveloped” nations with “less-developed” people was the closest analog that extension officials could find for their work in cities.<sup>29</sup>

Facilitated by funding organizations and government agents and programs, international development ideas—including community development, nutrition education to eliminate hunger, and social education—were much more accessible and readily available to the program planners responsible for determining Extension’s direction in this period. In many ways, the Extension Service was simply carried with the tide—of public opinion and political momentum—of large-scale federal programs targeting poverty, hunger, race, and urban issues. In the postwar years, the land-grant complex as a whole was interested in solving the agricultural and economic problems of the Third World: that was where the funding was, and that was where their focus lay. When their experts were suddenly called to bring their knowledge to bear on the domestic urban situation, they saw it through the lens of their international activities.

Lewis’s opinions about the characteristics of the poor and the universality of poverty culture were widely shared by other social scientists, who helped incorporate these theories into the anti-poverty programs the federal government was devising in the 1960s. Extension officials also latched on to theories like Lewis’s, which seemed to offer welcome guidance on how to calibrate their approach to the new swath of low-income families they were now charged with serving. The culture of poverty theory thus came to inform both urban

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29. Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, “Plan for Compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” February 1965, Class KFM7012.S4, Book M757; Debra A. Reid, *Reaping a Greater Harvest: African Americans, the Extension Service, and Rural Reform in Jim Crow Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), chapter 7.



extension programs and extension training more broadly.<sup>30</sup>

One rural sociologist with the Federal Extension Service drew on Lewis's theory explicitly in advising extension workers how best to work with "the disadvantaged" in their communities. "Three basic deficiencies need to be corrected—the people must develop greater *desire to change*, show greater *courage to change*, and have available more *resources to change*."<sup>31</sup> In this context of apathy, passed down from parents to children and perpetuated by environmental conditions, work with low-income youth took on special importance. "Long range goals must emphasize the advancement of children and youth," the sociologist added. "Only here can the poverty cycle be broken in the long run."<sup>32</sup> For the Extension Service, then, 4-H club work emerged as a critical way to bring extension programs under the rubric of the War on Poverty, drawing in particular on their most enduringly popular program: foods and nutrition.

#### NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE: EXTENSION IN THE CITY

Theories of juvenile delinquency and poverty, combined with a growing popular and political attention to issues of poverty hunger, malnutrition, and urban (often racial) conflict, created an opportunity for extension programs to expand their influence into cities in the late 1960s. But it took time for the Extension Service to get to a point where it felt able and justified in shifting its focus from the traditional purview of agricultural improvement in the rural areas to helping Americans, regardless of their location, live better lives using land-grant research. This section steps back in time a bit to outline extension's slow but steady movement toward serving urban and suburban Americans as well as rural folk. Though much of this history is administrative, it points to an important preoccupation of extension officials at both the state and federal levels during the

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30. See, for example, E. J. Niederfrank, *Working with the Disadvantaged* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968), in Cornell Cooperative Extension Records, #21-24-1975, Box 43, Folder 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. For an overview of social scientific views of poverty, see O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, see n. 25.

31. Niederfrank, see n. 30, p. 8.

32. *Ibid.*, 10.

immediate postwar period with the future of the organization. As Bernie Loshbough pointed out in his address to Pennsylvania extension workers, the problems faced by agricultural extension work after the war were largely of their own creation: by helping industrialize American farming, the Extension Service and the USDA had in effect shrunk their original constituency. This left them in an uncertain position. Extension's introspection in this period was indicative of a broader shift in the Agriculture Department, as it transformed itself from a farmer's agency into a consumer's agency as well.<sup>33</sup>

One of the easiest ways to make the transition was to apply its longstanding strengths in the areas of food and nutrition research to solving a problem common to both third-world peasants and impoverished Americans: hunger. As recent scholarship has shown, fighting hunger became an important strategy in fighting the Cold War—and the battlefield, Americans soon learned, was at home as well. In the late 1960s, a series of high-profile newspaper articles, exposés, and television coverage alerted Americans to the fact that, despite the image of postwar affluence, people were still starving, and not just in famine-prone India, but right in their own backyards. Spurred by this flurry of publicity in the late 1960s, the USDA decided to take action. The Extension Service's slow conversion to thinking of itself as an organization not exclusively focused on rural people, and the need to tackle hunger and poverty, made way for legislative approval of a large extension initiative aimed at the urban poor, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). Chartered in 1968, EFNEP used social-scientific theories about poverty, land-grant research on nutrition, and established methods of extension organization to put forth a program aimed at improving the lives of the urban, minority poor. In the process, it discovered that international experience working with the poor and malnourished overseas proved incredibly useful in adapting its methods from the rural to the

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33. Don F. Hadwiger, "The Freeman Administration and the Poor," *Agricultural History* 45 (Jan. 1971): 21–32; Kerr, see n. 25; Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

urban context.<sup>34</sup>

#### EXTENSION IN URBAN AREAS

The Extension Service had since 1914 had a broad mandate to bring land-grant knowledge beyond the walls of the state colleges and directly to the people. However, as the country-life focus of early extension advocates made clear, “the people” who would benefit from agricultural and home economic knowledge were always assumed to be the ones actively making a living in agriculture. As a result, extension programs had long focused on farmers and their families, with some additional home economic work in villages, cities, and towns, mostly through home demonstration agents.

Extension work targeted explicitly at an urban clientele did not appear until the late 1940s, when county agents began reporting increasing requests for their services, mostly from rural people who were familiar with the Extension Service, but who had left the countryside to find other opportunities in metropolitan areas. 4-H clubs were in high demand, particularly from parents who themselves had grown up on farms and been club members, but who were bringing up their children in the suburbs. They wanted their offspring to be able to enjoy the camaraderie of 4-H, even if they were not planting fields of corn or raising sheep. However, while county agents and local leaders tried to meet these requests as they were able, most extension officials did not see urban and suburban audiences as a part of their constituency, nor did they find financial support forthcoming for special urban extension projects. Thus, where urban programs existed in the years immediately following the war, they were largely an unfunded and uncoordinated extension of existing rural

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34. Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). This media coverage included a piece in the *New York Times Magazine*, a series of articles on “Hunger in America” in the *New York Times* shortly thereafter, and a *CBS Reports* special. Robert Sherrill, “It Isn't True That Nobody Starves In America,” *The New York Times Magazine* (June 4, 1967); Homer Bigart, “Hunger in America: Stark Deprivation Haunts a Land of Plenty,” *The New York Times* (Feb. 16, 1969); Homer Bigart, “Hunger in America: Poverty Leaves Migrants Prey to Disease,” *The New York Times* (Feb. 17, 1969); Homer Bigart, “Hunger in America: Negroes in Mississippi Delta Poorly Fed Despite Federal Aid,” *The New York Times* (Feb. 18, 1969); Homer Bigart, “Hunger in America: Mexicans and Indians Quiet but Perhaps Most Vulnerable of All,” *The New York Times* (Feb. 19, 1969); Homer Bigart, “Hunger in America: Appalachia Ill-Fed Despite a National Effort,” *The New York Times* (Feb. 20, 1969). See also Hadwiger, see n. 33.

programs.<sup>35</sup>

However, as town-, city-, and suburb-dwellers' requests for extension programs continued to increase, extension officials began to question the idea that their mandate under the Smith-Lever Act was limited to rural folk, as they had assumed for over three decades. The language of the legislation that had established "cooperative agricultural extension work" had never explicitly stated that it would *only* be carried out with rural people; but it had been written at a time when 54 percent of the population was rural, and was introduced by legislators who were intimately concerned with farm problems. Furthermore, the stated intentions of the act—"to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics"—seemed to assume a largely rural audience. Nonetheless, as non-rural citizens began to take a greater interest in what extension had to offer at the local level, officials at the state and federal level had to admit that there was nothing to say they should not be serving town and city residents as well.<sup>36</sup>

The Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) wrestled with this question in its meetings in Washington. Reports from county agents suggested that village, town, and even city programs were already in place in several states. To determine whether these efforts were anomalous or typical, ECOP commissioned a survey in 1948 to see how widespread town and city efforts actually were. By mailing questionnaires to local extension agents around the country, they found that urban work—defined as "cities and

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35. Although 4-H's postwar foray into urban areas reflected a new emphasis on cities, the postwar years did not mark the first time that extension work had been carried on with urban populations. As early as World War I, extension agents had conducted home demonstration work in towns and cities, particularly on food preservation and substitution, home gardening, and other thrift measures to support the war effort. In some cities—most notably Portland, Oregon—the extension work that began during the war never abated, and continued through the decades with local support. But this was not the case in most states, where extension was presumed to be for rural people almost exclusively. Overall, urban work was an anomaly—a product of either wartime emergencies or other special conditions—until the years following World War II. See Mary L. Collings, *Survey of Extension Work in Urban Areas* (Extension Service Circular 462, 1950); Emory J. Brown and Patrick G. Boyle, *4-H in Urban Areas: A Case Study of 4-H Organization and Programs in Selected Urbanized Areas* (Washington, DC: National 4-H Club Foundation, 1964).

36. As of the 1910 census, there were 49,348,883 people living in rural areas of the United States, as opposed to 42,623,383 in "incorporated places having 2,500 or more inhabitants." *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1910* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914); *An act to provide for cooperative agricultural extension work between the agricultural colleges in the several States*, Act of Congress, ch. 79, 38 Stat. 372, 7 U.S.C. 341 et seq. (8 May 1914), hereafter, the Smith-Lever Act.

villages with a population of 2,500 or more”—was going on in all 48 states, mostly as an outgrowth of the regular extension program, but in some areas as its own program, tailored to the needs of urban people. The report revealed that this type of work was far more prevalent than anyone in Washington had realized, and suggested that perhaps it was time to start serving this growing urban, suburban, and rural-nonfarm population more intentionally.<sup>37</sup>

Extension officials and local people were not the only ones calling for more work with nonfarm folk: politicians were also becoming vocal. In 1947, Senator Robert E. Johnson of New York wrote to the dean of the Agricultural College at Cornell, requesting that he assemble a statement on the feasibility of extending Cornell Cooperative Extension work into the five boroughs. Though their proposal was not implemented just then—presumably because of its cost—the state leaders of agricultural extension, home demonstration, and 4-H club work all outlined the programs of work they would implement, the staff and resources they would require, and the types of projects they would institute should their purview extend to the state’s premier city. Focusing on food, clothing, consumption, leadership, and horticulture, they felt that their services “would be of immediate and direct value to the people of New York City.” Extension work could be as helpful to city folk as it could to rural people.<sup>38</sup>

The primary obstacle to outlining a broader program of extension work, focusing on the needs of non-farm families, was financial. Additional contributions at the local level were possible—from businesses and organizations interested in spurring expanded extension—but to secure the level of funding necessary to launch a statewide or national program of urban extension work would require either a legislative appropriation, or a massive infusion of cash from private sources. Without new federal funding, the Extension Service could do little more than continue to produce studies of urban work—its feasibility, its popular-

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37. Collings, see n. 35.

38. “Nature and scope of a possible program of extension in New York City” (1947). CCE, Box 84, Folder 10.

ity, its potential financial and staff requirements—and to test out city-level pilot programs designed to see what kinds of modifications would be necessary in the urban context—how urban youth were different, what kinds of projects they might be interested in, and how to most effectively serve this different clientele. Extension continued to do this for most of the 1960s, both on its own, and with funding from donors like the Sears-Roebuck Foundation and the Ford Foundation.<sup>39</sup>

As the 1960s dawned, the Extension Service also found itself the target of a spate of criticisms that reflected the tenor of the times. These included charges of focusing its programs on middle-class families and ignoring the neediest; accusations that 4-H was not actually helping rural youth succeed in agriculture at all, but was in league with the big livestock breeders' organizations and agribusiness; and, within its own ranks, growing discontent and impatience among black extension workers with the segregated system that existed throughout the South. In this environment, extension officials could little afford to continue on the same path, and the set about to adapt their programs accordingly.<sup>40</sup>

Extension's foray into cities was further facilitated by a growing sense among Americans that the Extension Service *should* be serving a much wider swath of citizens, including those not residing in rural areas, and, in particular, those of more limited economic means, and people of color. Because of their nature as a federal-state cooperation, carried out largely on a local basis, the organization of 4-H and extension work was left entirely up to the individual states. As a result, the racially segregated nature of southern life was reflected in how extension proceeded below the Mason-Dixon line. Up until Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, extension was carried out on a wholly segregated basis in the southern states, with essentially a separate (and decidedly unequal) Extension Service working with black families. "Negro Extension," as

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39. Laurel K. Sabrosky, *A Survey of Urban 4-H Club Work in the United States, 1962* (Extension Service Circular 542, 1963); Brown and Boyle, see n. 35; Josephine Pollock, "Cooperative Extension Service Work with Low Income Families," *Extension Service Circular*, no. 546 (1963); Wilbur F. Pease, *Selected Writings on 4-H Work* (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 1956–1969).

40. For more on these critiques, see: Ira Dietrich, *Poor Damn Janeth* (Madison, WI: Bascom House Publishing Company, 1967); Reid, see n. 29; Wessel and Wessel, see n. 18, chapter 9.

it was called, was in general poorly funded and staffed, with Negro agents (as they were designated at the state level) receiving much lower pay than their white counterparts, and having far more families to serve. When the Civil Rights Act became law, this segregated organization became illegal, and states had to scurry to demonstrate that they were compliant with the new rules.<sup>41</sup> In most states, this entailed simply moving the Negro extension office (usually headquartered at one of the black colleges) into the white office at the land-grant school, and changing the black agents' titles from "Negro agricultural agent" and "Negro home demonstration agent" to "assistant agricultural agent" and "assistant home demonstration agent." Their inferior status within the organization was maintained, while meeting the letter, if not the spirit, of the law.<sup>42</sup> At the same time that the Extension Service was coming under fire for racial discrimination, it was also being accused of ignoring the needier members of its constituency.<sup>43</sup> Shifting some of its focus to cities seemed a way to address all of these critiques head-on.

Extension's official arrival in cities across America was enabled financially by a growing federal interest in urban affairs in the 1960s, which culminated in President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, and the attendant national focus on eliminating the twin problems of poverty and racial injustice, both of which seemed particularly acute in cities. 1964 marked a crucial year for these programs, as it saw the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the Food Stamp Act, and the Economic Opportunity Act, all of which made clear the administration's desire to focus on low-income families, people of color, and urban residents. Eager to ensure its continued relevance in this changing demographic and political environment, the Extension

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41. See, for example, Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, see n. 29.

42. My understanding of this process is indebted to conversations with Pete Daniel. For an overview of segregated extension work, and of the process of integration, see Reid, see n. 29, esp. chapter 7. For some of the critiques leveled against the USDA and Extension, see Hadwiger, see n. 33; Sherrill, see n. 34.

43. For Extension's responses to these criticisms, see, for example: Meredith C. Wilson, "How and To What Extent Is the Extension Service Reaching Low-Income Farm Families?" December 1941, M. L. Wilson Papers, 1913–1970, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, Collection 2100 (henceforth cited as Wilson Papers), Box 1, Folder 22.

Service rapidly proposed a set of programs that would be directed at the president's favored causes. But, though it tried, the Extension Service was not particularly successful in getting grants from the Office of Economic Opportunity, and it was not until 1968 that it received federal funds to expand its programs into cities.

In the meantime, Extension was busy incorporating the latest social scientific theories about youth and poverty in the urban context into its mission and activities. The Department of Agriculture as a whole had begun to realize that, in order to remain relevant in a decreasingly rural, agricultural society, it would need to make its activities relevant to all Americans, urban, suburban, and rural. Orville Freeman, Secretary of Agriculture under Kennedy and Johnson, made a concerted effort turn the USDA from a farmers' organization into a consumers' agency, putting food consumption on par with food production through programs like school lunches, government donations, and food stamps, which turned the nation's burgeoning agricultural surplus into comestible goods for those who needed them. Food aid to the poor in the form of nutrition education and foodstuffs themselves became central to the new USDA in the 1960s.

These initiatives took as their model the foreign food aid programs originally conceived to deal with the surplus problem in the 1950s—programs like PL-480, also known as the “Food for Peace” program, which had been “disposing” of surplus commodities by “donating” them to developing countries the U.S. wished to court in the struggle against communism. This model of food aid built on the Lewisian idea that poor people everywhere were fundamentally alike, and underscored the USDA's reorientation from a farmer's/producer's agency to a service and education agency for consumers, with a particular focus on nutrition and the poor. It marked a revision of an earlier idea—that farmers everywhere shared certain characteristics—in an age where poverty and hunger, rather than rural living or agricultural subsistence, were what set certain people apart. What marked people as needing assistance in becoming modern and democratic was not where they lived or how they made their living, but how much of a living they made. Whereas, prior to the 1960s, the



Extension Service saw its mission as one of helping *rural* people the world over, in the 1960s and beyond, it saw its clients as the poor and needy. It is no accident, then, that the new domestic program for which the Extension Service finally received congressional funding in 1968 was a nationwide nutrition initiative to fight poverty through ameliorating hunger, one that emphasized the minority poor residing in America's inner cities.<sup>44</sup>

#### FIGHTING POVERTY WITH NUTRITION: EFNEP

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) was the Extension Service's first and foremost federally funded, nationwide initiative aimed at a largely low-income, urban, minority audience. Like international development programs, EFNEP took aim not so much at poverty per se, but at the less controversial blight of hunger. The idea that undernourished children were living in the midst of domestic abundance—particularly at a time of unprecedented agricultural surplus—was shocking to many Americans, and EFNEP aimed at helping the poor through nutrition training, consumer education, and cooking instruction. Begun in 1968 and in existence to this day, EFNEP received \$7.5 million from the federal government at the outset, followed shortly thereafter by another \$7.5 million in 1973 as part of the Agricultural Appropriations Act, \$5 million of which went to promoting urban club work.<sup>45</sup>

After being enacted into law in 1968, EFNEP was put into action at the county and city level in January 1969. After two months of operation, it was established and running in 513 "program units" (a county or a

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44. The first modern/non-emergency food stamp program was actually passed as a part of PL-480 in 1954. Dennis Roth, "Food Stamps, 1932–1977: From Provisional and Pilot Programs to Permanent Policy," United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, URL: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/foodstamps.htm> (accessed 01/19/2012); Kerr, see n. 25; Marjorie L. DeVault and James P. Pitts, "Surplus and Scarcity: Hunger and the Origins of the Food Stamp Program," *Social Problems* 31, no. 5 (June 1984): 545–557; Hadwiger, see n. 33.

45. See Youth Community Development Program Records, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #23-18-3654 (henceforth cited as YCDP Records, RMCCU). The remainder of the 1973 appropriation went to support youth involvement in rural community development programs. Wessel and Wessel, see n. 18; "Guideline for Submitting Supplemental Plan of Work and Budget for \$7.5 million 4-H Increase," October 1972, YCDP Records, RMCCU, Box 1, Folder 1.

city) with 28,500 program families composed of over 133,000 individuals. 53 percent of these families were urban, 54 percent were black, 29 percent were white, and 14 percent had a Spanish surname—meaning, presumably, that they were Puerto Rican or belonged to another Hispanic group. 37 participated in a USDA food assistance program, and 29 percent were on welfare. 71 percent were living on less than \$3,000 a year. By the end of 1973, the number of participating families had increased more than tenfold to 306,000, of which 65 percent were urban, 47 percent were black, 37 percent were white, and 14 percent had a Spanish surname. 50 percent were on food assistance, 38 percent on welfare, and 55 percent were making less than \$3,000 a year. At any given time, a third to half of the program homemakers had less than an eighth-grade education. Families usually spent just over a third of their income on food.<sup>46</sup>

EFNEP was comprised of both adult and youth/4-H programs, and operated on a system that paralleled the classic county-agent/local-volunteer model of 4-H Club work. Extension agents assigned to the city or the neighborhood worked with local people to conceive and coordinate programs directed at individual families and their communities. The extension professional staff consisted mainly of nutrition specialists, who trained volunteer “nutrition aides” to go out into the community and run nutrition classes in the home and in community centers for women, children, and entire families. An aide was ideally “a paraprofessional, whose background generally reflects the area served by the program.”<sup>47</sup> According to extension staff, this allowed her (and it was almost always a “her”) an easier rapport with client families than subject matter specialists (generally of a higher social and educational status) would enjoy. Being drawn from a similar background as the families she served would not only help her better understand their problems, but also make the family

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46. “The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, 1969–1973: A Preliminary Review,” n.d., Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program Records, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #21-24-3292 (henceforth cited as EFNEP), Box 9, Folder 7.

47. *Massachusetts Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program*, 1979, EFNEP, Box 8, Folder 16, p. 1, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program Records, #21-24-3292, Box 8, Folder 16. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

members themselves more comfortable and willing to accept her advice and assistance.<sup>48</sup>

However, despite these structural similarities, EFNEP departed from the professional/volunteer model in that it provided funds to turn unpaid local volunteers into paid workers. Unlike 4-H club leaders, who were volunteers drawn mostly from the ranks of parents of 4-H youth, EFNEP aides were actually in the employ of the Extension Service, and were paid for their services. While many worked part-time at their EFNEP duties—according to one document, the majority of nutrition aides were putting in about three-quarters to full time—they were in many ways more akin to county or home demonstration agents in their responsibilities and job description.<sup>49</sup>

Extension's decision to train and employ nutrition aides as the ground troops of the program reflected the fact that EFNEP was indeed breaking new socioeconomic ground, targeting populations that would not have the freedom and flexibility to participate in the program in the absence of financial return. By making the nutrition aide a paid position, with paraprofessional training and support, the Extension Service could more easily recruit local leaders from the community. Becoming an EFNEP aide was a way for low-income women to secure gainful employment, as well as to gain on-the-job experience that could translate into future employment prospects. Lori Corbett, a nutrition aide in Schoharie County, New York, found that her EFNEP training made it possible for her to get a job as a nutritionist. Aides also received nutrition training that was often helpful to them at home, whether in doing the grocery shopping, stretching the food stamp dollar, or planning and preparing more interesting and nutritious meals. In many ways, then, aides were important clients of the program as well as its executors.<sup>50</sup>

While the expert-paired-with-a-volunteer structure of EFNEP was familiar to extension programmers,

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48. *Massachusetts EFNEP*, see n. 47; Jeanne Nolan and Debrah Jefferson, *Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program: People Helping People: Ten Years of Helping, 1969–1979*, Apr. 1979, EFNEP, Box 8, Folder 16.

49. “EFNEP 1969–1973,” see n. 46.

50. “EFNEP 1969–1973,” see n. 46; “EFNEP: A Quarter Century of Making a Difference, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Testimonials, 1969–1994,” 1994, EFNEP, Box 9.

turning this model into a reality—particularly in the urban context—was fraught with a new set of difficulties. In particular, as their critics had rightly charged (and as the ES itself readily admitted), extension had never targeted the neediest in the communities in which it operated for assistance and support. As extension workers attempted to spread their influence among low-income families, people of color, and other marginalized groups, they discovered that their outreach efforts were far less successful with these segments of society than with the largely middle-class clientele they were accustomed to serving. Professional extension staff found a wider gap between themselves and their local volunteers than they had found in previous contexts. Whether for reasons of class, culture, race, or ethnicity, urban extension demanded a new approach.

In their search to improve the efficacy of their outreach, extension administrators were able to turn for guidance to the “poverty knowledge” that social scientists like Cloward, Ohlins, and Lewis were producing about low-income communities and the American underclass, and that was rapidly being incorporated into other government programs in the Great Society.<sup>51</sup> EFNEP also built on social science research on food habits, conducted by anthropologists, home economists, and psychologists, that explored the cultural bases of food habits and preferences, as well as how those habits and preferences might be shaped or modified.<sup>52</sup> The mostly white, mostly female extension nutrition staff, trained in home economics at land-grant institutions, began to receive a new type of training to equip them for their roles as advisors to the poor. They received instruction not only in navigating the new federal welfare programs, such as food stamps, but also in the latest social scientific ideas about low-income families: how they spent their money, how they lived, what their values were, what their problems were.<sup>53</sup>

In the end, this amounted to a training regime quite similar to that received by extension workers going

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51. O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, see n. 25.

52. Carl E. Guthe and Margaret Mead, “The Problem of Changing Food Habits: Report of the Committee on Food Habits, 1941–1943,” October 1943, Wilson Papers, Box 13, Folder 8.

53. EFNEP.

abroad. As one professor of rural sociology explained it to a gathering of home economists at Cornell in 1965, “The needs and desires of homemakers and their families in India differ less in content only, more in degree from low-income families in our society. [Their] inability ... to break out of their cycle of existence without help from the outside can be paralleled with families here in our own environment who are caught in never ending cycles—families who will not escape without assistance.” Home economists and other extension professionals could help penetrate these families’ homes and begin to help them “break the cycle”—but only if they understood “the needs and value orientations of the low-income families.” These constituted a litany that would have been familiar to any international development workers in the audience: a “highly localistic” perspective on the world, familial orientation, insularity, resignation to insurmountable environmental and socioeconomic circumstances, a tendency toward immediate gratification, emotionalism, physicality, low self-regard, and fear of the consequences of an unexpected loss of employment, death, or change in family circumstances. The speaker concluded that “These types of needs and value orientations document in clear terms the observation that many of the low-income families have not kept pace and are largely out of touch with the reality of typical community living patterns.”<sup>54</sup> Like their third-world counterparts, these American peasants had fallen out of step with modern life, and needed help to be brought back in.

As with overseas development, urban programs identified hunger as a key problem facing the domestic poor, and programs like EFNEP drew on ideas developed in foreign aid programs aimed at eliminating hunger to formulate their initiatives. More than simply being legislatively related to foreign food aid and Food for Peace, EFNEP was structurally similar, in its aims and its organization. Like foreign food aid, domestic nutrition programs were primarily directed at spurring consumption, in order to dispose of the nation’s enormous agricultural surplus. They were targeted at the neediest members of society. Finally, they

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54. Harold R. Capener, “American Society Spotlights the Low-Income Family,” A talk delivered at the Conference for Home Economists on Working with Low-Income Families—A Follow-Up Conference to the American Home Economics Association Workshop of March, 1965—Held at the New York State College of Home Economics, Cornell University, Oct. 23, 1965, EFNEP, Box 9, Folder 1, pp. 13-14.

assumed that poor, hungry people were poor and hungry due to a combination of lack of income to buy or produce food, and lack of proper knowledge of nutrition that would allow them to eat healthily. Poverty and hunger, while potent political issues at home, was, for the USDA, initially less pressing than the agricultural surplus that was starving farmers and inundating the nation's storehouses.<sup>55</sup>

Nutrition programs like EFNEP were a relatively uncontroversial way to offer assistance to low-income families. They were not administered as welfare, and they did not attempt to fundamentally change the social and economic structures that made people poor. Rather, they were based on the idea that teaching better consumption habits—both alimentary and monetary—could lift people out of poverty through the American virtues of ingenuity and thrift. However, there were two consequences of this focus on feeding the poor that reverberated through the rest of 4-H's programs, and that fundamentally changed the nature of extension work. The first was to shift Extension's activities from primarily supporting production, towards assisting with consumption, in terms of both purchasing and ingesting food. The second—which followed from the first—was an emphasis on women and children as the primary targets of 4-H programs, and a consequent gendering of urban extension activity. Male farmers may have continued to be the primary clients of traditional agricultural extension, but women and youth were far and away the majority of Extension's clients in the city.

Due to this design, EFNEP involved a cluster of activities—mostly with women and youth—designed to encourage better eating habits, smarter shopping and spending habits, and frugal yet nutritious cooking habits. Aides distributed pamphlets on the elements of nutrition, explaining the role of calories, protein, fats, vitamins, and minerals in the body; what foods were rich in which components; and how to combine them into nutritious, tasty, and inexpensive meals. They taught good buymanship, instructing homemakers to not

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55. For a discussion of definitions of poverty and hunger, see O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, see n. 25; DeVault and Pitts, see n. 44.

be “tricked” by marketing or packaging by reading ingredient lists and labels and only purchasing healthy food that gave good nutrition for the food dollar. They took groups of homemakers to the grocery store and taught them how to put this nutritional and budgeting training into practice. They distributed nutrition calendars that program participants could hang in their kitchens as everyday reminders of what foods were rich in iron, or the role of vitamin A, or the kinds of breads and cereals that were healthiest. They mailed out bulletins with weekly meal plans, recipes, and time-saving tips. And, perhaps most importantly, they knocked on doors, offered free advice, and visited families in their homes, in an effort to work with them on their particular problems and challenges.<sup>56</sup>

The 4-H phase of EFNEP was similarly oriented toward guiding urban 4-H youth—mostly girls between the ages of 9 and 13—in making good food choices. 4-H EFNEP’s “nutrition education” aimed at three goals: to “provide education for youth in principles of nutrition and diets, and the acquisition and use of foods,” to “contribute to the personal development of disadvantaged urban youth through improved nutrition,” and to “contribute to improvement of diets and nutrition of families by means of education programs for youth.”<sup>57</sup> Groups gathered after school to make healthy snacks, plan simple meals that children could prepare for the family, and, of course, to eat. As aides and administrators quickly discovered, offering food at 4-H EFNEP meetings was not only a good way to attract youth to the program, it was also often a critical element of program children’s daily diet. One new aide in New York State surveyed a group of six low-income children on what they had eaten the day before, and was appalled by the answers. “One girl said all she had was six slices of bread and ice cream,” she reported. “Out of the six, only one youngster was close to having the suggested number of servings from the four food groups. One little boy said he had sneaked a glass of milk”

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56. “Extension Program Aides Fight Hunger,” September 1969, EFNEP, Box 9, Folder 3; Nolan and Jefferson, see n. 48; *Massachusetts EFNEP*, see n. 47; “Nutrition Calendars,” 1970s, EFNEP, Box 8, Folder 26; “Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program: New York City,” n.d., EFNEP, Box 8, Folder 32; “Point of Purchase bulletins,” n.d., EFNEP, Box 8, Folder 32; “Penny Snitchers,” n.d., Division of Nutritional Sciences Records, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, #29-4-2733 (henceforth cited as DNS), Box 1, Folder 26.

57. “EFNEP 1969–1973,” see n. 46, p. 9.

to supplement his intake of “three slices of toast and tea for breakfast, two slices of toast and tea for lunch, and a hamburg sandwich, french fries, and tea for supper.” As the aide put it simply, “These families are really in need of help.”<sup>58</sup>

EFNEP offered help in several forms. In addition to providing this nutrition education about the “basic four” food groups, meal planning and preparation, and shopping, aides instructed homemakers on how to navigate government aid programs, including welfare, food aid, and food stamps. The Extension Service published pamphlets on using the government surplus foods that some communities distributed for free as a part of federal aid programs, as well as bulletins for both extension workers and program clients on how to enroll in and make the most of the food stamp program.<sup>59</sup>

As we saw earlier, domestic nutrition assistance to the poor had important legislative and ideological connections to the federal government’s overseas food aid, which had been a central part of the Marshall Plan beginning in 1949, and which had picked up steam with the the “Food for Peace” program in 1954. Indeed, hunger had become a central focus of efforts to improve the lot of people in the developing world, and a critical locus of Cold War anticommunism. Hungry peasants were vulnerable peasants, who might be more susceptible to communist propaganda—or who, more simply, might be willing to cooperate with communists in exchange for food. By feeding the poor through nutrition aid, while also helping them to become self-reliant through agricultural and domestic science extension, foreign aid programs could combat poverty and communism simultaneously.

In EFNEP, the connections between foreign places and urban neighborhoods again often went beyond simple analogy. In some parts of New York City, entering a neighborhood *could* be quite like entering a foreign country, with barriers of not just of class and culture but also of language. Cornell Cooperative

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58. “Youth Participation in the Expanded Nutrition Education Program,” December 1970, EFNEP, Box 8, Folder 24, p. 1.

59. “Food Stamps to End Hunger,” rev. June 1970, EFNEP, Box 9; “You Can Help Fight Hunger in America: Food Stamp Handbook for Volunteers,” May 1969, rev. November 1969, EFNEP, Box 8, Folder 22.



Extension's nutrition programs in Manhattan included Spanish-language materials as a matter of course. These were addressed directly to Puerto Rican communities, complete with recipes for traditional Puerto Rican dishes, and tips on preparing them economically, using both donated foods from the agricultural surplus and groceries purchased with food stamps. In this way, culture—expressed through food—was a way for the Extension Service to make a connection with a new group of people it had not served in the past, while leaning on a built-in resource, namely, Puerto Rican extension. The Extension Service in Puerto Rico operated on a basis similar to that of the individual states, but had also served as a proving ground for international extension methods, a partially domestic space with a more foreign flavor (and perhaps more third-world feel). Though technically not “international,” Puerto Rican extension had strong ties to international extension work, and its use as a template for inner-city materials supports the notion that there was something foreign about urban places in the United States that extension had to address.<sup>60</sup>

Although the focus on consumption, and on women and children, found its fullest expression in Extension's urban programs, these emphases in turn shaped the broader program of extension activities. This can be seen by examining 4-H publications—in any state—in the 1960s and '70s. The transition is striking. Project bulletins moved from an emphasis on recipes, meals, and family eating, toward a more reductive focus on nutrition, less discussion of the art and craft of cooking and baking and more on nutrient delivery, and a great deal of “buymanship” activities. One foods project did nothing but present a series of “case situations” that asked the club member to navigate questions of pricing, grading, and quality at the grocery store. For instance, “You notice that chuck roast is on sale at two of the local supermarkets at 79¢ a pound. You are wondering if it makes a difference in which supermarket you buy the roast. Is there a way to tell if there is a difference in the quality of the meat? How can you find out?” Club members learned about USDA inspection stickers and the national meat- and produce-grading systems, how to read labels—everything, in

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60. “Spanish-language and Puerto Rican cooking materials,” n.d., DNS, Box 1, Folders 26 and 33.

other words, about choosing and buying food, and a lot less about preparing it. While cooking and recipes continued to be a part of foods projects, they took up much less space in the bulletins, and were less and less complicated. Whereas a 1940s 4-H foods bulletin might have asked a club member to prepare an entire dinner for her family, in the 1970s, a typical cooking activity might involve cutting up vegetables of different kinds for an after-school snack.<sup>61</sup> As one extension worker recalled of her work in the 1970s, “we were convinced we could move youth away from such a strong influence on cooking to appealing ways to learn how to choose foods that were more nutritious. Youth needed to deal with fast foods and snack choices and forgo [sic] fad diets. Gradually 4-H projects were revised incorporating more nutrition and consumer education.”<sup>62</sup>

Nutrition programs like EFNEP helped guide the rest of 4-H’s projects towards consumer education in ways that meant assuring a more continuous stream of new club members—many of them living in suburbs—who were not interested in baking blue-ribbon pies or raising prize-winning hogs, but were glad to learn more about making snacks for themselves, caring for their pets, babysitting, fixing cars and maintaining bicycles, cultivating flower gardens and houseplants, caring for their lawns, and how to shop for the ready-made food and clothing increasingly available in self-service stores, supermarkets, and shopping centers in the postwar era. This shift in focus—from productive activity for market and profit, to wise consumption of store-bought, manufactured, and processed goods—was both a reflection of the changing needs of Extension’s clientele more broadly (rural, urban, and suburban alike), large-scale changes in agriculture itself, and the market conditions of the U.S. economy; as well as a by-product of programs for the urban poor, who could not rely on market gardening or do-it-yourselfism (due to lack of land and resources) to lift themselves

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61. See, for example, Lola T. Dudgeon, “Food makes a difference,” rev. January 1961, DNS, Box 1; Debbie Biegelson and Ruth Lowenberg, “A Garden of Snacks: A kit of vegetable snack recipes with tips for healthy eating and smart shopping,” 1970s, DNS, Box 4, Folder 13.

62. Martha Mapes, “Overview of Efforts for Youth in the ’70s,” n.d., DNS, Box 4, Folder 2, p. 5.

out of poverty.

It is not surprising, then, that consumption came to the fore for the urban poor as it did for rural villagers abroad. How can we teach better consumption? was the question on the minds of development specialists, agricultural experts, and home economists in the postwar period. Modernity in this era came to be characterized not by particular modes of production, but by the act of consumption itself. Broadening tomorrow's market meant bringing the non- or under-consuming masses into the modern consumer economy, both abroad and at home.

Central to this change was a reenvisioning of extension work's broader goals and procedures, as well as the kinds of land-grant science and knowledge that primarily informed these methods and aims. The postwar explosion of the social and behavioral sciences—enabled by the same organizations that facilitated the meeting of international and urban development programs, namely, the Ford Foundation and the U.S. Government—also led to the founding of programs in area studies, comparative extension education, and other similar fields at land-grant colleges across the country. In these locations, extension experts developed a new formulation of their educative work, which blended traditional agricultural and home-economic extension with the emerging paradigm of community development, as practiced both abroad in Indian villages and in American inner-city neighborhoods. However, at the same time that Extension was refocusing its mission based on its own international experiences, another set of experts—concerned primarily with urban problems—were discovering these extension techniques and reimporting them from abroad. These reformers—mostly urban professionals with backgrounds in architecture, real estate and housing, and social science—saw in international extension work an opportunity to renew America's cities. Drawing primarily on the paradigm of community development, and with help from both private philanthropy and government largesse, they advocated “a land-grant act for cities” in the form they dubbed “urban extension.”

### A LAND-GRANT ACT FOR THE CITIES: URBAN EXTENSION

In July of 1961, a group of businessmen, city officials, real estate developers, foundation representatives, university professors, journalists, and international development workers met in Pittsburgh to discuss a new approach to urban problems in America. With a grant from the Ford Foundation, the Allegheny Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods (ACTION)-Housing, Inc., wanted to implement what it dubbed “urban extension—a new process” that would “employ techniques developed from urban experience, from community development programs abroad, and from the long and successful work of the Cooperative Extension Service in American rural areas” to revitalize city neighborhoods through self-help and community action, and public-private sponsorship. “The concept is a simple one,” the final report declared: “the city is for people, and people make the city. A good city with lively, healthy neighborhoods requires alert and responsible citizens; such citizens can be helped to develop through systematic harnessing of the city’s motivating, educating, and action resources.” Human development, in other words, was central to urban improvement.<sup>63</sup>

After spending a morning touring some of Pittsburgh’s most troubled neighborhoods, the members of this Urban Extension Conference gathered to determine what the aims and methods of their new undertaking should be. As they shared their ideas and experiences, the attendees pointed to the existing programs that had led them to the urban extension concept. The efforts of the USDA Extension Service in rural America were the most obvious template for their efforts. Indeed, since the 1930s, many members of the urban professions had looked the Department of Agriculture as a model for government-sponsored improvement, and had been lobbying to create a federal-level agency for cities that would serve as its urban counterpart. During the 1950s, the Ford Foundation had taken this up as a part of its mission for urban improvement, sponsoring programs around the country to apply extension techniques to urban problems.<sup>64</sup>

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63. *Pittsburgh Urban Extension Conference*, see n. 22, p. vi.

64. *Pittsburgh Urban Extension Conference*, see n. 22; Jennifer Light, *The Nature of Cities: Ecological Visions and the American*

But the other important precedent for urban extension was international, specifically the agricultural extension programs that were being carried out all over the developing world by the late 1950s, through the combined efforts of the U.S. State and Agriculture Departments, the governments of modernizing nations, and private philanthropies like the Ford Foundation. India's extension system in particular attracted the attention of urban reformers at home, who, though largely unfamiliar with the extension work that had been going on outside the city limits for nearly half a century, seized on Nehru's village- and community-development efforts halfway around the world as a potential model for neighborhood self-help and improvement in America's troubled inner cities.<sup>65</sup>

These two sources—extension in rural America and international development work based on those same rural extension techniques—thus provided the basis for a second set of urban extension programs put forward by urban reformers. In the 1960s, a decades-old model of rural development found expression in efforts to address urban problems in the United States, as city planners, housing experts, community organizers, and real estate developers encountered extension anew, refracted through the lens of its international adaptations.

#### THE FORD FOUNDATION, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND URBAN EXTENSION

One of the most important organizations to shape the form that urban extension took was the Ford Foundation. Its Public Affairs Program made the translation of agricultural extension work to the urban context a key goal of its grantmaking. In 1959, the Foundation had begun awarding grants to agricultural colleges around the country to develop urban extension programs, and present at the Pittsburgh conference were representatives of several of these universities, including the Deans of Extension from the Universities of

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*Urban Professions, 1920–1960* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); O'Connor, "The Ford Foundation's Gray Areas Program," see n. 22; *Urban Extension: A Report on Experimental Programs Assisted by the Ford Foundation* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1966).

65. *Pittsburgh Urban Extension Conference*, see n. 22; *American Community Development: Preliminary Reports by Directors of Projects Assisted by the Ford Foundation in Four Cities and a State* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1964); Cullather, see n. 34; Loshbough, "Rural Extension Techniques," see n. 2.

Wisconsin and Missouri, a Wisconsin sociologist, the director of the Center for Urban Studies at Rutgers University, and the director of the Calumet Center and Urban Development Institute at Purdue. Typifying this nexus of land-grant expertise and foundation money was M. L. Wilson, agricultural economist, former director of the Federal Extension Service, and consultant to the Ford Foundation on international programs. During the next two days, Wilson consistently articulated the broad mission of extension education, and its applicability not only abroad, but to cities at home.<sup>66</sup>

Like Wilson, many of the conference participants had no urban background per se, but were well versed in at least one of two areas: existing extension programs in the United States, and their international counterparts, most notably the community development and village extension efforts being carried out—with the help of Ford Foundation money—in India. Indeed, woven throughout the conference proceedings were references to the community development and extension education programs people like Wilson and Douglas Ensminger were carrying out in India in cooperation with the Ford Foundation. Ensminger's writings on community development were repeatedly referenced, both by conference participants, and by ACTION-Housing's Ford Foundation grant application.<sup>67</sup> Marshall Clinard, the UW sociologist, had himself recently returned from India, where he had been working with the Delhi Municipal Corporation and the Ford Foundation on "a program of social change in slums"—a pilot program in applying rural community development methods to the urban setting.<sup>68</sup>

Emblematic of this domestic urban rediscovery of extension work was Bernard E. Loshbough,

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66. *Pittsburgh Urban Extension Conference*, see n. 22; Light, see n. 64; O'Connor, "The Ford Foundation's Gray Areas Program," see n. 22; *Urban Extension*, see n. 64; *American Community Development*, see n. 65.

67. *Contribution of Extension Toward War-Torn Countries*, see n. 24; *Extension Around the World*, see n. 24; Douglas Ensminger, *A Guide to Community Development* (Delhi: Coronation Printing Works for the Ministry of Community Development, Government of India, 1957); Douglas Ensminger, *Rural India in Transition* (New Delhi: All India Panchayat Parishad, 1972); M. L. Wilson, *Community Development Programme in India: Report of a Survey* (Issued by the Community Project Administration, Government of India, 1956); Wilson Papers; Cullather, see n. 34.

68. *Pittsburgh Urban Extension Conference*, see n. 22, p. 16.

ACTION-Housing's executive director, a man with long experience in real estate, housing policy, and urban planning in the United States. Loshbough received an architecture degree from Notre Dame, and began his career in the 1940s as the director of the Housing and Community Facilities Division of the National Security Resources Board, under the Executive Office of the President in Washington. After the war, he spent two years as head of the Connecticut State Housing Authority, only to return to D.C. a few years later as Deputy-in-charge of Operations at the National Capital Housing Authority. In 1953, he won a post as the Deputy Director of Community Development in India for the Technical Cooperation Administration, the agency responsible for America's Point Four Program. He stayed on in India for three more years as a Deputy Representative of the Ford Foundation, working with Douglas Enslinger, the Foundation's longtime Representative to India (1951–1970), on projects that would certainly have focused on village and community development. He returned to the states in 1957 to become the Executive Director of ACTION-Housing in Pittsburgh, a post he held until 1972. Loshbough's deep connections to both the federal government and the Ford Foundation must have greatly facilitated ACTION-Housing's receipt of grants and other support from the government's Great Society programs and the Foundation's Public Affairs Program.<sup>69</sup>

Like the other urban professionals at the Pittsburgh conference, Loshbough had first encountered extension methods not at home but in India. He had been fascinated by them “not insofar as growing corn was involved—but in terms of human motivation and communication. How to motivate people, and how to get people to do things under the guidance of a generalist assisted by competent subject matter specialists” were the aspects of extension work he was most interested in. As he recounted to the other conference participants in July of 1961, “I remember sitting in my office and saying to M. L. Wilson: ‘These processes that

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69. Roy Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business, and Environmental Change* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969, 1996); “Douglas Enslinger, 79, a Sociologist, Dies,” *The New York Times* (June 8, 1989).

I learned in housing in the United States are no different than those you use in agricultural extension work.’ The processes of getting people to do things are fundamentally the same—particularly those used in a controversial program of a social nature.” Back home, the urban crisis—and planners’ responses to it—typified such a controversial social program. Racial discord, entrenched poverty, blight, unemployment, and juvenile delinquency were just some of the issues that were, by the 1960s, literally setting many American cities on fire. When Loshbough returned to the U.S. to resume his work on urban problems, he went about applying the international incarnation of extension work he had encountered overseas to ACTION-Housing’s efforts in Pittsburgh.<sup>70</sup>

The way international extension and development work had mobilized youth was of particular interest to Loshbough, who hoped his initiatives would attract the attention of the Kennedy administration, and eventually be incorporated into an expanded federal program for urban America. Indeed, Loshbough tapped into the White House’s enthusiasm for youth programs, international development, and urban renewal in an article he wrote for the *Journal of Housing* in 1963. Foreshadowing the VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program that would be established under Johnson’s Economic Opportunity Act the following year, Loshbough pointed out that “No single venture of the Administration has met with more unanimous approval than the ‘peace corps’ now serving overseas. Ergo, would not a domestic youth corps be equally successful, working as a task force in the revitalizing of our cities...?” Fortunately, ACTION-Housing had already “field-tested this concept” in a 1962 summer program that brought college students to Pittsburgh’s Homewood-Brushton neighborhood to carry out “11 action-research projects”—and to do more mundane

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70. For the connections between domestic housing policy and international development, see Cullather, see n. 34, esp. chapter 3. Loshbough’s quote is from *Pittsburgh Urban Extension Conference*, see n. 22, p. 4. For more on urban renewal and the urban crisis, see Avila, see n. 12; Eric Avila and Mark H. Rose, “Race, Culture, Politics, and Urban Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History* 35, no. 3 (Mar. 2009): 335–347; Biles, see n. 7; Gelfand, see n. 7; Guian A. McKee, “Liberal Ends through Illiberal Means: Race, Urban Renewal, and Community in the Eastwick Section of Philadelphia, 1949–1990,” *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 5 (July 2001): 547–583; Wendell E. Pritchett, “Which Urban Crisis? Regionalism, Race, and Urban Policy, 1960–1974,” *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 2 (Jan. 2008): 266–286; Schwartz, see n. 7; Teaford, see n. 7. For a glimpse of the different viewpoints urban professionals were offering at the time, see Colean, see n. 13; Jacobs, see n. 1.



things like assist in home improvement projects, clean up vacant lots, and run recreation programs for children. Though the students had been housed in a local church, Loshbough hoped that in future years they would be able to secure local families to host them, resulting in a more integrated experience.<sup>71</sup>

In its use of young people's labor alongside that of local residents, its combination of public and private funding, its aims at fostering interracial and intercultural understanding, and its focus on community improvement, ACTION-Housing's youth corps resembled nothing so much as a domestic, urban version of the International Farm Youth Exchange. Indeed, the Peace Corps program drew inspiration from IFYE, which preceded it. It was no accident that the Ford Foundation, which had been a major supporter of IFYE during its early years, was pledging additional funds a decade later to support ACTION-Housing's parallel program for city youth. And, just like IFYE, ACTION-Housing's Youth Corps was also aided by the American Friends Service Committee. Though Loshbough may never have known of IFYE itself, it and his Youth Corps not only sprang from a common set of concerns, but were enabled by common funding and administration.<sup>72</sup>

As Loshbough saw it, the task of uplifting urban neighborhoods was equivalent to that of awakening the masses of underdeveloped nations and bringing them into the modern world. In likening the process of "selling" the American development program to Third-World peasants and domestic attempts to get inner-city residents to go along with urban renewal and redevelopment programs that often fundamentally changed their neighborhoods (not always for the better), Loshbough was effectively equating the underdeveloped poor of the Global South and the struggling residents of the inner city. Loshbough was not the only urban reformer to draw this parallel—and the likeness was not limited to poverty. Race played a central—if rarely

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71. Bernard E. Loshbough, "A 'Youth Corps' is already in action—in Pittsburgh; more to come," *Journal of Housing* 20, no. 4 (May 1963): 200–202; *Urban Extension*, see n. 64; O'Connor, "The Ford Foundation's Gray Areas Program," see n. 22.

72. Another influential youth program of the 1960s, which eventually became a template for War on Poverty programs, was New York City's Mobilization for Youth project; see Noel A. Cazenave, "Ironies of Urban Reform: Professional Turf Battles in the Planning of the Mobilization for Youth Program, Precursor to the War on Poverty," *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 1 (Nov. 1999): 22–43.

spoken—role in urban efforts to adapt extension programs like 4-H to urban areas. Indeed, the racial and cultural dimensions of international programs—the fact that they dealt more explicitly with differences in color and culture than domestic 4-H, which had for most of its career operated on a segregated basis—made them a much more appealing template for urban reformers, operating in the era of Civil Rights, than domestic extension work. Indeed, in addition to drawing inspiration from international development work, the kinds of neighborhood-level collective action advocated by programs like that of ACTION-Housing drew on the community organizing tactics being developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s by civil rights activists and working-class reformers in America's cities. In particular, the neighborhood organizing programs of Saul Alinsky in Chicago helped inspire the kind of grassroots reform that became so influential in the 1960s, when urban leaders began focusing less on municipal areas as a whole and more on bettering individual neighborhoods through local input. The result was a transfer of “self-help” methods of community development from foreign aid programs to urban renewal efforts.<sup>73</sup>

#### FOREIGN AID IN REVERSE: URBAN EXTENSION IN ACTION

It is clear from the work of programs like ACTION-Housing that extension work came to the cities via its international programs. As Loshbough himself admitted, “It is ironic—perhaps shocking—that an urbanite like myself had to travel 10,000 miles to India to learn that a home-grown product like agricultural extension can very likely be adapted for effective use in urban centers. I guess you could call this ‘foreign aid’—in

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73. Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Gerald E. Markowitz and David Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Karen Ferguson, “Organizing the Ghetto: The Ford Foundation, CORE, and White Power in the Black Power Era, 1967–1969,” *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 1 (Nov. 2007): 67–100; Jerald Podair, “Review Essay: Neighborhood Power,” *Journal of Urban History* 31, no. 5 (July 2005): 746–752; Noel A. Cazenave, “Chicago Influences on the War on Poverty,” *Journal of Policy History* 5, no. 1 (1993): 52–68; Stephen J. McGovern, “Review Essay: Neighborhoods, Race, and the State,” *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 6 (Sept. 2003): 820–832; Wendell E. Pritchett, “Race and Community in Postwar Brooklyn: The Brownsville Neighborhood Council and the Politics of Urban Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 4 (May 2001): 445–470. For an example of neighborhood organizing in action, see Julia Abrahamson, *A Neighborhood Finds Itself* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959). Abrahamson herself was in attendance at the Pittsburgh Urban Extension Conference in 1961. For more on the connections between domestic housing policy and international development, see Cullather, see n. 34, esp. chapter 3.

reverse. Here in the United States of America, for a half-century the agricultural extension process has been developing just beyond our city limits, and we have overlooked it as a tool for urban use.”<sup>74</sup> But Loshbough’s comments beg the question: why did it happen this way? Why was it necessary for urban reformers to travel halfway around the world to discover a program that was literally in their backyards, and had been there for half a century? Why had they “overlooked” domestic extension work for so long? And why, when they encountered it abroad, did it seem relevant?

The answer to this question brings us back to the idea of rurally negotiated modernization that the originators of 4-H and extension work had made so central to their program. One of the primary reasons that urban planners had ignored domestic extension work—even those who perhaps had had more exposure to it than Loshbough himself—was because, in the United States, extension was almost exclusively rural in its philosophy, if not always in its geography. As Loshbough explained to the group of extension agents gathered at Penn State, “Institutions geared essentially to a rural and agricultural society cannot easily cope with the mercurial nature and fragmentation of city life. ... there is no waiting ‘shelf of techniques’ easily transferable to the urban areas...”<sup>75</sup> Despite the similarities that were developing between rural and urban life in the second half of the twentieth century, as American society became more interconnected via transportation, communication, markets, and mass media, an institution like the Extension Service that had evolved under essentially rural conditions in response to explicitly rural problems could not be transferred untouched to the urban context and expected to achieve the same success. Urban life, in the end, was not the same as rural life, and its people in particular were different, with different attitudes, outlooks, and ways of making a living. City life also involved navigating a different set of social and civic institutions. Agents would need to be retrained in urban affairs, and would need to rely on a different set of subject matter specialists in

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74. Loshbough, “Rural Extension Techniques,” see n. 2, p. 202.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

developing their programs. But, though these details of training and problem-solving would need to change, the underlying principles of extension would remain unchanged in the move to the cities. “What we seek to transfer are certain fundamental concepts: the involvement of people in planning; flexibility in methods; and an ordered pattern of relationships among levels of government and education, civic, and social agencies.”<sup>76</sup> This, then, was the new definition of extension work: a placeless organization that could develop place-based solutions to local problems through citizen participation and expert guidance. It was a definition that had been worked out in rural areas, but was now stripped of its rural associations.

Extension’s international travels had been instrumental in helping uproot the program from its rural nursery and transplant it to a new set of situations the world over. Although most of the places where extension was initially imported around the globe were rural, and although most of the problems it was intended to address in those places were rural and agricultural, the sheer variety of cultural, geographic, and economic conditions it encountered overseas began to change how it conceived of itself. Indeed, extension’s success in the United States had been due in part to its distributed structure, its flexibility and adaptability to the wide variety of environmental and social situations that existed within the nation’s boundaries. But the diversity of circumstances it encountered abroad was even greater, and the result of having to adapt to these far more different contexts while retaining a coherent philosophy and set of methods and practices was a transformation of these extension seedlings in such a way that they differed somewhat from their progenitor. In its transplantations abroad, extension work developed into a slightly different creature that resembled its parent in many important ways, but that could survive (and, indeed, thrive) in a much greater variety of conditions. The rural rootstock remained below the surface, but the plant itself had been transformed into a much more flexible organism.

Like Extension Service officials, who did not see their international experience as relevant to the urban

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76. Loshbough, “Rural Extension Techniques,” see n. 2, p. 203.

context until social-scientific ideas like the culture of poverty helped point out to them the parallels, Loshbough and his fellow reformers did not recognize rural extension as a useful set of techniques until after it had begun to change in these ways. It was only this second generation of extension work that seemed at all useful to professionals working in the domestic urban context. As a rural organization, domestic extension work had been invisible to urban reformers; but refracted through the lens of international work, it became a beam of light city planners were eager to follow.

This process was facilitated and enabled by two important entities: the Ford Foundation, and the United States Government. Together, these organizations made possible the encounter and cross-fertilization of international rural development strategies and domestic urban renewal ideas, both by sponsoring the sort of research that made this new kind of extension work possible, and by bringing into contact people who were able to transfer these ideas across disciplinary and geographic boundaries. The career paths of people like Bernard Loshbough—who went from state and federal government administrator to Department of State representative to Ford Foundation employee to ACTION-Housing director and Ford Foundation grant recipient—and Albert Mayer—a New York real estate developer who helped pioneer community development efforts in India—illustrate the revolving door between private philanthropy and government policy that helped make community development based on extension the template for renewal efforts both abroad and at home.<sup>77</sup>

International extension's elaboration of the social education concept was what made its version of extension work so immediately attractive to urban practitioners like Loshbough, who saw a parallel apathy and hopelessness among their charges. By involving them in local initiatives, equipping them with useful skills, improving their physical surroundings, and creating community vision and pride, they might create an en-

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77. Lubove, see n. 69; Albert Mayer, *Pilot Project, India: The Story of Rural Development at Etawah, Uttar Pradesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958); Cullather, see n. 34.

during kind of uplift for urban neighborhoods, just as people like Mayer and Ensminger had in rural Indian villages.

A brief examination of ACTION-Housing's flagship urban extension project illustrates these parallels. One of the places that the Pittsburgh Extension Conference visited on their morning tour in July of 1961 was the "declining neighborhood" of Homewood-Brushton.<sup>78</sup> It was here that ACTION-Housing would soon pilot-test its first set of renewal programs involving urban extension techniques. With funding from several sources—including grants from the Ford Foundation and federal urban renewal programs, as well as the support of local businesses—Loshbough and his team set about applying what they had learned at the conference, in their travels, in their previous urban experience, and in their collaborations with extension staff. They organized a Citizens Renewal Council, made up of community members, including both neighborhood residents and local industries and merchants, and housed in an office in the neighborhood that was staffed by a local council member. "The program is open at every step to participation by the neighborhood people—the source of the original impetus for self-help renewal," Loshbough explained. "Education and training of citizens proceed in an organized manner, so eventually they may be prepared to carry on most of the program themselves."<sup>79</sup>

By using federal grant money as one of many tools in their kit, ACTION-Housing aimed to avoid two problems common to urban renewal projects: the "slip-back gap" between applying for and actually receiving a grant, and the "federal-father-fixation" that treated D.C. funds as the only way to achieve these projects, resulting in over-reliance on Washington, "neglect of local resources and paralysis of local forces."<sup>80</sup> By insisting upon local leadership, local administration, and local staffing, Homewood-Brushton would be

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78. Loshbough, "Rural Extension Techniques," see n. 2, 203.

79. Bernard E. Loshbough, "Rehabilitation of Housing: Federal Programs and Private Enterprise," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 32, no. 3 (Summer 1967): 416–438; Loshbough, "Rural Extension Techniques," see n. 2, p. 201; *Cora Street* (Pittsburgh: ACTION-Housing, Inc., January 1969).

80. Loshbough, "Rural Extension Techniques," see n. 2, p. 201.

able to develop its native resources to further local goals. By participating in the Council, neighborhood residents would gain experience that would serve their community in the future, and prevent them from becoming dependent upon outside aid. This was a refrain that—however often misapplied—was common in discourses around foreign assistance, and Loshbough made the connection as well. “We think some of the successful principles of Etawah have been put to work in Homewood-Brushton,” he explained. With the aid of specialists, neighborhood residents “started with small projects like yard clean-up and turning two blocks of unneeded streets into a parking area, and proceeded to more difficult problems like a complete evaluation of their entire educational structure. At every step, people are involved in the making of the master physical and social plan.”<sup>81</sup> With the aid of an initial investment from philanthropy and government, Homewood Brushton would proceed toward self-governance and self-improvement.

Though its emphasis was on local initiative, ACTION-Housing called upon a few outsiders for assistance as well. Extension Service staff from Penn State came to consult on the project and offer advice and expertise. In addition, one of the crucial aspects of the extension model that ACTION-Housing incorporated into the Homewood-Brushton program was cooperation between the public and the private sector. Loshbough called for “private enterprise to take the initiative in forming a new, broadly-based corporation which, in cooperation with government, would bring about housing modernization on a sizable scale, with particular attention to the needs of families of low and moderate income.”<sup>82</sup> This “very close interaction between private enterprise and the public sectors in carrying out the program”<sup>83</sup> was on display in a housing rehabilitation scheme ACTION-Housing undertook in Homewood-Brushton in 1966. The organization purchased 22 row houses on Cora Street, refurbished them, and rented them back out to 22 families “at a rental only slightly

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81. Loshbough, “Rural Extension Techniques,” see n. 2, p. 203.

82. Loshbough, “Rehabilitation of Housing,” see n. 79, p. 416.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 424.

higher than previous payments.”<sup>84</sup> Loshbough hoped to demonstrate not only that extension techniques were applicable to the urban situation, but that urban renewal projects could enrich communities and local businesses at the same time.

One of the ways ACTION-Housing attempted to address residents’ needs for better housing and employment while also making a bit of money for local investors was through this Cora-Street model of rehabilitating—rather than demolishing and rebuilding—housing stock. Loshbough stressed the importance of involving minorities not just in the planning but also in the construction of this housing—employing the neighborhood while improving it physically. Like EFNEP, ACTION-Housing’s urban extension program saw the direct employment of local people as one way to contribute to community betterment. This was based on the same idea as rural and international extension: that by raising incomes, one could contribute mightily to local quality of life.<sup>85</sup>

In reading Loshbough’s description of the Homewood-Brushton project and Albert Mayer’s account of community development at Etawah side by side, it is often difficult to tell which is which. Both emphasize the importance of cultivating local leadership and developing local resource, both extol the virtues of local and government cooperation, both identify the changing of attitudes and the gradual accumulating of knowledge and skills as critical aspects of the work. These two programs, separated by seven and a half thousand miles, shared not only a leadership trained in urban American housing, but also a reliance on the extension model for inspiration and methods. Though, as Loshbough put it, it was strange to find ideas for urban problems in “faraway India,” that was how extension had arrived: on a long journey from the rural U.S., to the developing world, to the underdeveloped American city.<sup>86</sup>

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84. Loshbough, “Rehabilitation of Housing,” see n. 79, p. 425.

85. Ibid.

86. Loshbough, “Rural Extension Techniques,” see n. 2; Bernard E. Loshbough, “Social Action Programs in Urban Renewal,” in *Poverty in America: Proceedings of a National Conference held at the University of California, Berkeley, February 26–28, 1965*, ed. Margaret S. Gordon (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965); Loshbough, “A ‘Youth Corps’ is already in action,”



### CONCLUSION: UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND INNER CITIES

Over the course of the 1960s, rural extension techniques found their way into America's inner cities, with consequences that reshaped extension programs nationwide. In one set of efforts to bring extension to the city, the Extension Service itself capitalized on the federal enthusiasm for fighting poverty, particularly in urban areas and among minorities, to design a new set of programs that could introduce extension work to a new clientele, defend the organization against criticism, and help ensure Extension's survival and relevance in an urban and suburban world. These initiatives resulted both in local undertakings, such as 4-H in New York City, which helped establish a distinctly urban flavor of extension work within state extension organizations; and in nationwide programs like EFNEP, which affected the entirety of Extension's operations, pushing rural, suburban, and urban work alike towards consumer education and nutrition programs that could be applied in multiple contexts, and that might go some ways towards solving agricultural production and consumption problems at the same time. The international experience of extension and rural development work constituted a crucible for the social-scientific knowledge-making that formed the foundation of these new extension programs at home, particularly when it came to ideas about poverty, hunger, and culture. Specifically, these aspects of "backwardness" came to the fore in comparing third-world peasants and American ghetto-dwellers; and they consequently replaced the rural and the agrarian as the defining features of extension-worthy groups. In the process, the rural faded increasingly into the background.

The international context was equally important to the second set of efforts to promote extension in cities during this period, and it also helped "deruralize" extension. Urban reformers and liberal-minded philanthropists previously unacquainted with the Extension Service discovered and adopted extension methods by way of international development programs in the third world. Many of these programs had been formulated

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see n. 71; Loshbough, "Rehabilitation of Housing," see n. 79; Mayer, see n. 77.

and carried out by rural extension specialists from the United States in the immediate postwar years: they thus shared a common lineage with domestic rural extension. However, these “international” or “foreign aid” versions of extension work had nonetheless diverged somewhat from the extension programs that inspired them by the time urban reformers discovered them in the 1960s. Specifically, although many of the international development efforts that the Extension Service itself ran had by the 1960s and ’70s become focused chiefly on economic development through agricultural mechanization, crop breeding, and the technologies of the Green Revolution, the programs based on extension but modified to meet local conditions—often by people at one time connected with Extension but now working for governments or foundations, such as India’s village development program—retained a communitarian cast that had been declining in the Extension Service’s work both at home and abroad. The story of community development—from New Deal rural sociological efforts in the southern United States, to village improvement schemes in Asia and Latin America, to neighborhood action in American inner cities—illustrates this journey perfectly. Refracted as extension was through this international lens, it lent a slightly different emphasis to the new urban incarnation of extension it inspired outside the Extension Service. In the form of community development implemented in programs like those of ACTION-Housing, and in federal Great Society programs such as community development block grants, the cultivationist approach to improvement endured, despite its deracination from rural life. However, it was now practiced in a different setting, by different people and organizations, in service to different groups, than those imagined by extension’s founders in the early twentieth century.

Extension ideas traveled along these two distinct routes to get to the city, but one result of these journeys was the same: the deruralization of extension work and the expanded purview and applicability of its educational and reformatory techniques. In this context of universality, where extension methods needed to be applied to help a single working mother in Harlem sign up for food stamps, or a group of Indian peasants organize an irrigation scheme, or a suburban girl learn to repair her bicycle just as readily as they would

be to introduce a new method of tillage to an Oklahoma farmer or to train a farm boy in the finer points of beef cattle showmanship, a new set of foci and guiding principles emerged to define what it was extension *did*. The concept of social education—education for change—thus became central, both to the new and expanded version of extension education the Extension Service was defining, and to the community development model with which it was so closely allied. Teaching people new attitudes, new aspirations, new wants and needs and possibilities—these aims fit well with both the economically focused and the social-action strains of development through extension. On the one hand, social education could be a tool for spurring consumption among the “underconsuming”—the poor—both at home and abroad, thus solving the problem of agricultural overproduction in ways that furthered the extension of American influence, technology, and markets under the guise of “self-help.” On the other, it could be a means of empowering local people, spurring them towards action to improve their communities along lines they themselves defined, and giving them the organizational tools and institutional means to do so. Social education was so vast a concept that it could accommodate these two very different ideas about how best to develop people; as a result, extension work was able to gain a new lease on life that could carry it into the future, no matter how the political currents shifted.

It was in this latter incarnation—community development through social action and organization—that the ideas and ideals of rural modernity found a new and expanded form. Although no longer explicitly rural, the central aims of these programs paralleled nothing so much as the spirit of Country-Lifers who wished to give rural people a voice; to help them organize for fairer prices, higher incomes, better schools, modern conveniences; to allow them to imagine a future that *they* desired for themselves, their communities, their livelihoods, rather than one that would be imposed upon them from outside; and give them the means to use their own skills and abilities to bring that future about. Community development may not have been a term of art for Liberty Hyde Bailey or Seaman Knapp, but it would have been immediately recognizable to

them in both theory and practice. Likewise for the rural sociologists and ecologists of the New Deal Era who sought to aid rural self-determination through a focus on social organization and local conservation. Though the futures they imagined did not always come into being, their ways of pursuing them were not only remarkably similar, but also products of the same intellectual heritage.

While rural youth—and, to some extent, 4-H clubs themselves—have faded into the background in this chapter, the broader movements of which they are a crucial part highlight the significance of both for telling a history of development. Following the career of extension work with young people—from the fields and farmhouses of turn-of-the-century America, all the way to a village in the Ganges valley and a public housing project in Chicago—demonstrates the importance of agrarian models of improvement to later incarnations of development work—agricultural, economic, and otherwise—that are more familiar to us today. It also highlights the centrality of cultivation—of young people, of crops, of livestock, of community life—to developmental thinking, not only as a biological metaphor, but as a set of practices for interacting with and getting a living from nature. These metaphors and practices do not disappear when development ceases to be a solely agricultural or rural phenomenon; rather, they endure and inflect our discourse in important ways. What is more, they help us attend more closely to localities, to the particular places where scientists, educators, government officials, reformers, businessmen, bankers, and farm men, women, boys, and girls came together and interacted in furtherance of both lofty goals and highly local, particular aims. Uncovering the roots of these ideas can help us to disaggregate development, to see other possible paths, other possible pasts, other potential futures.

# Conclusion

## The Rural and the Modern

If the aim of 4-H has been to cultivate the country's most important crop—its children—it certainly has succeeded. Today there are over 6 million youth enrolled in 4-H programs nationwide, and even more participating in similar clubs overseas. These numbers make 4-H a larger program than the Boy Scouts (with just under 3 million boys) and the Girl Scouts (2.3 million girls) combined, and significantly larger than Camp Fire USA, formerly the Camp Fire Girls (300,000 boys and girls). The other major youth organization in the United States that focuses on agriculture, the FFA (formerly the Future Farmers of America), boasts just half a million members. At county, state, and regional fairs the country over, Americans can see these young people's handiwork on display, watch them show their livestock in the ring, and cheer them on as they compete for prizes in more fields than Seaman Knapp could have imagined.<sup>1</sup>

While 4-H, Nature Study, Scouting, Camp Fire, and FFA all grew out of similar sets of concerns about youth in a modernizing nation, 4-H was the only organization to explicitly address the needs of rural youth,

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1. For 4-H enrollment statistics, see: United States Department of Agriculture, Research, Education, and Economics Information System, "4-H Reports Page," URL: [http://www.reeis.usda.gov/portal/page?\\_pageid=193,899783&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL&smi\\_id=31](http://www.reeis.usda.gov/portal/page?_pageid=193,899783&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&smi_id=31) (accessed 07/12/2012); National 4-H Headquarters, "National 4-H Headquarters Fact Sheet: 2010 4-H Youth Development ES-237 Statistics," 2010, URL: <http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/library/FS-ES237-2010.pdf> (accessed 07/12/2012). Figures quoted are from the latest available data (the year 2010). For Scouting, Camp Fire, and FFA enrollment, see: Boy Scouts of America, "At a Glance," 2011, URL: <http://www.scouting.org/media/mediakit/ata glance.aspx> (accessed 07/12/2012); Girl Scouts of the USA, "Who We Are: Facts," 2012, URL: [http://www.girlscouts.org/who\\_we\\_are/facts/](http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/facts/) (accessed 07/12/2012); Camp Fire USA National Headquarters, "Financial Statements and Report of Independent Certified Public Accountants," 2011, URL: [http://www.campfireusa.org/uploadedFiles/Content/News\\_and\\_Events/Camp%20Fire%20Audit%20Report%20FY2011.pdf](http://www.campfireusa.org/uploadedFiles/Content/News_and_Events/Camp%20Fire%20Audit%20Report%20FY2011.pdf) (accessed 07/12/2012), p. 9; National FFA Organization, "National FFA Organization - Who We Are," 2012, URL: <https://www.ffa.org/about/whoweare/Pages/Statistics.aspx> (accessed 07/12/2012). Figures quoted are for 2011, 2012, 2011, and 2012, respectively.

and to articulate a clear set of aims around the conservation and improvement of rural life.<sup>2</sup> This dissertation attempted to show that the efforts to envision and enact this rural modernity through 4-H club activities has been central to American ideas about national and international development in the twentieth century. From its roots in the regional agricultural landscapes of the United States in the early 1900s, to its national mobilization for food production during World War II, to its realignment around issues of conservation, health, and community during the Depression, to its explosion on the international and urban stages in the postwar period, 4-H has attempted to modernize by cultivation, to direct biological and social processes in husbanding ways. Today, we live in a world of agribusiness and industrial farming, but we also live in a world of state fairs, championship ribbons, and project records; of urban farms and backyard chickens; of scientific research on perennial grains—a complex and multilayered world in which the rural and the modern often intersect. 4-H helps us see that this has long been the case.



At the close of 1939's *Agriculture in Modern Life*, M. L. Wilson discussed “the search for new rural culture patterns” in an age marked by change and transition. He describe a rural populace desirous of nothing so much as security, so intently it could fairly be described as the spirit of the times. “Just as the nineteenth century was imbued with the ideal of progress, just so our present age is increasingly intent upon an ideal of security.” People wanted “a rest from the breakneck speed with which science and technology have altered our environment in the past hundred years.” They had set aside the excesses of personal ambition, and wanted

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2. For more on the history of scouting and other similar youth programs of the turn of the twentieth century, see: Tammy M. Proctor, “(Uni)Forming Youth: Girl Guides and Boy Scouts in Britain, 1908–1939,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 45 (Spring 1998): 103–134; Tammy M. Proctor, *On My Honour: Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2002); Ben Jordan, “‘Conservation of Boyhood’: Boy Scouting’s Modest Manliness and Natural Resource Conservation,” *Environmental History* 15 (Oct. 2010): 612–642; Helen Buckler, Mary F. Fiedler, and Martha F. Allen, *Wo-He-Lo: The Story of Camp Fire Girls, 1910–1960* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961); Ernest Thompson Seton, *Boy Scouts of America: A Handbook of Woodcraft, Scouting, and Life-craft*, With which is incorporated by arrangement General Sir Robert Baden-Powell’s Scouting for Boys (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1910); Camp Fire Girls, *The Book of the Camp Fire Girls* (New York: Camp Fire Girls National Headquarters, 1914).

to build secure, comfortable, modest lives and homes. They did not want more and lots of it; they wanted peace.<sup>3</sup>

Wilson believed it was possible for government to help give the exhausted rural populace what they wanted—peace, security, contentment—by fostering cultural adjustment between rural folk patterns and the tendencies of technological modernity. “The solution as I see it,” he wrote, “lies in combining the best of the new with the most enduring of the old, and in political-social-economic-educational policies that strive to keep the social mechanism sufficiently simple for fundamental popular understanding.... Otherwise democracy cannot survive, and violent clashes of interest and ideologies will follow.” The prospects for rural life were fine, so long as this adjustment could be achieved. “Our future now lies in the middle ground,” he said. It was a modest vision, but a rural one and modern.<sup>4</sup>

Two decades later, another book appeared that contemplated the place of agriculture in modern life from a very different perspective. Sponsored by the Foundation for American Agriculture and based on a Harvard Business School study of the emerging field of “agribusiness,” *Farmer in a Business Suit* was an unabashed paean to this “new and stimulating concept of economics relating to and including modern agriculture,” a “combination of agriculture and business that now provides our great abundance of food and fiber.”<sup>5</sup>

Like so many treatises on agriculture, this one offered a narrative about the history of farming in America divided into phases: the earthbound era, a three-centuries-long period characterized by land and the frontier; the transition, the period between 1920 and 1940 during which an economic frontier replaced the land frontier, and businesses allied with agriculture outpaced the practice of farming itself; and the agribusiness era, which constituted for its authors both the exciting present and the limitless future that resulted when the

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3. O. E. Baker, Ralph Borsodi, and M. L. Wilson, *Agriculture in Modern Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), p. 265.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

5. John H. Davis and Kenneth Hinshaw, *Farmer in a Business Suit* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), p. ix.

farmer donned a business suit and aligned his activities with those of the corporate world and the demands of economic growth.

The farmer in a business suit has taken the place of the old homesteader. His horsepower is bred in factories and his stock is fed by the white-frosted scientists in the laboratories that produce those fabulous substances known as antibiotics and hormones. His family farm is a costly, efficient, revved-up complex of fields, barns and equipment with a gluttonous hunger for capital and managerial know-how. His productivity is a hundred, a thousand times his family's own needs. His harvests flow through myriads of enterprises and arrive in your kitchen cleaned, prepared and processed as if by built-in maid service.<sup>6</sup>

This was a vision that could hardly have been more different from the future Wilson sketched at the end of *Agriculture in Modern Life*. From the point of view of the early twenty-first century, the farmer in a business suit lacks much of the luster he must have possessed for the agribusiness-booster authors who described him. To them, the farmer-businessman was the inevitable result of the massive expansion of the postwar American economy: in an age of endless development, the man who husbanded the processes of life that fed and clothed the world needed to uproot himself from the ground and burst forth upon an economic scene that was more and more unmoored from the environment. Baker, Borsodi, and Wilson did not share this faith in endless progress. They were optimists, hopeful visionaries in the midst of the worst hard time for rural folk; but they were also men with their feet in the 19th century, and a very different notion of the possibilities of and limits to development.



This dissertation has shown how a set of alternative propositions for the future of farming and rural life in the United States were floated, attempted, and marginalized over the course of the twentieth century. It is a story of moments of opportunity, in which rural reformers and farm people worked to create a space in

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6. Davis and Hinshaw, see n. 5, p. x.



which rural life and modern life could merge in ways that would benefit all Americans. It is the story of how they rallied around youth and government as the means to enact these reforms, and how the futures they imagined were eventually marginalized in favor of a more universal view of economic progress. It is about a set of American attempts to reconcile the rural and the modern, to ensure that they would not be at odds, either conceptually or practically, by forging connections between the developmental processes of agriculture and human growth, and the improving tendencies of agrarian democracy and American society. In the end, it is the story not only of how rural places were made modern, but also of how they came to be seen as inherently non-modern, in need of radical social, economic, technological, and political change.

The rural and the modern, for all their intersections over the course of the twentieth century, remain at odds, a contradiction in terms we have difficulty reconciling. The reason for this has everything to do with the linearity of the development narrative itself, the way it flows swiftly past the tributaries and meanderings that helped to give it form and strength. This tendency towards channelization may make the abandoned watercourses more difficult to see from our swiftly traveling craft, but it cannot prevent us from finding a mooring that allows us to step out and explore the oxbows that remain. They remind us that the river did not always follow its current path, that it is ever carving and recarving its channel.



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CCE	Cornell Cooperative Extension Records, 1915–2004. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca. #21-24-1975.
CU4H	Cornell University 4-H Club Minutes, 1938–1952. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca. #37-6-2084.
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FF53-200	Grant No. 53-200. Ford Foundation Archives, New York. R-0515.
FF54-179	Grant No. 54-179. Ford Foundation Archives, New York. R-0517.
FF55-20	Grant No. 55-20. Ford Foundation Archives, New York. R-0518 and R-0519.
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MCES4H	Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service. Cooperative Extension Service 4-H Club. Special Collections, University Archives Division, Mississippi State University Libraries, Starkville. A88-27.
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MTER	Montana Extension Service. Records, 1913–1970. Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman. Accession 00021.
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