



**Advances in Race and
Ethnicity in Education**
Volume 7

African American Rural Education

College Transitions and
Postsecondary Experiences

Edited by
Crystal R. Chambers
Loni Crumb

Series Editors
Chance W. Lewis
James L. Moore III

AFRICAN AMERICAN RURAL
EDUCATION

ADVANCES IN RACE AND ETHNICITY IN EDUCATION

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ADVANCES IN RACE AND ETHNICITY IN EDUCATION
VOLUME 7

**AFRICAN AMERICAN
RURAL EDUCATION:
COLLEGE TRANSITIONS
AND POSTSECONDARY
EXPERIENCES**

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2021

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83909-871-0 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83909-870-3 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-83909-872-7 (Epub)

ISSN: 2051-2317 (Series)



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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FOREWORD

Our lives, perspectives, hopes, and dreams are influenced by our race which is not the true determinant of our future or what we were put here to be or do. Race is a social construct and its meaning in the lives of individuals varies. Although there is a definition of race, there is not one universal practical way that one lives or defines his or her individual way of being in a race that would make a lived experience monolithic, only one's outer shell and assumptions about life in that shell which is not the individuals' reality in its purest form.

Perhaps, race for true southern African American males, like ourselves, who are academic leaders and employ a personal philosophy of embracing the wisdom of elders, males, and females, about masculinity, race, and culture, and the importance of being authentic challenges the assumptions and stereotypes about the African Americans from the rural South.

From our interpretation and commonality, growing up in the rural South, the context of family was extremely influential on our development and expectations of responsibility to self, family, community, and world. The ability to interact with multiple generations of family members gave us a sense of identity and belonging that was extremely important for the developmental years. Just sitting at the feet of our elders conveyed a family structure that honored and simply respected them and trusted what they said to be of value. Looking at their hands and their faces penetrated our consciousness of the fact that their ordinary existence was proof enough to honor their extraordinary lives and spirits.

We are reminded who we are each day and of our elders' love for us by the fact that they took the time to not only be with us but to involve us in the daily simple tasks of life so that we could bring our unique self into being. From getting water out of the country well; to picking and shelling beans from the garden; to helping gather wood for the stove; to making biscuits for dinner. What is extra special about one's experiences is the notion that we were never judged for being ourselves or thinking out of the box to solve simple problems.

The stillness of sitting on the porch in the summer in anticipation of a storm by smelling the rain in the air before it arrived. Experiences, like this one, certainly taught us patience, self-control, reflections, appreciation, and the art of stillness and imagination. The lessons with our elders in the rural South also gave us lessons in character which bleeds into the way we communicate with others.

Because we were born and raised in the 1960s and came of age in the 1970s and 1980s, we experienced some of the most transitional and powerful discoveries in history that affects how we are in the world. We have always lived in an integrated world, regardless of what others might think about the south, life was good and kind. We experienced classrooms with both Black and White teachers

and Black and White classmates whose social economic status was similar to our own. We watched men go off to work, pray in church, and take part in building our communities. We watched mothers who stayed home and others who went off to work in textile mills, hospitals as nurses, or the field for seasonal work. Regardless, there was the expectation that your community had for you to get an education and be the best you that you can be for yourself and community. Make a difference in the world; put God first; do unto others as you would have them do unto you; and know that you were loved were messages that sustain us through our adolescence and young adulthood.

As academic leaders, many times the only Black person in the room, who shoulders the responsibility to education and enlighten our peers about behavior, policies, and assumptions regarding those who were not like them. This is an issue of respect and honoring all while teaching them that the whole is as important as the parts. We must take a broad lens when dealing with discrimination in our current time. We must take the humanistic approach which is not a complicated one and remember to continue to penetrate the consciousness of all

We are so pleased to be asked to write the foreword for this exceptional work. The authors should be commended for exploring these important and challenging topics related to African American rural education. Black rurality is generally underexplored. This work contributes greatly to scholarship as it reflects the experiences, challenges, and triumphs of Black rural people just like us.

B. Grant Hayes, PhD,
Acting Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor,
East Carolina University

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PREFACE

We are excited to share Volume 7 – *African American Rural Education: Post-secondary Pathways and Experiences* in the *Advances in Race and Ethnicity in Education* book series. Volume 7 brings novel perspectives on the secondary and post-secondary educational experiences of African American students, administrators, and educators living in rural communities. Current literature on rural education is White dominated. Sparse attention is given towards an understanding of the educational challenges and collegiate trajectories of rural African Americans. Yet, nearly 20 percent (19.3%) of the US population is rural and African Americans comprise the largest racial/ethnic minority group in rural settings, about 2.6 million people. Moreover, with reverse migration from urban centers, there are increasing numbers of African Americans returning to rural communities as well as communities concentrated in the American (US) South that remain predominantly Black over time (DeShay, 2020; Housing Assistance Council, 2012; Schaeffer, 2019). The majority of Blacks in the US are not poor, but many particularly in areas in the American (US) South have endured persistent, intergenerational poverty (USDA, 2018). While literature on rurality addresses poverty, it does not address experiences from a Black perspective, excluding experiences of Black culture as well as structural and interpersonal racism. In the words of contributing author, Tremaine Young, “it’s one thing to be poor and rural. It is another thing to be Black” (2019). This observation was made after Dr. Young hired a White teacher from coal mining country to work at a school in a majority Black rural school district and he observed a cultural mismatch.

Thus, specific attention to African American students in rural settings is warranted. The purpose of the volume is to attend to the challenges, trajectories, and opportunities of African American rural students as they move from secondary to postsecondary education. The volume consists of an introduction and 10 chapters from contributing scholars across multiple disciplines who provide research findings and theoretical ideology related to rurality and education. Through this volume, it is our hope that educators, policy makers, and social media influencers will garner a better sense of what it means to be African American in a rural environment as well as develop culturally informed pedagogies/andragogys that will assist in supporting the educational trajectories of rural African American students.

This volume opens with a foreword by Grant Hayes, Acting Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs at East Carolina University and Lemuel Watson, Dean and Professor in the School of Education at Indiana University, who set the tone for the volume by sharing their appreciation for rural

living and African American cultural values that have an ongoing influence in their current positions in university leadership. The Foreword is followed by an introduction by Elise J. Cain titled *African American Rural Students: Exploring the Intersection of Place and Race*. Cain sets the context for the rest of this collection with an exploration of the intersection of race and geographic location for African American students. She brings together the contemporary push to increase college enrollments among rural students in an effort to mitigate population declines among traditional college students nationwide with an understanding of rurality formally defined and socially constructed as intersected with race. Higher education institutions are now recognizing rural communities as valuable places for new college recruiting initiatives; however, given the suboptimal primary and secondary educational experiences of African American rural students, there is a need to prime the postsecondary educational pump so that these students receive the educational content, knowledge of college, and support needed to be successful.

The rest of the volume is divided into two sections, focusing on secondary and post-secondary education settings. This first section lays the groundwork for postsecondary pathways through the examination of the secondary level education experiences of African American rural students. In Chapter 1, *Passport with No Access: The Habitus and Cultural Capital Influences of Rural, African American and Low Socioeconomic Status Students' College Aspirations*, Cara M. Gafford finds that rural African American students' college aspirations are associated with their academic self-concept; but that students' aspirations exceeded their "circle of influence" or social capital. As such, she challenges institutions to seek earlier opportunities to interject college and career conversations in order to cultivate African American students' college aspirations. In Chapter 2, *Black, Gifted, and Living in the 'Country': Searching for Equity and Excellence in Rural Gifted Education Programs*, Joy Lawson Davis, Donna Y. Ford, James L. Moore, III, and Erinn Fears Floyd extend the constraints of race and place in the identification of brilliance among African American rural students. Focusing on within race gendered experiences, Authors Erik M. Hines, James L. Moore, III, Renae D. Mayes, Paul C. Harris, Paul Singleton, II, Christian M. Hines, and Chris J. Harried discuss the interconnections of rurality and Black male identity in Chapter 3, *Black Males in Rural Contexts: Challenges and Opportunities*. In the following chapter, *#BlackGirlMagic: The (Mis)education of Gifted Black Girls from Economically Disadvantaged, Rural Communities*, Raven K. Cokley and Loni Crumb discuss the intersections of intellectual ability, race, gender, social class, and place, calling attention to the underrepresentation of girls from rural, economically disadvantaged backgrounds in gifted education programs from a Critical Race Feminist Perspective.

In the second section, focused on postsecondary pathways and experiences, authors consider student trajectories, experiences, and institutional responses to the needs of African American rural college students. The section opens with Chapter 5, *The Privileged Rural: The College Experiences of Rural African Americans*. Jamon Flowers uses W.E.B. Du Bois' double consciousness framework to explore how African American rural students experience college.

In Chapter 6, *Rural Pathways to Higher Education: The Role of Mathematics Achievement and Self-Efficacy for Black Students*, Crystal R. Chambers discusses differences in the trajectories of Black rural students, whether attending a two or four-year institution as compared to no college enrollment. The difference among students all comes down to mathematics as students with higher scores tend to attend four-year institutions, whereas those who attend two-year institutions or have no collegiate experiences are not statistically distinct. The implication is that in order to improve Black rural students' college access, we must address the quality and quantity of mathematics education in the secondary school context. In the next chapter, *Rural, Black, and Distant: Building Relationships to Foster Higher Education Access* relays a creative approach to engaging Black rural students through the Emerging Scholars Program at Clemson University. Jason Combs, Michelle L. Boettcher, Amber Lange, and Sara Hanks present the Emerging Scholars Program as a model for programming connecting universities to rural communities, cultivating postsecondary access and outcomes for African American rural students. In Chapter 8, *The Culturally Relevant Classroom Management Competence (CRCM) of Novice Teachers*, Tremaine Young and Crystal R. Chambers explore the relative influence of teacher preparation on the culturally relevant classroom management competence of novice teachers. They find that multiple decades of immersion within one's own community is not interrupted by a few years in a teacher education program, whether at an HBCU or PWI. Greater intentionality within teacher preparation programs, post-graduation continued induction and professional development is necessary to cultivate CRCM competency among novice teachers. Tricia J. Stewart and Nicole DeRonck add to the conversation of educator preparation in Chapter 9, *Advancing Rural Administrators and Teacher Leaders: Educational Opportunity in the Alabama Black Belt*. They examine the influence of a doctoral program in educational leadership in cultivating educational opportunities for K-12 African American rural students. Finally, African American professors Adrienne Erby and Dominique S. Hammond examine the influences of their positionality on their pedagogy, curricular content and approach, experiences with students, and institutional climate in the final chapter, *Outsiders Within: Critical Perspectives of Black/African American Women Teaching Multicultural Counseling in Rural Appalachia*. We close the volume with a reflective Afterword by Kassie Freeman, President and CEO of the African Diaspora and Senior Faculty Fellow Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Teachers College, Columbia University.

The authors of this volume hail from a variety of disciplines as the post-secondary trajectories of African American rural students are stymied by various influences such as social, economic, psychological, and political forces which may damper the ability of these students to seamlessly progress from secondary to postsecondary education. Just as the context of African American rural students is complex, there is also a need for multifaceted solutions to disentangle the effects of race and place to secure affirming educational pathways for rural African American students. We are grateful for the knowledge of each contributor and the voice they give to African American rural education in this volume.

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AFRICAN AMERICAN RURAL STUDENTS: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF PLACE AND RACE

Elise J. Cain

ABSTRACT

The educational attainment of rural people differs considerably based upon peoples' races and ethnicities. For example, in 2015 twice as many White rural adults had a bachelor's degree or higher compared to Black, American Indian and Alaska Native, and Hispanic or Latino rural adults. Within higher education contexts if one is to understand college students and their experiences, a recognition of students' identities is necessary. For African American college students from rural areas, I argue a starting point for understanding these students and their experiences in college environments is an exploration of the intersection of their place-based and raceethnicity-based identities. This chapter, therefore, provides statistics about the educational attainment of rural people, reviews rural place-based identity literature, and then integrates perceptions of place with perceptions of race and ethnicity. Based on this discussion, recommendations for future pedagogies, practices, and research are suggested for faculty, staff, and scholars.

Keywords: Identity; rural; African American; student development; educational attainment; Place; Race; Black

AFRICAN AMERICAN RURAL STUDENTS: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF PLACE AND RACE

Due to lowering enrollment rates at colleges and universities as well as additional attention mass media outlets allocated to rural places based on voting patterns during the 2016 United States presidential election, people from rural areas are being targeted for recruitment to postsecondary institutions (Jaschik, 2017; Nadworny, 2018; Pappano, 2017). This additional attention on rural people may be beneficial for rural individuals because although rural students are graduating high school at a comparable rate to other locales (National Center for Education Statistics[NCES], 2011), their enrollment (NCES, 2015), persistence (High School Benchmarks, 2016), and bachelor's degree attainment (United States Department of Agriculture[USDA], 2017) lags urbanized areas. These national statistics point to educational disparities based upon people's places of origin; however, they omit further marginalization based upon people's other social identities. For example, the educational attainment of rural people differs considerably based on peoples' races and ethnicities. In 2015, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic/Latino rural people were less likely to graduate high school and were half as likely to complete a bachelor's degree compared to White rural people (USDA, 2017). This means that in 2015, for instance, only 10% of Black rural adults aged 25 and over had earned at least a bachelor's degree (USDA, 2017).

Recruitment of rural students, specifically rural students of color, although important, is only one aspect of these students' journeys within higher education. Students' experiences within college contexts are also important to consider because these experiences will lead to students' completions of their degrees and/or certificates. Although the data above indicate the status of postsecondary educational attainment for rural students, it hides the association between identities (as well as systems of inequality based upon identities) and educational attainment. Identities are powerful influencers in peoples' lives because they have an effect on people's perceptions of themselves and others, as well as impact how people interact (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Jones and Abes (2013) stated, "an understanding of identity is necessary if one is to understand college students and their experiences in higher education contexts" (p. 19). In the case of African American rural college students, therefore, I argue a starting point for understanding these students and their experiences in college environments is an exploration of the intersection of place-based and race/ethnicity-based identities.

This chapter will begin with an overview of the educational attainment of rural people, followed by a comparison of these national statistics with the educational attainment of rural people who identify as African American. Afterward, because few scholars focus on place-based identity (Thomas, Lowe, Fulkerson, & Smith, 2011) and because rural places and people, specifically, are often neglected in research and policy discussions (Lavalley, 2018), this chapter will provide a review of rural place-based identity literature. This review will include both classifications based on official government definitions as well as understandings of place in terms of socially constructed views and meanings, including the urban-rural binary as a false dichotomy. This chapter will then integrate

perceptions of place with perceptions of race and ethnicity due to the explicit focus of this book on African American rural people. Due to a comprehension of the combination of place-based identity with race/ethnicity-based identity in rural areas, this chapter will further highlight how these identity politics can influence the beliefs and experiences of African American rural college students. I will purposefully discuss how race and ethnicity are constructed in urban versus rural places, note the connection between whiteness and educational access and success, as well as examine how persistent poverty are all potential barriers to African American rural college students' pathways. As students from rural areas and as students of color, place and race are just two identity dimensions of these students. These two oppressed identities, nevertheless, work together and influence each other. Based on these discussions, recommendations for future pedagogies, practices, and research will be then be offered to conclude this chapter.

THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF RURAL PEOPLE

I will begin this chapter by reviewing the educational attainment of rural people to provide context for the educational journeys of African American rural students. Overall, people from rural areas in the United States of America are completing higher levels of education than in the past (USDA, 2017). Most rural people now have a high school diploma or equivalent (USDA, 2017). In fact, in 2010, the national high school graduation rate for students from rural areas was 80.6%, which was similar to suburban (81.4%) and town (79.9%) locales and higher than city locales (71.1%) (NCES, 2011). Although rural people are graduating high school at comparable rates to more urbanized areas, less rural people are enrolling in postsecondary education. For example, in 2015 only 29.3% of rural people aged 18 to 24 and only 10.0% of rural people aged 25 to 29 were enrolled in colleges and universities (NCES, 2015). These percentages were less than town, suburban, and city locales for both age groups, with the percentages for the 18- to 24-year-old group being 41.2%, 42.3%, and 47.7% and the percentages for the 25- to 29-year-old group being 12.1%, 15.8%, and 17.4%, respectively (NCES, 2015). When rural people are enrolled in postsecondary education, there is also data that suggest they may be struggling with maintaining their enrollment. For instance, *High School Benchmarks* (2016) reported college students from rural areas having a slightly lower first- to second-year persistence rates (83%) compared to college students from urban (88%) and suburban (84%) areas.

Relating to their postsecondary participation and completions rates, in 2015 about the same percentage of rural and urban people completed some college or completed their associate's degrees (USDA, 2017). A more pronounced difference in educational attainment between urban and rural people is seen at higher degree levels. In 2015, for instance, 33% of urban adults compared to 19% of rural adults earned at least a bachelor's degree (USDA, 2017). Between the years of 2000 and 2015, the educational attainment of rural people not only lagged urban people relating to bachelor's, postgraduate, and professional degrees, the urban-rural gap of people with these types of credentials grew from 11% to 14% (USDA, 2017).

These national statistics, however, hide differences in educational attainment based on people’s identities. Race and ethnicity, for instance, are major factors associated with the educational attainment of rural people. Even though people of all races and ethnicities in rural areas are currently achieving higher levels of education than in the past, educational attainment of rural people dramatically differs based upon people’s races and ethnicities (USDA, 2017). According to the USDA (2017), “racial and ethnic minorities comprise an increasing share of the rural population without a high school diploma” (p. 4). Likewise, in 2015, twice as many White rural adults (20%) had a bachelor’s degree compared to Black rural adults (10%), American Indian and Alaska Native rural adults (10%), and Hispanic or Latino rural adults (9%) (USDA, 2017).

Due to the focus of this volume being African American rural education, I will now expand upon the educational attainment of Black and African American rural people. In 2015, 39% of Black rural people had a high school diploma or equivalent, 21% of Black rural people had some college, 7% of Black rural people had an associate’s degree, and 10% of Black rural people had a bachelor’s degree or higher (USDA, 2017). At all three postsecondary levels, the percentages of attainment for African American rural adults were less than the percentages of attainment for White rural adults as well as all rural people nationally (recognizing that most rural people identify as White (USDA, 2018)) (see Fig. 1). The greatest disparity between these numbers was at the bachelor’s degrees or higher level, with Black rural adults being half as likely as White rural adults to have

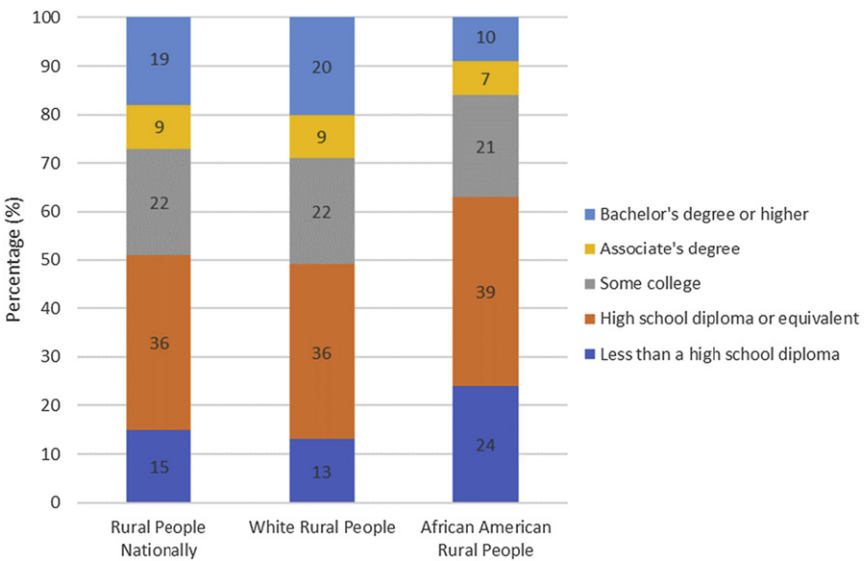


Fig. 1. A Comparison of the Educational Attainment of all Rural People Compared to White Rural People and African American Rural People, 2015. Source: Adapted from United States Department of Agriculture. (2017).

completed at least a bachelor's degree (USDA, 2017). These statistics, therefore, suggest educational inequalities not only based on place but also race in the rural America.

OFFICIAL DEFINITIONS OF RURAL PLACES

To provide context for these statistics, it is key to know the definitions of rural places being used by these reporting agencies. Definitions of "rural" used by scholars and policy makers, however, can be perplexing because there are several official government definitions as well as additional alternative definitions used by people (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008; USDA, 2019). For instance, according to the United States Census Bureau (2016), about 60 million people live in rural areas. The USDA (2018), on the other hand, reports the rural population to be about 46.1 million people. Why is there a discrepancy of almost 14 million people between these two sources? These differences result from dissimilar definitions used to categorize urban and rural areas (USDA, 2019). The use of various definitions sometimes causes confusion as exemplified, for instance, in the population sizes discussed above. Thus, it is key for people to recognize which definition is being used (if an official definition is being used at all) in reports as well as understand the different official definitions of rural places. This part of this chapter, therefore, will briefly review three official definitions of rural places as defined by the United States Census Bureau, by the United States Department of Agriculture, and by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

United States Census Bureau

One definition of rural places comes from the United States Census Bureau. The United States Census Bureau's urban-rural classification system is divided into three parts based on population size within geographic areas. First, areas with 50,000 people or more are defined as urbanized areas. Second, areas with at least 2,500 people but less than 50,000 people are defined as urban clusters. Third, all other areas not included in the two urban definitions are considered rural areas, meaning rural areas are places with 2,499 people or less (United States Census Bureau, 2018).

United States Department of Agriculture

Another definition of rural places is used by the USDA. The Economic Research Service of the USDA defines rural places based on nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas as defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (USDA, 2019). The OMB definitions are based upon counties and county-equivalent units. Metropolitan (metro) areas include counties with one or more urbanized areas of 50,000 people or more as well as "outlying counties that are economically tied to the core counties as measured by labor-force commuting" (USDA, 2019, "Nonmetro Counties," para. 3). Alternatively, nonmetro counties are outside of these metro areas and are distinguished as either micropolitan (micro) areas or

noncore counties. Micropolitan areas are “nonmetro labor-market areas centered on urban clusters of 10,000–49,999 persons and defined with the same criteria used to define metro areas” (USDA, 2019, “Nonmetro Counties,” para. 4). Noncore counties, conversely, are areas that do not have either an urban or an urban cluster core. When comparing the Census Bureau’s definition and the USDA and OMB definitions, it is critical to note that due to the larger geographic areas within the county-based OMB definitions, it is likely that most counties contain both rural and urban Census-defined areas (USDA, 2019).

National Center for Education Statistics

Yet another official definition of rural places comes from the NCES. NCES classifies school district locales using a system based on the United States Census Bureau and the 2000 OMB definitions (NCES, 2006). The NCES’s classification divides areas into four locales: city, suburban, town, and rural. These locales are then divided into three additional subcategories. The NCES (2006) defines rural locales, specifically, based on the Census-defined rural territories and then further divides rural areas into fringe, distant, and remote rural areas. Rural fringe areas are rural territories less than or equal to 5 miles from urbanized areas and less than or equal to 2.5 miles from urban clusters. Rural distant areas are in rural territories more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from urbanized areas and more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from urban clusters. Rural remote areas are in rural territories more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and more than 10 miles from urban clusters (NCES, 2006).

SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED MEANINGS OF “RURAL”

In addition to official definitions of rural places, however, the word “rural” also has socially constructed meanings, influencing not only how people define these geographic areas but also how rural places and people are viewed (Theobald & Wood, 2010; Thomas et al., 2011). Media, such as movies, television shows, and books, have influenced peoples’ perceptions of rural places and people (Reynolds, 2017; Thomas et al., 2011). For instance, one common understanding of “rural” involves idyllic images such as farms, small towns, and close-knit communities of people who are “honest, hard working, and ‘just trying to make it’” (Thomas et al., 2011, p. 23). These images result in seeing rural people and places as simple as well as places of nostalgia or escape from urban life (Thomas et al., 2011). Alternatively, there is also contradictory imagery of rural places “as dangerous, wild, backward, and primitive” (Thomas et al., 2011, p. 23). People are taught to fear rural people because they are violent, scary, and wild (Reynolds, 2017; Thomas et al., 2011).

In addition, being “rural” often equates to being inferior, subpar, backward, or unsophisticated (Theobald & Wood, 2010; Thomas et al., 2011). Since in the United States more than 80% of the population lives in urbanized areas (United States Census Bureau, 2016), most people view the city landscape and lifestyle as the norm

(Thomas et al., 2011). Thomas et al. (2011) argued this results in a system of “urbanormativity” where city conditions and culture are viewed as standard and normative. Since rural places, people, and lifestyle differ from these city-based criteria, they are deviant and, therefore, inferior. This urbanormativity is powerful and often leads to urban-centric thinking that is reinforced and reproduced (Thomas et al., 2011). For example, rural people and places are often ignored regarding policy decisions, research, and scholarly literature (Lavalley, 2018).

Urbanormative thinking as well as stereotypes of rural people and places are critical to understand because they not only shape media but also influence the way real people come to think about and interact with rural people and places (Thomas et al., 2011). Since these images are dominant culture’s representation of rural people and rural places, even rural people themselves are recipients of these messages (Theobald & Wood, 2010). These negative messages, therefore, have influenced the way rural people think about themselves and their education. For example, Theobald and Wood (2010) stated,

...somewhere along the way, rural students and adults alike seem to have learned that to be rural is to be sub-par, that the condition of living in a rural locale creates deficiencies of various kinds – an educational deficiency in particular (p. 17).

Some rural people ignore these messages relating their personal identities, however, many do not. Since these messages are commonplace, educators must consider the ways urbanormativity impacts their curriculum, practices, and viewpoints.

THE URBAN–RURAL BINARY

Before continuing with this chapter, I feel it is also necessary to address the urban–rural binary. Most research compares urban and rural places (although sometimes a third [i.e., suburban] or a fourth [i.e., town] category are added). Even within this chapter, much of the data and literature I utilize rely on the comparison of rural and urban. It is critical to note, however, that this urban–rural binary is a false dichotomy. For example, Burdick-Will and Logan (2017) in their study investigating racial composition, class composition, and test performance of urban, suburban, and rural schools found “a steady gradient across categories, rather than clear-cut differences” (p. 195). Their findings suggested that inner suburban schools looked similar to their nearby urban areas and the outer suburban schools looked similar to their nearby rural areas, with only a small area of middle suburban schools having the most advantaged demographics and resources (Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017). Likewise, even within urban and rural categories there is a lot of variation (Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017; Greenough & Nelson, 2015). Greenough and Nelson (2015), for instance, compared student demographics in rural areas finding students in schools closer to cities and towns to be noticeably different than those further away from urbanized areas.

Further complicating the urban–rural binary is people’s use of informal categories. Because people use their experiences to judge locations, even urban

places can be described as “rural” within individuals’ definitions (Thomas et al., 2011). For example, if a person lives in one of the country’s largest cities, like Los Angeles or New York City, even smaller cities may feel like rural places to them. However, if a person lives in a rural community of a few hundred people, they may see even small cities as urban locations. Thus, personal perceptions play a role within the categorization of areas due to the socially constructed meaning of these places.

What is crucial to remember is that all rural and all urban places are not homogenous because they have unique geographic makeups, structures, and cultures. All people within these locations are not the same either. Borrowing from scholars like Lorber’s (1996) work with sex, sexuality, and gender as well as Delgado and Stefancic’s (2017) work with race, we must also deconstruct the categories of rural and urban. By challenging these categories, we challenge the power of conventional thinking and create new possibilities for the future (Lorber, 1996). Therefore, I implore readers of this chapter to learn from comparisons of rural and urban, but to also recognize the challenges of this binary as they continue reading.

THE INTERSECTION OF PLACE AND RACE

Now that perceptions of place have been reviewed, race and ethnicity must also be considered as influencing factors for African American rural students. According to the USDA (2018), “rural America is less racially and ethnically diverse than urban areas” (p. 3) with about 80% of people identifying as White, 9% of people identifying as Hispanic, 8% of people identifying as Black, 2% of people identifying as American Indians, and 1.8% of people identifying as “other” (e.g., Asians, Pacific Islanders, and people of multiple races). Showalter, Klein, Johnson, and Hartman (2017) reported that although about a quarter of public-school children in rural areas are students of color, the percentages range dramatically by state with New Mexico having more than 85% rural students of color compared to Rhode Island with less than 4% rural students of color (Showalter et al., 2017). Depending on the location of the rural area as indicated by the previous statistics, it is possible, therefore, that people of color may be in the majority for a given area (Showalter et al., 2017). For instance, on the 2010 Census, Black people (alone or in combination with one or more races) made up about 14% of all the people in the United States (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewer, 2011). Of those people who reported being Black (alone or in combination) on the 2010 Census, almost 60% lived in just 10 states and 55% lived in the South (Rastogi et al., 2011). Since nationally people in rural areas are predominantly White (Showalter et al., 2017; USDA, 2018), however, rural people are sometimes stereotyped as being only White. This misconception hurts all people in rural areas, but especially people of color in rural areas because they are often marginalized and unseen.