

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN: 1940-1960

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Between 1940 and 1960, the population of Oakland County grew by approximately 433,000 residents. This figure represents an increase of 170.6 per cent in twenty years (Table 1).¹ In comparison, Macomb County had a substantially higher growth rate, but a lower absolute gain in population over this period (276.6 per cent and 297,728 persons, respectively).² Of the three counties in the Detroit metropolitan area, Wayne has had the lowest rate of increase (32.4 per cent), but the highest gain in absolute numbers (approximately 652,000 persons).³

Oakland County experienced a considerably higher rate of population increase in the 1950 to 1960 decade than between 1940 and 1950. In this respect, it is comparable to Macomb County. Wayne County, however, had a growth rate over the last decade which was only half that of the 1940 to 1950 period.

Oakland is an important part of the greater Detroit metropolitan area. As will be shown, a significant factor in the growth rates of different sections of Oakland is the proximity of these sections to the city of Detroit. For purposes of this analysis, Oakland was divided into three zones. The "adjacent area" is that part of the county that was assigned census tracts for 1950 by the United States Bureau of the Census. This zone borders on the Detroit city limits and runs north for approximately six miles (Birmingham, which is slightly

¹The data presented here for 1940 and 1950 are based on published U.S. Census materials. The data for 1960 are based on preliminary figures from the 1960 census. It is expected that the preliminary figures will not vary substantially from those of the final count. The final figures were not available at the time of this analysis.

²"Population Distribution in Macomb County, Michigan: 1940-1960." Ann Arbor: The Detroit Area Study, 1960 (mimeographed).

³"Population Distribution in Wayne County, Michigan: 1940-1960." Ann Arbor: The Detroit Area Study, 1960 (mimeographed).

more than six miles distant, is also included in the adjacent area). The "middle area" covers that part of Oakland County which lies outside the adjacent area but within approximately twelve miles of the city of Detroit (incorporated and unincorporated places in Troy, Bloomfield, West Bloomfield, Farmington, and Novi townships are located in the middle zone). The "outlying area" includes the remainder of the county.

Between 1940 and 1950, that area of Oakland which was adjacent to Detroit grew at a faster rate than either of the other two zones. In turn, the middle area had a higher rate of population increase than did the outlying section. The outlying area, however, includes the city of Pontiac. Similarly to other relatively large cities in the United States, Pontiac has been growing at a markedly lower rate than its surrounding territory. Thus, when Pontiac is excluded, the outlying zone actually experienced a higher rate of increase between 1940 and 1950 than did the middle zone. It is probable that an important share of the growth rate of this zone can be attributed to population increase in the fringe areas of Pontiac.

During the 1950 to 1960 period, the middle area of Oakland County far outstripped the other two zones in rate of population increase. This area increased by 143 per cent over the last decade. By comparison, the adjacent area grew by 81.2 per cent, while the outlying area, even with Pontiac excluded, had an increase of 75.9 per cent. Apparently, those sections of Oakland which are relatively close to Detroit are becoming progressively developed; we may therefore expect that the growth of this county, in at least the near future, will be most concentrated in the middle zone.

All areas of Oakland County discussed here, with the exception of Pontiac, experienced a phenomenal growth between 1940 and 1960. The adjacent zone more than tripled in population size over this twenty year period; the middle zone came close to a four-fold increase; and the outlying zone, again excluding Pontiac, had about three times as many residents in 1960 as in 1940.

As a result of differential growth rates, the distribution of Oakland County's population had a quite different pattern in early 1960 than was true for 1940. The adjacent area has claimed an increasingly larger share of the residents of this county, while the outlying area, as a whole, has declined considerably in relative size (Table 2). In 1940, 41.8 per cent of Oakland's residents lived in the adjacent zone; by 1960, almost one-half (49.1 per cent) of the population were in this zone. It may be noted, however, that most of this area's increase in relative size occurred between 1940 and 1950.

As compared to the adjacent zone and the outlying zone, the middle zone has a rather small percentage of Oakland's population. This proportion has grown, however, from 10.9 per cent in 1940 to 15.4 per cent in early 1960. And contrary to the adjacent zone's experience, the middle area had its greatest relative growth in the 1950-60 period, rather than between 1940 and 1950.

The outlying zone, as a whole, had a significantly lower share of Oakland's population in early 1960 than it did twenty years previously. In 1940, more Oakland residents lived in this zone (47.3 per cent) than were in the area adjacent to Detroit. At the present time, the outlying zone has only 35.5 per cent of the county's total population. This decline in relative size is a result of the failure of Pontiac to grow at a rate comparable to the remainder of the county. Over a quarter of Oakland's residents lived in the city of Pontiac in 1940; by early 1960, little more than a tenth of the county's were in this city. Excluding Pontiac, the outlying area had a slightly larger proportion of Oakland's residents in 1950 than in 1940, but did not increase appreciably in relative size over the last decade.

The importance of the spatial location of the city of Detroit to Oakland County's past and future growth is quite clear from the above discussion. Between 1940 and 1950, Oakland's population was increasingly clustered in areas adjacent to Detroit, and Pontiac city became comparatively less of a focal

point. In the last ten years, Pontiac has continued to decrease in relative size, while the middle areas of Oakland increased their share of the total population. Oakland County undoubtedly will continue to grow at a rapid rate. It is probable, however, that the middle zone and the outlying zone (excluding Pontiac) will claim an ever larger share of Oakland's population.

TABLE 1

POPULATION OF OAKLAND COUNTY BY SELECTED SUBDIVISIONS:
1940 - 1950 - 1960*

Selected Sub- divisions of Oakland County	Year			Change Between:			Per Cent Change:		
	1940	1950	1960	1940- 1950	1940- 1960	1950- 1960	1940- 1950	1940- 1960	1950- 1960
Area adjacent to Detroit	106,009	186,394	337,747	80,385	231,738	151,353	75.8%	218.6%	81.2%
Middle area	27,769	43,625	106,009	15,856	78,240	62,384	57.1	281.8	143.0
Outlying area: all	120,290	165,982	243,855	45,692	123,565	77,873	40.0	102.7	46.9
Pontiac	66,626	73,681	81,525	7,055	14,899	7,844	10.6	22.4	10.6
Remainder	53,664	92,301	162,330	38,637	108,666	70,029	72.0	202.5	75.9
Oakland County: all	254,068	396,001	687,611	141,933	433,543	291,610	55.7	170.6	73.6

* Data for 1960 are based on the preliminary figures from the U.S. census.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION OF OAKLAND COUNTY
BY SELECTED SUBDIVISIONS: 1940 - 1950 - 1960*

Selected Sub- divisions of Oakland County	Year		
	1940	1950	1960
Area adjacent to Detroit	41.8%	47.1%	49.1%
Middle area	10.9	11.0	15.4
Outlying area: all	47.3	41.9	35.5
Pontiac	26.2	18.6	11.9
Remainder	21.1	23.3	23.6
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of persons	254,068	396,001	687,611

*Data for 1960 are based on the preliminary figures from the U.S. Census.