

In 1900, about 40% of Americans lived in rural areas. By 2010, less than 18% of the U.S. population lived in rural areas. In just over a century, massive economic and social changes moved millions of Americans into urban areas. Still, nearly 60 million Americans live in rural areas. And, since only 3.5% of the U.S. landmass is considered urban, the vast majority of the landscape remains rural.

Americans have relied on rural crossroads for generations. These places where people gather to exchange goods, services and culture and to engage in political and community discussions are an important part of our cultural fabric. The United States needs vibrant and sustainable rural communities. Americans, no matter where they live, rely on the products of the countryside (and the productivity of rural people) for food and fuel.

*Crossroads: Change in Rural America* offers small towns a chance to look at their own paths to highlight the changes that affected their fortunes over the past century. The exhibition will prompt discussions about what happened when America's rural population became a minority of the country's population and the ripple effects that occurred.

Despite the massive economic and demographic impacts brought on by these changes, America's small towns creatively continue to identify new opportunities for growth and development. Economic innovation and a focus on the cultural facets that make small towns unique, comfortable, and desirable have helped many communities create their own renaissance.

Today's rural communities often struggle against negative views of rural America. Many Americans considering these areas to be endangered—suffering from dwindling employment, inadequate schools, and a barren, overused landscape. But, the true story of rural America is much more complex.

Revitalizing rural places matters to those who remain, those who left, and those who will come in the future. Rural Americans are taking on that challenge. The future is bright as small towns embrace the notion that their citizens and their cultural uniqueness are critical assets.

*Crossroads: Change in Rural America* will engage rural communities across the country in a rich and exciting discussion about their futures.