



## Demography and Destiny

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Two recent articles by Rob Christensen, the political columnist for the News & Observer talk about the impact of demographic changes in North Carolina.

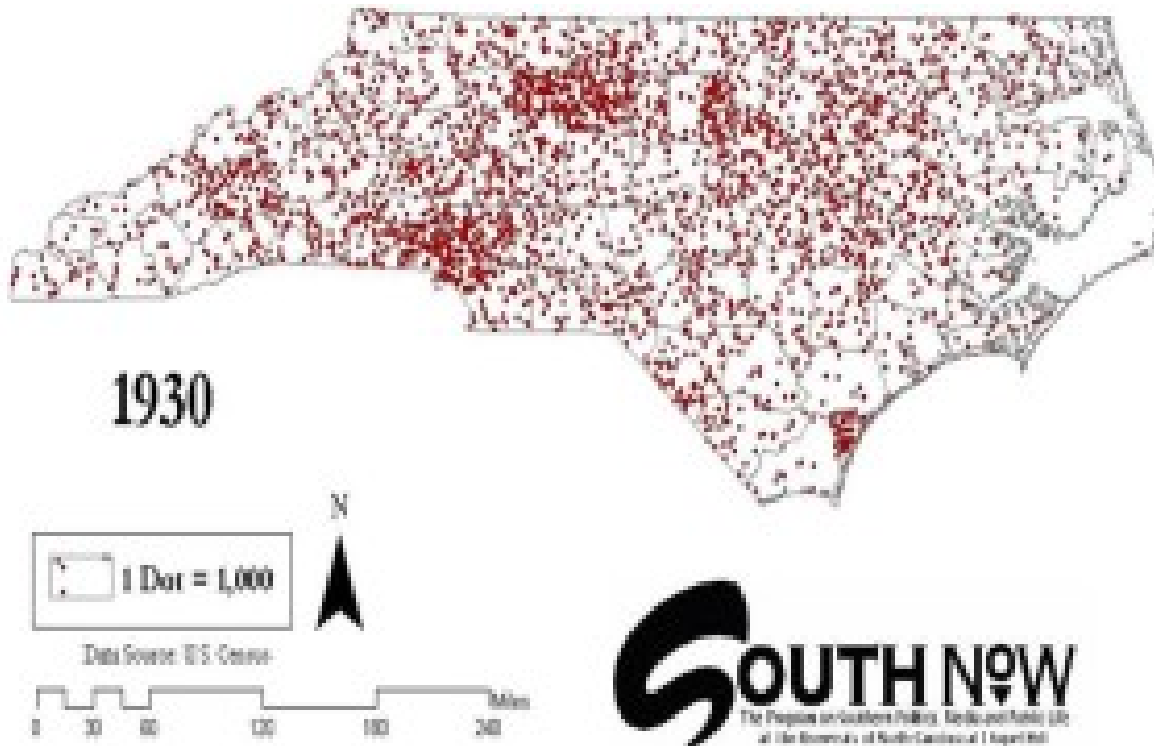
[The first article](#) was about the impact of North Carolina population shifts on legislative redistricting. Of course we know that our metropolitan areas are growing rapidly and our rural areas have been losing population. According to Christensen, almost half of the state's 100 counties have lost population since the 2010 Census. Here is the demographic projection that startled me—by 2020 our **“50 smallest counties will have 13 percent of North Carolina’s population, while Wake and Mecklenburg counties alone will have more than 21 percent of the population.”**

[The second article](#) focused on how rapid population growth has transformed our state and its

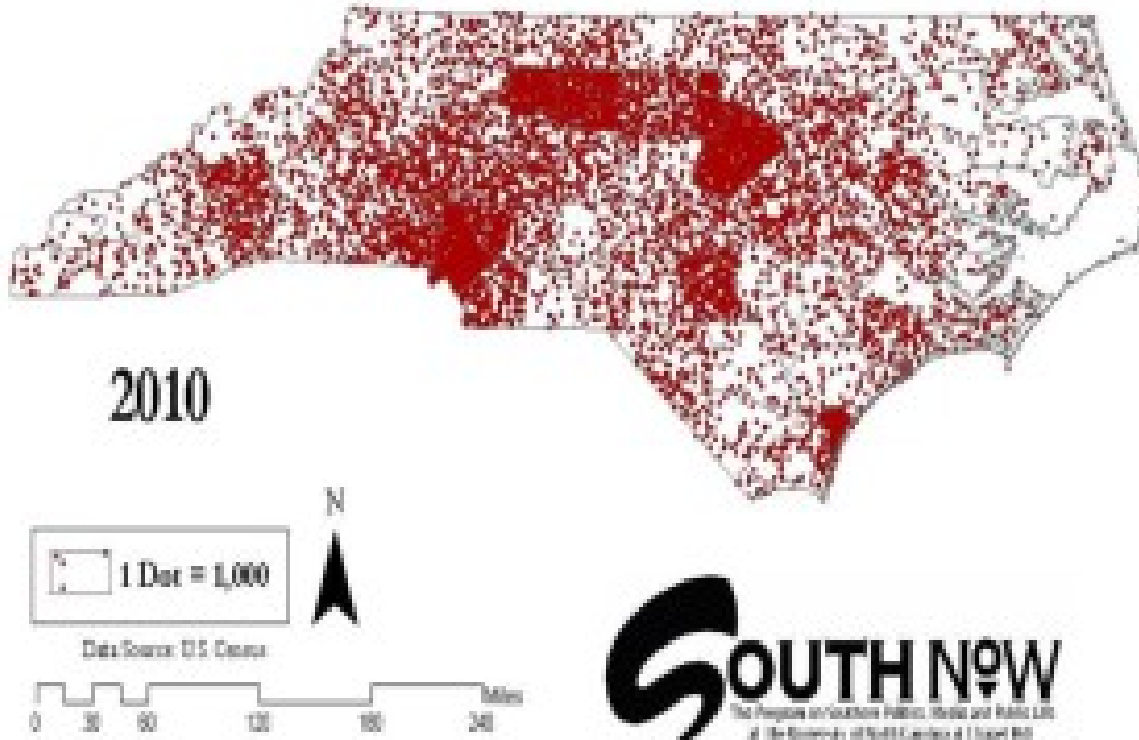


culture. Christensen emphasizes again that “nearly all of the growth is in the urban areas—particularly the Triangle and Charlotte metro areas—the rural areas and small towns are stagnant or dying.” The explanation for the shift is a familiar one. The decline of agriculture and the major hit to North Carolina’s industrial base caused by the loss of textile mills and furniture factories. As he correctly points out, those trends are unlikely “to change because they are being driven by market forces.”

Here are another couple of comparisons from Christensen that surprised me. **“It is easy to forget that Charlotte is now larger than Detroit, Seattle, Denver or Boston, and that Raleigh is now larger than Miami, Minneapolis, Cleveland or New Orleans.”** Take a look at the following maps that compare North Carolina’s population distribution in 1930 and 2010.



NC Population Distribution 1930



### NC Population Distribution 2010

What are the implications of these changes for the School? I honestly don't know, but we need to think about them in our strategic foresight process as we position ourselves to be successful over the next twenty years.

For example, most conversations about the rural-urban divide tend to focus on how to help struggling rural areas. Maybe it makes sense for us to invest more resources in serving urban areas that will face complex challenges associated with over-the-top population growth. Are there fields of expertise associated with selected urban issues where the School should add faculty capacity? If we want to impact the lives of the greatest number of people, should we focus more energy on the governments in those places where the most people will be located—urban and metropolitan areas?

I'm not suggesting that we ignore rural communities and their officials, but I am suggesting that we think hard about the balance of our work in the future.