Let's Move to Maine!

Amenity migration, rural-urban mobilities, and community change in the wake of a pandemic

by
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Introduction

Preface

Growing up in Camden, Maine, a town of roughly 5,000 people, I had no conception of the urban or rural as a kid. I remember filling out a survey in middle school that asked for geographic classification. Later that day, I asked my mom what differentiated the terms *city*, *countryside*, and *suburb.* As she described what they meant, I looked out the window at the adjacent yards of our neighbors and at Route 1, the major north-south arterial that intersects the bottom of our street, and struggled to classify the landscape. There were no skyscrapers around, nor were there livestock or pastures. I thought about when we would occasionally drive the ninety minutes to Portland for an appointment, shopping trip, or exhibition and wondered if that made us a suburb.

Certainly by the time I was in high school I had a clearer understanding of what it meant to live in a decidedly rural town where everybody knew everybody. Each summer, our community braced for the influx of tourists who would flood our two-block downtown. Most kids I knew scooped ice cream, waited tables, or worked as deckhands on tour boats when school wasn't in session. A solid portion of each year's graduating class went directly into the lobstering industry. I desperately wanted to get out; choosing to attend Vassar was my own personal rural-urban migration. When I arrived on campus, I was taken aback by the consistent reaction when I introduced myself as being from Maine; the state's reputation preceded me, and when I joked about wanting to escape I was often met with empathetic laughter even from those who had never been. At first this was comforting—finally, people who understood!—but I quickly became annoyed at the dismissal of my home as a beautiful tourist attraction full of moose and maple syrup. To this day, one of my closest friends likes to remind me how "nobody lives there".

While they mean no harm, I know even inane jokes come from real-world understandings and can do political work.

There has always been a duality to the fact that our town and much of the state relies heavily on tourism. It is a point of pride for locals that outsiders want to come and experience Maine, and year-round residents do express gratitude for the summer visitors' economic support. The tourists, however, are also a source of great frustration due to the traffic and ignorance they often bring with them (once, while working retail, I was asked how far a walk it was to the "lake"— the lake in question being our harbor on the Atlantic Ocean).

This tension was further complicated when, halfway through spring break my freshman year of college, COVID-19 erupted and relegated me to my childhood bedroom until the following fall. Suddenly, the "people from away", as Mainers say, held considerable power. Without their tourism dollars, the future of our local economy hung in the balance, but out-of-state license plates were simultaneously regarded with scorn for endangering the lives of our community during a pandemic. After the initial lockdown period, anecdotal evidence suggested that more outsiders were not just visiting Maine but moving there. Again, there was uncertainty among locals over how to feel about this: on the one hand these outsiders were contributing to the economy by paying taxes and spending money, but on the other they were driving up housing prices and the cost of living. I began to wonder: Were local perceptions of these migration patterns accurate? Did the pandemic qualitatively change or increase the appeal of Maine as a destination? I had a feeling this phenomenon did not start when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March of 2020.

Thesis Question

How have urban populations and urban forces transformed Maine's rural character?

This thesis aims to use the sociological imagination and Maine as a case study to explore the influx of city-dwellers to rural areas. In Chapter One, "Maine", I provide a brief orientation to the state to equip readers with the necessary geographical, historical, and political context. I pay special attention to the state's transition from manufacturing to a service-based economy. In Chapter Two, "The Urban, the Rural, and their Mobilities", I trace dominant constructions of the urban/rural dichotomy and investigate how COVID-19 has exacerbated, rather than disrupted, existing conceptions of the urban and rural. Here, I establish the theoretical concepts of place and mobility as central to the broader story of community change. In Chapter Three, "Gentrification, Disaster, and Resilience", I examine the rising costs of living sweeping the state. I also introduce the concepts of disaster gentrification and resilience to critique how urbanization has been framed in academic and popular discourse since the onset of the pandemic. Finally, in Chapter Four, "Newcomer-Local Relations", I explore the power dynamic and tensions between long-term residents and urban migrants. Though much is still unknown about the most recent waves of migration to Maine, I use the information presented in previous chapters to evaluate the potential for reconciliation and long-term growth at the community level.

My research draws from a range of secondary sources to inform my analysis. Some of the theoretical material, notably Hanes (2018), Thompson et al. (2016), and Miller (2014), are actually situated in Maine. Even these, however, required mining for ideas relevant to my topic. Hanes, for example, focuses on aquaculture; Thompson et al. on fishing communities; and Miller on economization within Maine. For work specific to the themes of community change, amenity migration, and urban-rural mobilities, however, I turned to articles published in other national

and international contexts. Maine has much to offer as a case study for scholars concerned with rurality, tourism, and coastal industry, but to date has been underutilized as a site for research and is underrepresented in the literature. While economic reports conducted or commissioned by Maine state agencies or nonprofits are readily available and used in this thesis to contextualize or supplement my arguments, there is a distinct lack of scholarship discussing the changes taking place in Maine from a more sociological perspective.

Overall, I aim to situate Maine's apparent urban transformation in its proper context: the pandemic did not create, but rather accelerated and deepened, economic and demographic shifts as well as existing inequalities. In doing so, I address the classically sociological theme of community change. While Maine is my case study, this phenomenon can be observed in a number of other U.S. areas attracting newcomers from more populated metropolises including upstate New York, Montana, and Florida. I credit the seed for this thesis to a moment in Population, Environment, and Sustainable Development, a geography course I took over Zoom my sophomore year with Professor Joe Nevins. His class raised the point that urban studies programs exist but rural studies are practically unheard of. This project aims not to recenter the narrative from a rural perspective, as was my initial inclination, but rather to respond to a call from academics such as Lichter and Brown for greater "conceptual and empirical integration of urban and rural scholarship" (2011:565). The urban and the rural remain institutionally segregated despite growing evidence that the boundaries between them are increasingly blurred; this work seeks to recognize the interdependencies that appear to be emerging but perhaps have been there all along.

Chapter 1— Maine

1.1 Welcome to Vacationland

Maine is, by a variety of metrics, a unique place. It is the only state with one syllable and the only state to border exactly one other U.S. state. As of July 2022, the state population is estimated at 1,385,340, roughly the same size as San Diego, California and 43rd among U.S. states and territories in terms of population (United States Census Bureau 2022a, 2022b). Maine is distinctly old and White; it has the highest median age of any state in the country at 44.7 years old (the national median is 38.8) and the highest non-Hispanic White population at 90.8% (the national statistic is 61.6%) (United States Census Bureau 2020b).

Maine's natural resources are abundant. Despite being about five times smaller in area, Maine has more coastline than the entirety of California and is home to the only national park in New England. Maine earns its official nickname of the Pine Tree State with 17.7 million acres, or nearly 90% of the state, recognized as forested (United States Department of Agriculture 2017). This equates to an average of 44 people per square mile, ranking 44th among U.S. states and territories by population density (United States Census Bureau 2022a). Its unofficial nickname, and the slogan that appears on the general issue license plate, is Vacationland: this is a place with a certain charm about it, at least during the temperate summer months, which attracts many part-time residents. Indeed, in 2021, Maine was the only state to have a gross housing vacancy rate above 20%, a statistic that includes second homes and seasonal units (Callis 2022).

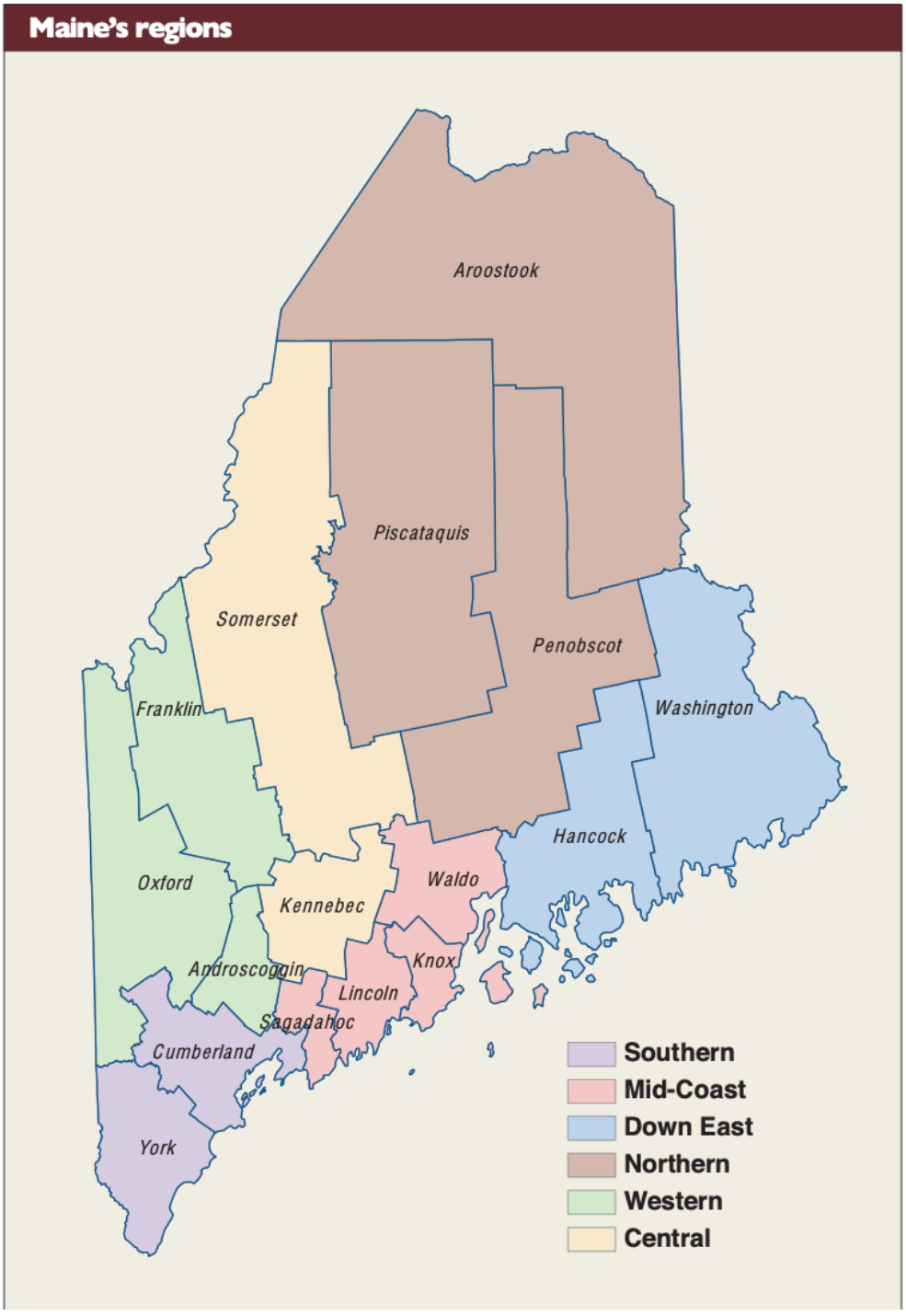

Figure 1: Maine's 16 counties divided into 6 regions by the Brookings Institution based on similar demographic and economic trends and a "general sense of shared experiences" (Brookings Institution 2006).

1.2 Maine as Rural

Maine is particularly distinct in regard to rurality. The term *rural* will be examined in more depth in the following chapter, but it generally refers to geographic areas in the countryside rather than city centers or suburbs. In 1910, the U.S. Census recorded 54.4% of the country's population living in rural areas. One hundred years later, that percentage shrank to 19.3% (United States Census Bureau 2016). From 1950 to 2010, the time frame across which The Census Bureau's classification criteria remained the most consistent, Maine was the only state to go against this national trend and see its rural population increase. It did so by 13%. The next closest states were New York and Vermont, with 2.4% and 2.5% decreases in their rural populations respectively (United States Census Bureau 2011).

Maine ranked as the most rural state in the nation in 2010, with 61.3% of its population living in a rural area, though it was overtaken by Vermont when The Census Bureau updated its rural and urban classifications for the 2020 Census (United States Census Bureau 2020c). Of Maine's sixteen counties, in 2010 two qualified as completely rural (Lincoln and Piscataquis), two as mostly urban (Androscoggin and Cumberland), and the remaining fourteen as mostly rural. Based on the Office of Management and Budget's delineations, Maine has just three metropolitan areas (Bangor, Lewiston-Auburn, and Portland-South Portland) and one micropolitan area (Augusta-Waterville) as shown in Figure 2.

Even these more urban areas are relatively small. Augusta is the state's political capital, home to the Maine State House and Governor's mansion, while Portland is widely considered the state's cultural capital, known for its arts and food scenes. Portland is also Maine's most populous city as of the 2020 Census with 68,408 people, placing ahead of Lewiston (37,121) and

Bangor (31,753); Augusta ranked ninth at 18,899. This makes Maine one of only five states without any city population exceeding 100,000.

Figure 2: Map of Maine's metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas (United States Census Bureau 2020).

1.3 Historical Foundations: Resource Economy

To understand the present distribution of Maine residents, we must consider that the state historically relied on its resource economy, particularly forestry, farming, and fishing. The trend of population growth in rural areas was initially driven by the need for relatively unskilled manual labor. For instance, Aroostook County, Maine's northernmost and largest county by area—affectionately deemed simply "The County" by many Mainers—was the state's fastest growing county between 1860 and 1910 and ranked as the state's third most populous by 1910 (Barringer and New England Environmental Finance Center 2006:8). A transportation network emerged to move goods such as timber and potatoes to market as well as to move passengers throughout the state. In 1836, the first railroad connected Bangor and Old Town, and the lines gradually expanded to reach north to Montreal and south to Boston (McDonnell 2020:103). Figure 3 shows a 1923 system map of the Maine Central Railroad Company, displaying a well-developed transportation web extending outward from the coast.

As advancements in transportation, technology, and farming made food production more efficient, people began to seek work in mills and factories producing consumer goods. Some manufacturers built in cities, creating centers like those in Lewiston-Auburn and Biddeford-Saco, but many others located in rural areas to benefit from cheaper land and abundant water power. Thus smaller operations sprang up in places like Augusta, Skowhegan, and Guilford (Barringer and New England Environmental Finance Center 2006:8).

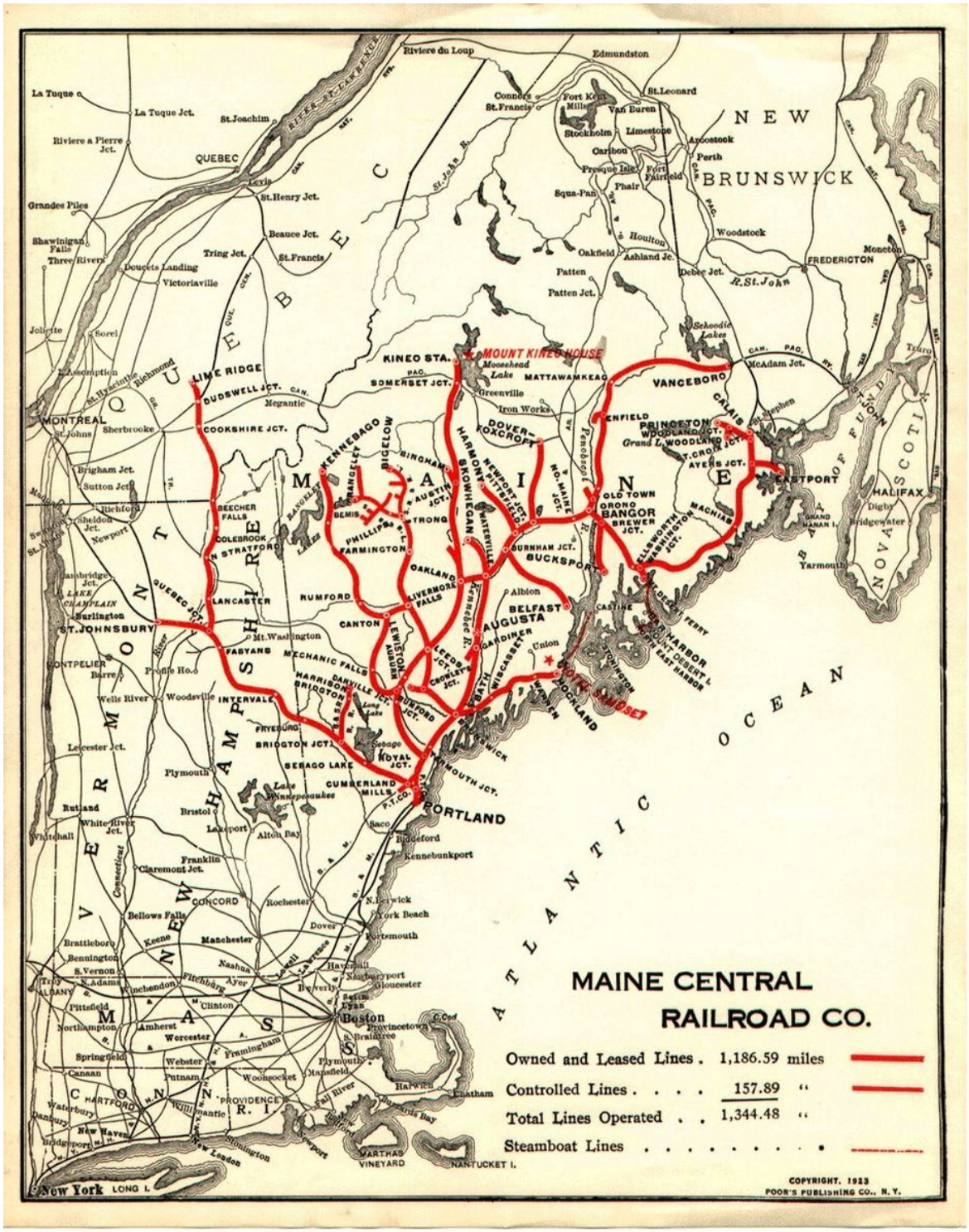

Figure 3: 1923 system map of Central Maine Railroad Company (Wikimedia Commons 2005).

The mid-twentieth century marked a shift when Maine's cotton, pulp, and paper mills began to sell to out-of-state owners as manufacturing in general struggled to compete with other regions. This period continued after World War II, exacerbated by the end of the wartime shipbuilding boom that had sustained the timber industry in particular. With the introduction and rising popularity of the automobile, highway construction projects phased out trolley and rail systems; Portland's Union Station was torn down in 1961 and replaced with a strip mall. Thus began the rise of the suburbs: land devoted to suburbs in Maine nearly doubled between 1950 and 2000, largely attributed to the parents of the baby-boomer generation, and car usage in Portland increased tenfold in the same period. Portland's population fell over 20% from 1950 to 1980 and Bangor's by 19% from 1960 to 1980 as people moved into the suburbs (McDonnell 2020:103).

1.4 Rise of Tourism and the Service-Based Economy

Maine's economy, once dependent on natural resources and manufacturing, has since seen declines in the shoe, textile, and apparel industries as well as in forest products, fisheries, and agriculture. Maine still relies heavily on manufacturing but has seen unmistakable growth in the retail, services, transportation, and government industries (Barringer and New England Environmental Finance Center 2006:16). The concept of postproductive transition (Hanes 2018), referring to the decline in raw-material extraction and commodity production in a rural area, is helpful here in understanding the processes at work in Maine's coastal regions where once-thriving fisheries and timber ports have given way to influxes of summer visitors. Figures 4 and 5 depict the transformation of Camden, Maine's harbor from industrial shipyard during World War II to present-day tourist attraction.

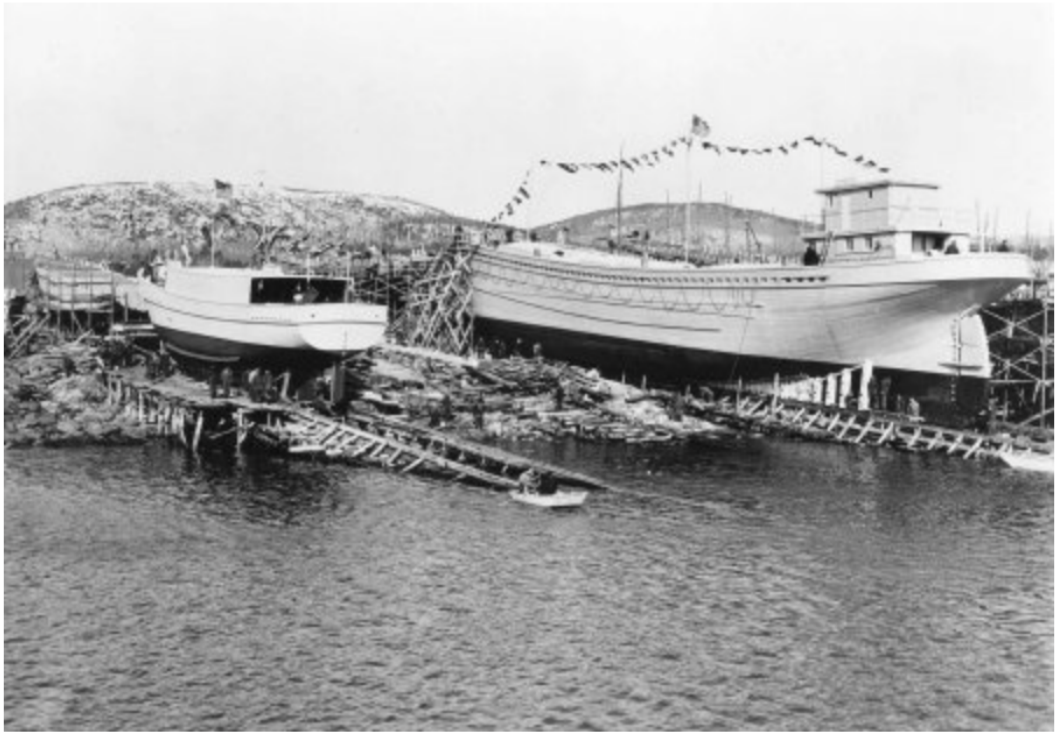

Figure 4: Photograph of a barge, used to carry coal, launched from the Camden shipyard in 1943 (Edward Coffin Collection).

Figure 5: Photograph of Camden Harbor taken in spring of 2023 (photo by the author). Restaurants occupy the prime dockside real estate to the left, and leisure boats wait to take tourists on cruises around the bay.

The most important service for the Maine economy is arguably tourism, particularly along the coast. Notably, the majority of tourists, over 20 million annually, are concentrated in coastal Maine during the short summer months (Barringer and New England Environmental Finance Center 2006:52). In 2022, visitors to Maine supported 151,000 jobs and contributed nearly $5.6 billion in income to Maine households (Maine Office of Tourism 2022). The 2022 tourism industry accounted for over 13% of Maine's GDP (Bureau of Economic Analysis 2023). The importance of tourism to the state is particularly well indicated by the industry's rebound following the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; Maine tourism was up 25% in the first five months of 2022 compared to the same period in 2019, with visitor spending up 18%. Its recovery led the nation, as only Montana and Vermont came close with 16% and 12% spending increases, respectively (Wade 2022).

1.5 Amenities

Why do the tourists come? Visitors to Maine typically seek out what are known as amenities, or "the most tangible aspect of place" (Nevarez 2011:152). These are any features or assets of a place that can increase or decrease its value in the eye of the consumer. They can be visible landscape or physical features such as parks or sidewalks, or less visible infrastructure such as school or transit systems. Amenity *consumption* occurs when people go to areas to experience their amenity offerings, and amenity *migration* is when people move to those areas long-term.

Amenities look different for urban and rural settings and typically attract different kinds of visitors. Urban amenities tend to center around culture and entertainment as well as development projects of the built environment such as historical preservation, improved traffic

flows, downtown revitalization, and housing availability and affordability (Reilly and Renski 2008:14). Rural amenities often rely upon the natural world and can include climate, open space, recreational opportunities, scenic views, and proximity to coastline or bodies of water (Reilly and Renski 2008:20). Part of their appeal is precisely their contrast to the urban and the unattainability or rarity of those features in a city, such as original architecture or small businesses rather than corporate chains (Nevarez 2011:174). For Maine, even the "urban" amenities of its small cities are truly only appealing to those who prioritize access to the natural world ahead of culture and entertainment needs; no one seeking world-class cuisine or big-name concert headliners settles down in Portland. Go to Boston for those, and enjoy the hiking in your backyard.

Amenity consumption and migration account for the concentration of population in Maine's southern and coastal areas—specifically the Southern and Mid-Coast Regions delineated in Figure 1 as well as Androscoggin and Kennebec Counties. Some of this population is seasonal: according to 2022 short-term rental data, the municipalities with the most whole-home short-term rental properties in Maine are Portland, Old Orchard Beach, Wells, Bar Harbor, and York (Maine State Housing Authority 2022c). All of these locations are coastal and, with the exception of Bar Harbor, southern. Much of the population, though, is permanent: 51% of all Maine employees in 2006 were in the labor markets around Bangor, Lewiston-Auburn, and Portland (Barringer and New England Environmental Finance Center 2006:9). More recently, the Greater Portland region alone accounts for one out of every four jobs in the state and 40% of all state job growth since the 2007-2009 Great Recession (McDonnell 2020:105).

Amenity migration is typically accompanied by amenity-consumption land uses, where traditional property uses "yield to a growing service sector" (Thompson, Johnson, and Hanes

2016:166). This is also known as rural restructuring, and the process makes way for land uses including tourism and second homes (Hanes 2018:187). Rural land is organized for production of food, raw materials, energy, etc. Meanwhile, more suburban or urban land is organized for consumption, particularly consumption of the privacy and lifestyle afforded by buying and selling homes (Barringer and New England Environmental Finance Center 2006:10). Figure 6 depicts the land in Maine that shifted from rural to non-rural land uses in the two decades before 2000, concentrated along the southern coast.

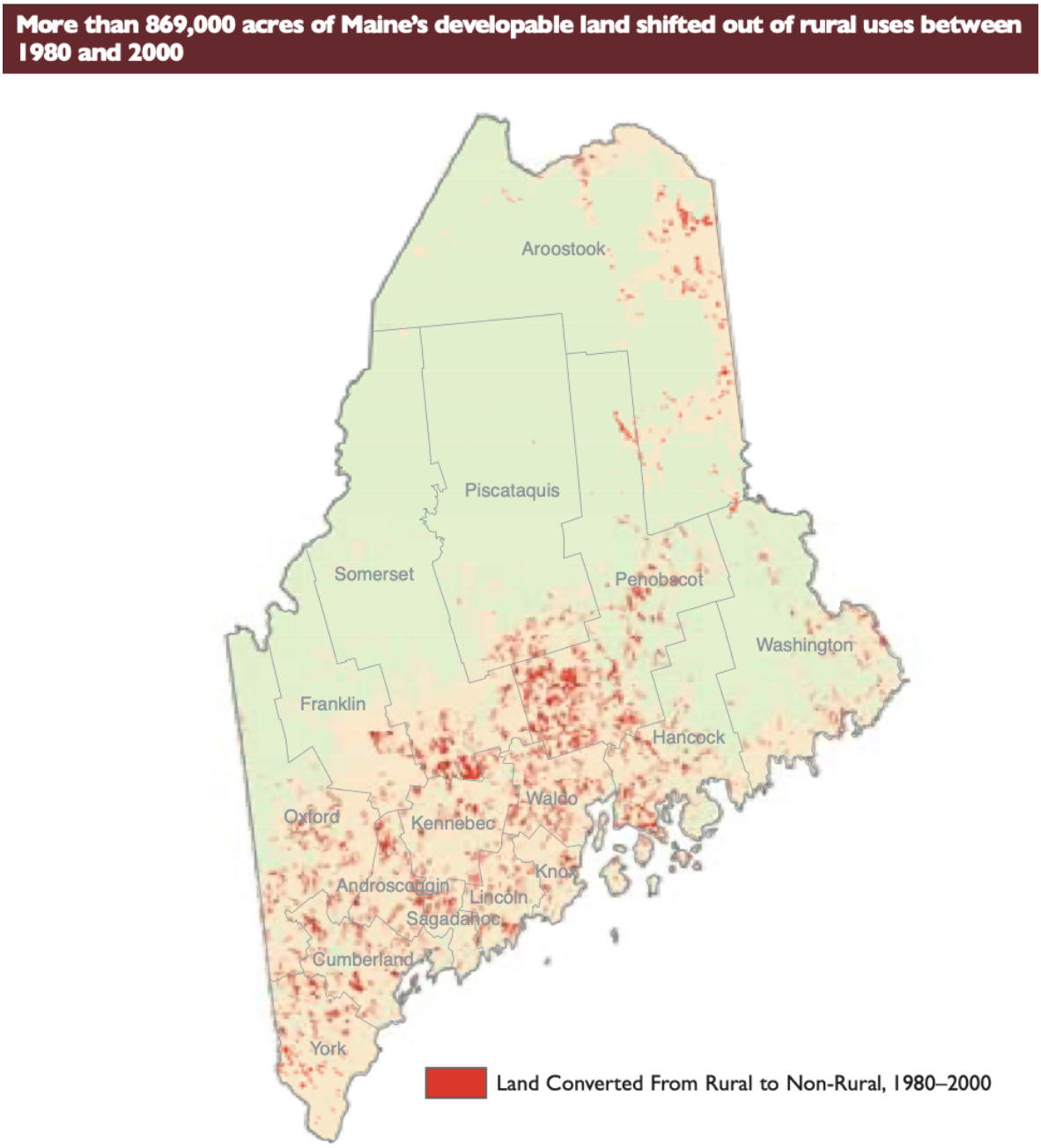

Figure 6: Map of Maine land that shifted from rural to non-rural uses between 1980 and 2000 (Brookings Institution 2006).

1.6 Quality of Life as a Brand

Typically, amenity migrants are pursuing what they perceive as a higher quality of life. Maine's abundance of natural resources and relative lack of urban development convey a certain idea about what it is to live there, and the value of that impression is paramount in an era when people are placing a premium on quality of life. A 2006 report commissioned by nonprofit GrowSmart Maine found that "Maine possesses a globally known 'brand' built on images of livable communities, stunning scenery, and great recreational opportunities" (Brookings Institution 2006:6). These images range from loons and lobsters to a more intangible reputation for "quality and honesty" leveraged by companies such as L.L. Bean and Stonewall Kitchen (Reilly and Renski 2008:13). Above all, the report argues, Maine must protect this brand and invest in a "place-based, innovation-focused economy" (Brookings Institution 2006:16). In other words, Maine already has its comparative advantage; it just needs to defend and advertise it.

Quality of life thus attains competitive value and can be leveraged as a "business good", particularly to appeal to amenity consumers and migrants (Nevarez 2003:75). Quality of place encompasses the characteristics that make a region or community both distinctive from those around it and attractive as somewhere to live or visit; these characteristics can include "environment, civic traditions, cultural amenities, and recreational opportunities" (Reilly and Renski 2008:14). In economic terms, quality of place is a scarce commodity with real value.

Pitching quality of place as an economic driver and placing emphasis on competition, however, as the 2006 Brookings Institution report does, can be harmful. Constituting Maine's communities as either "sites of lack, spaces of underdevelopment in need of economic growth, or spaces of potential in need of capitalization" is problematic and exploitative for the local populations (Miller 2014:2741). Considering every decision in light of whether it will make the

state more competitive, specifically in its attractiveness to outsiders, does not necessarily have the interests of Maine's people at heart. There is a difference between communities identifying their assets "for a genuine endogenous development" versus for the purpose of rendering valuable elements "into commodities or amenities to support in-migration" (Miller 2014:2741). Here Miller suggests that Maine is just one of many places where the economy and the environment are in conflict due to extractive resource practices and shifting industries incompatible with concerns for the wellbeing of larger ecosystems.

This dilemma is situated in larger geographic flows of power and migration. While Maine provides an ample setting for quality of life consumption, the phenomenon is also occurring at a national and global scale. Nevarez, examining the political implications of the new economy of software, entertainment, and tourism in Southern California, considers how proximity to a metropolitan area with the "critical mass of attractions and amenities it offers"—Los Angeles, in that case, and Boston in Maine's—and the desire to get away from it all contribute to place desirability (2003:71). The proximity to the city acts as both a push and a pull, a welcome convenience and safety net in the rural wilderness but also a nuisance and motivation to escape. Like so much else, the tourist gaze is relational, dependent upon what it is contrasted with (Urry 1995). The gaze has deemed Maine, for better or worse, a unique place with a high quality of life.

1.7 A Tale of Two Maines

Despite this seemingly coherent Maine brand, there is actually a significant discrepancy between southern, coastal Maine, where amenity consumers and migrants congregate, and the vast inland, northern part of the state. A large portion of the state is unorganized territory, or area without local, incorporated municipal government. Colloquially termed the North Maine Woods,

this region comprises over 3.5 million acres of mostly commercial forest land with both currently used and abandoned logging roads. With few permanent residents, the territory has a true wilderness reputation; some only know it from its feature in Henry David Thoreau's 1864 volume *The Maine Woods* (University of Maine n.d.). Various state agencies and county governments share the responsibilities for providing services and property tax administration, and the Maine Legislature serves as its "local governing body" (Maine Revenue Services n.d.). Figure 7 depicts all of Maine's unincorporated townships, concentrated in Washington, Somerset, Piscataquis, and Aroostook Counties.

The duality of these areas, the more densely populated and visited southern and coastal regions versus the vast interior and north of the state, has led some scholars to conclude that in reality there are "two Maines" (Brookings Institution 2006:28). Compared to the relatively urban southern Maine, rural northern Maine is older and less educated; in 2006, college attainment in the two regions was 33% and 21%, respectively (Brooking Institution 2006:36). The population of Aroostook County, in contrast to the population growth in the southern part of the state, has declined 40% since its peak in 1960 with 7% just in the last decade (McDonnell 2020:108).

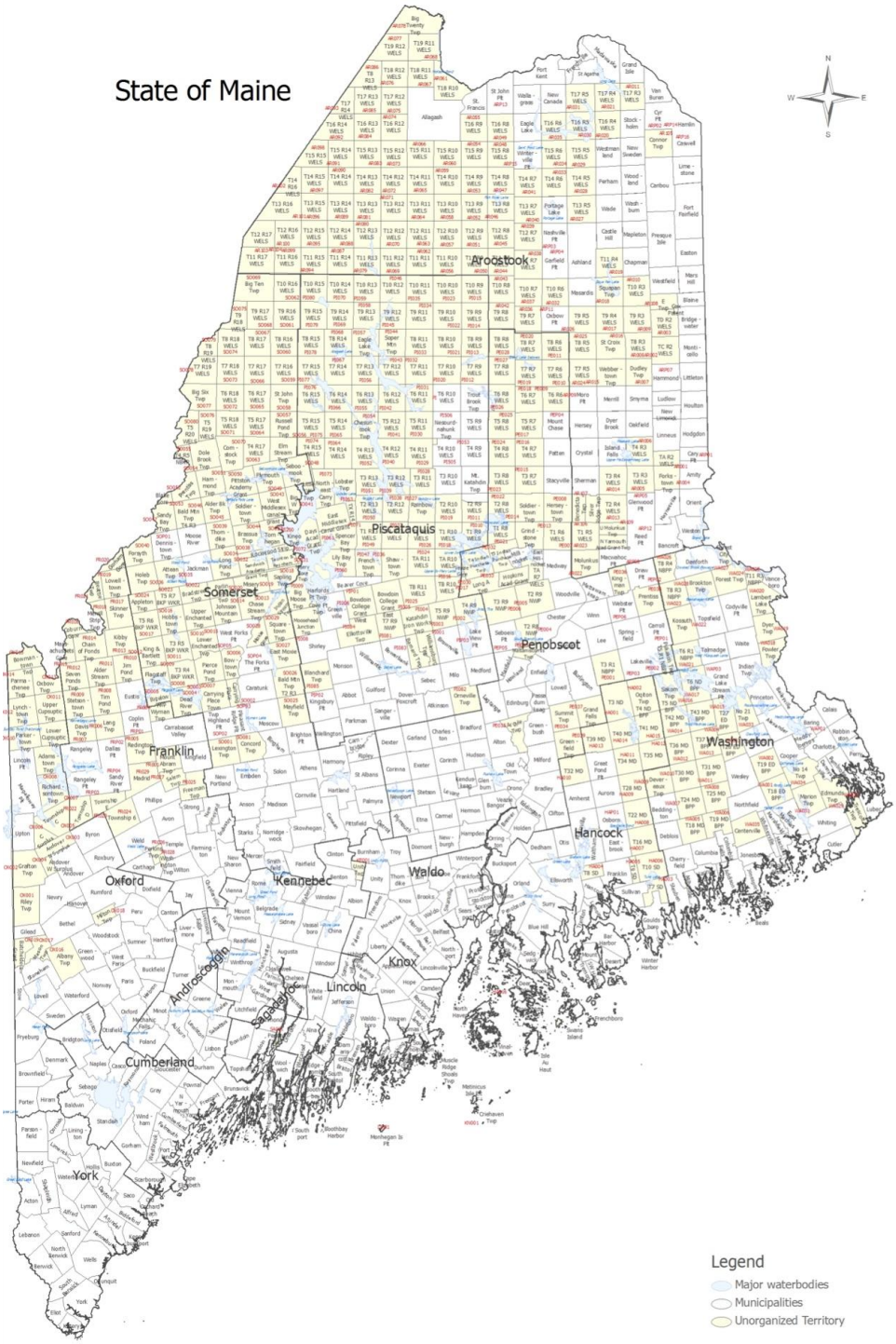

Figure 7: Map of Maine's unorganized territory, marked in yellow, concentrated primarily in the North Maine Woods area in the northwestern part of the state (Maine Revenue Services n.d.).

That Maine's southern coastal regions are distinct from the north of the state is also evident in Maine's politics. Along with Nebraska, Maine is one of only two states in the country to use the congressional district method rather than winner-take-all in apportioning electoral votes. Figure 8 depicts Maine's two congressional districts, the first in the southern coastal region and the second occupying the rest of the state; each district represents roughly half of the state population, or approximately 681,180 people (Bureau of Corporations, Elections & Commissions n.d.). The first district consistently votes Democratic, while the second is considered a swing district and after the 2016 election had the sole Republican representative in New England. While there is a dearth of ethnographic data on the politics of amenity migrants, the rural restructuring and migration patterns in the state of Maine suggest a preference for the Democratic. Though the north in many regards represents a truer, purer "wilderness" destination, tourists tend to choose the southern coast, with its more developed amenities, instead.

The challenges faced by these two unique regions also differ. The coast must manage its annual flood of summer visitors, the metropolitan areas in the south must support and retain a growing workforce, and the north must try hard to appeal to more rugged tourists to offset declines in other industries. The areas that were once more reliant on the traditional industries of manufacturing, farming, forest products, and fishing have suffered more from the move to consumer services. As a whole, however, Maine contends with the national trend towards a service-based economy and what that means for a state that is still overwhelmingly rural.

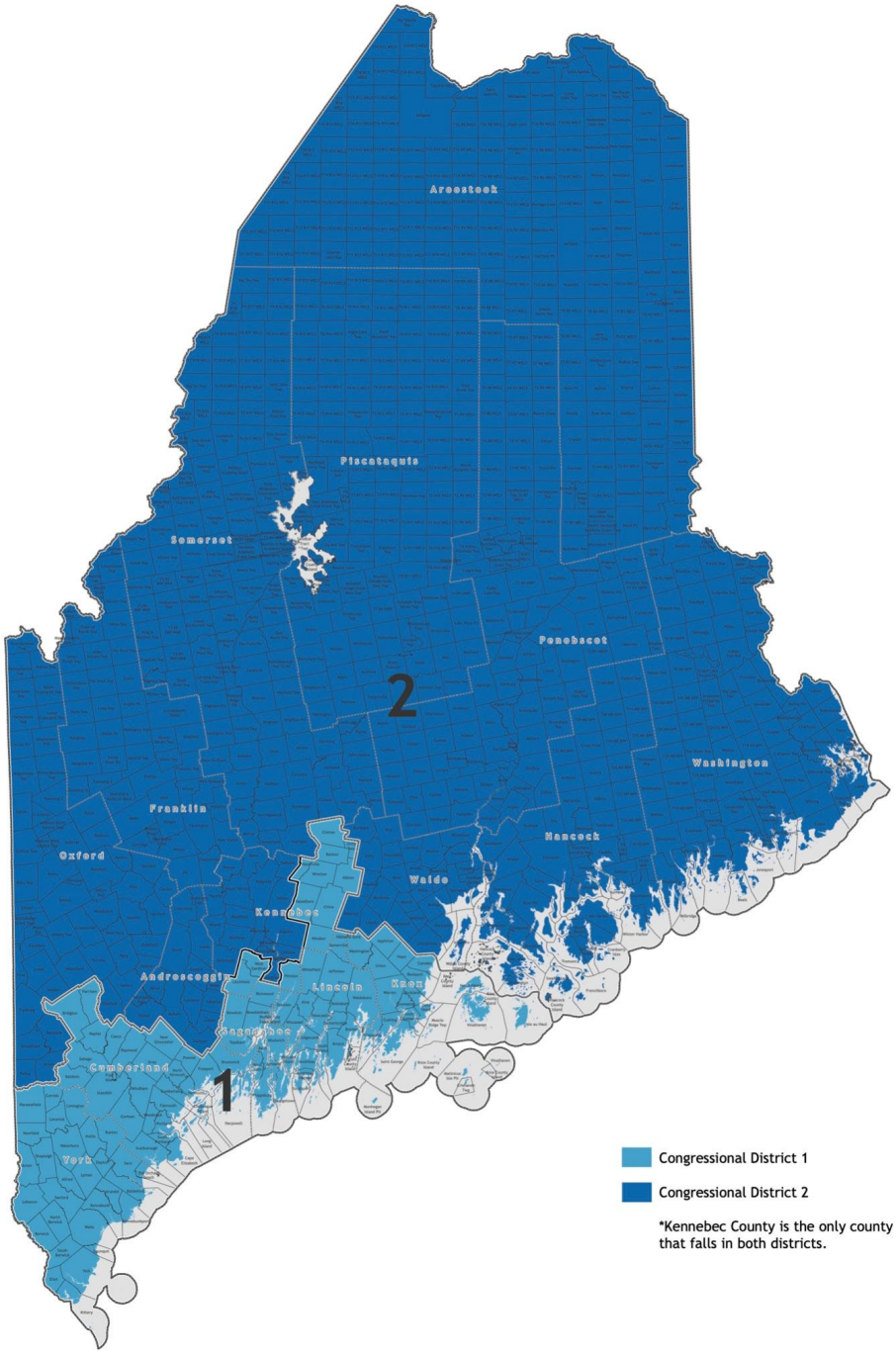

Figure 8: Map of Maine's two congressional districts, the first district in light blue and the second district in darker blue (Bureau of Corporations, Elections & Commissions 2021).

Chapter 2 — The Urban, the Rural, and their Mobilities

2.1 Measuring the Rural

The Census Bureau periodically updates its criteria for distinguishing between urban and rural spaces. For the 2020 Census, it adopted two significant changes: using housing unit density instead of population density to identify census blocks qualifying as urban, and raising the minimum threshold for qualification to at least 2,000 housing units or 5,000 people (Dumas 2022). In regard to housing unit density, a block must have an "initial urban core" of at least 425 housing units per square mile, the remainder of the urban area at least 200 units per square mile, and at least one "high density nucleus" of at least 1,275 units per square mile (United States Census Bureau 2020a). The Census Bureau notes in a Frequently Asked Questions document regarding these most recent changes that the inclusion of housing unit counts is "designed to provide more accurate naming in seasonal communities such as beach towns and mountain resorts" (United States Census Bureau 2020a). This has particular implications for Maine and other places experiencing high volumes of amenity consumers or migrants seeking rural escapes.

Rural is a notoriously slippery term that invokes a variety of landscapes and has been historically difficult to quantify. Notably, The Census Bureau's official definition of rural is "territory not defined as urban" (Dumas 2022). Beginning in 1910 and continuing through the first half of the twentieth century, the Census Bureau recognized as urban any incorporated city or town with a population of at least 2,500 people, with no attention to population density (Ratcliffe 2015). Due to increasing suburbanization and the need to include settled communities outside the boundaries of incorporated municipalities, the 1950 Census distinguished between traditional urban areas with a population of 50,000 or more and outlying urban clusters with a population between 2,500 and 50,000. For the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau introduced the

"hop" concept to recognize that urban development can be noncontinuous, as nonresidential urban uses such as parks or commercial areas create gaps in densely settled territory (Dumas 2022). The Census Bureau began considering in 2010 land cover and "impervious surfaces", or paved areas such as parking lots, so blocks with nonresidential urban land uses can also be included. Under this criteria, sites such as airports qualified for inclusion in urban areas for the first time.

The updates for the 2020 Census go against this trend of expanding the definition of urban. Moving away from population density and effectively doubling the threshold for qualifying as urban has raised some concerns. As some researchers projected, the updated statistics released in December of 2022 indicate areas deemed urban a decade ago becoming reclassified as rural; this was precisely the case for 1,140 areas. Despite the actual urban population of the United States increasing 6.4% between 2010 and 2020, urban areas decreased from 80.7% in 2010 to 80.0% in 2020 due to the new criteria. The population living in rural areas also increased, albeit slightly, from 19.3% to 20.0%. The Census Bureau is careful to note that these statistics should not be interpreted as a "sign of substantial urban to rural migration" but rather reflections of the updated definitions, which certainly raises questions of what the Census is actually designed to measure and how much faith we should put in its assessments (United States Census Bureau 2020c).

The full implications of these changes are yet to be seen, but researchers worry that federal funding for critical services like health clinics and education could be affected as competition increases for the limited funds available to rural communities (Schneider 2022). The shifting criteria can also be viewed as a reflection of, if not a conscious effort to acknowledge, blurring spatial boundaries, as Lichter and Brown (2011) urge us to consider. Over the past

several decades, they argue, rural-urban interdependence has increased and rendered sharp distinctions between the two not only obsolete but also problematic for locals who find themselves stereotyped and reduced to consumable features of a quaint landscape; this will be elaborated upon in Chapter Four. The relationships across boundaries have been transformed by social and environmental processes such as economic restructuring, globalization, technological innovation, and changing relationships between levels of government.

Consistent throughout all of The Census Bureau's updates is that *rural* persists as simply *not-urban*, leaving a diverse array of spaces to be consolidated under the category. In an attempt to make this system more precise and maintain some distinction between, for example, sparsely populated remote areas and densely settled small towns, The Census Bureau sorts counties into three categories based on the percentage of the county population living in rural areas: completely rural (100%), mostly rural (50-99%), and mostly urban (<50%) (Ratcliffe et al. 2016). This was the system of classification used to describe Maine's counties in the previous chapter, and while it is helpful in examining comparative population distribution, it still generalizes across significant geographic areas and can obscure local complexities. One wonders why these categories are the best The Census Bureau can do for distinguishing rural areas given the richer array of vocabulary employed in describing the urban (urbanized area, urban cluster, urban core, suburb).

2.2 Place

Tied up in understandings of the urban and rural and of migration between the two is the broader geographic concept of place. Distinct from the related concepts of environment, landscape, and space, place is defined by the meaning that we give it; place is not a static object,

then, but a process of construction. Curry (1996) delineates five characteristics of a place: we give it a name, associate symbols with it, classify it, tell stories about it, and do things in it. Places have meanings to people, and those meanings are subjective. The complex emotional and psychological relationship between people and place—on both the individual and community level—is known as place attachment. This, too, is a social process. Attachment is based on experience and memory and also influenced by factors such as institutional ties, community involvement, relationships with family and friends, and general feelings towards a place (Walker and Ryan 2008:142). Migration and place attachment are linked; length of residency has been found to correlate to a sense of belonging, as the longer someone is associated with a place the higher their feelings of attachment towards it are. In this way, place "can be a mode of expression for one's self-identity, where personal identity and place identity can become inextricably linked" (Walker and Ryan 2008:142).

There is concern among scholars that the increasingly interconnected modern world both "dilutes traditional/local sources of identity" and amplifies people's quest to "actively construct a sense of who they are" (McIntyre et al. 2006:47). Tourism, second-home use, and amenity migration can thus be understood as "among the diverse responses to these modern conditions" (McIntyre et al. 2006:48). This is a setup for frustration and conflict, as the individual burden to put down roots and form an identity is accompanied by "little clear direction from society" on how to do so amidst the pressures of globalization (McIntyre et al. 2006:48). In this more mobile world, the politics of place become more pronounced. Amenity migration and second-home tourism in particular, for example, "involve making and resisting claims about what a place means and what constitutes its *true* character or sense of place" as newcomers and long-term

residents mix (McIntyre et al. 2006:41). There is a lure of control, a contestation over whose interests and perceptions matter and whose subjective understanding of place persists.

2.3 Mobility

Because the "increased mobility and freedom of identity that come with modernity energize amenity migrants' search for thicker meaning and authentic place" (McIntyre et al. 2006:47), the concept of mobility merits elaboration here. Beyond its implications for identity construction, mobility resists a fixed, stagnant sense of place and enables a critical analysis of power relations. Massey (1993) uses mobility as a lens to discuss what she calls the power-geometry of space-time compression, how the earth is parceled out in a way that produces and reproduces inequalities, resulting in various groups and individuals having different positions to power. Massey posits that some groups are "in charge of space-time compression", the ones "who can effectively use it and turn it to advantage; whose power and influence it very definitely increases" (Massey 1993:61). On the other end of this process are those not in control of mobility but profoundly affected by it; she gives the example of refugees, but this characterization can apply to many residents of amenity destinations as well. Therefore, Massey concludes that there is "a highly complex social differentiation" tangled up in notions of movement, communication, and initiation (1993:62). Ultimately, mobility is relational.

Clearly it is a privilege to be mobile, but it is also important to remember that "privilege is produced by structures" (Benson and Osbaldiston 2016:412). Benson and Osbaldiston caution against an overemphasis on agency in studying amenity migration and a tendency to overlook the structural conditions such as gender, race, ethnicity, and class that constrain individuals. Using the lens of mobility to understand a phenomenon like amenity migration, then, must take care to

problematize individualization—that is, to avoid relying on rhetoric of individual "freedom" or "choice" in moving or visiting somewhere new and give more attention to the material and structural conditions that make such decisions possible.

2.4 Rural-Urban Interdependence

In this modern and mobile world, place matters more than ever. Where the meaning of various places is "increasingly determined by their relations with the outside world, especially by their positions in global networks", then debates about distinctions between the rural and urban should be framed in terms of interconnectedness (McIntyre et al. 2006:22). All too often, however, such conversations perpetuate the assumption that any crossing or shifting of rural-urban boundaries reflects primarily changes in rural America as it urbanizes. This incorrectly centers the urban and its supposedly unidirectional impacts on the rural rather than acknowledging a symmetrical rural-urban interdependence. The symmetry hypothesis speaks back to the more conventional understanding that under modernization, all small towns and communities are subject to the pressures of urban society, underestimating and leaving uninterrogated the corresponding influences of the rural on the urban. For example, rural-urban interflows are evident in how some urban people "play at being rural" in their engagement with activities such as folk festivals, state and county fairs, horseback riding, country music, and urban gardening (Lichter and Brown 2011:570). The interdependence is visible in politics, too, particularly with conservative politicians using cities as foils—essentially casting the urban as the enemy—to mobilize small town and rural voters. The irony is that much of this rhetoric is strategized by political elites in precisely the urban centers that they portend to scorn.

In fact, there are significant reciprocal flows of people, goods, services, and information

occurring not only at already highly contested spaces at the "urban-rural fringe", such as the suburbs, where commuters and consumers interact across the divide, but also across increasingly large distances. This is made possible in part by technological innovation. In the past, innovations in transport in particular drove these mutual interdependencies as development of railroads, interstates, and airplanes facilitated movement of people and products. We saw this in Chapter One with the growth of Maine's industries and migration patterns along shipping and manufacturing lines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More recently, technological innovations have facilitated the flows not of people or products but rather of information and capital, as enabled by the Internet, broadband, and television, linking rural areas inextricably to the global economy (Lichter and Brown 2011:567).

Public understandings of the urban-rural dichotomy have not evolved to meet the call for acknowledging the blurring of boundaries or integration of urban and rural scholarship. Too often, the rural in particular is reduced to stereotypes, misunderstood, and overlooked (Lichter and Brown 2011:566). There is a mythical, utopian quality assigned to the rural in opposition to the urban known as the rural idyll (Shucksmith 2018; Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen 2010). This idyll conceives of rural spaces as timeless, natural, and "where old-fashioned virtues and their associated forms of life still linger" (Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen 2010:195). Where cities are viewed as spaces boasting diversity, culture, and innovation, their rural counterparts are cast in contrast as homogenous and resistant to change (Malatzky et al. 2020:2). The urban is a space to work, where business gets done and the pace of life is quicker; the rural is a space to play, relax, slow down. This binary allows little room for interdependencies.

2.5 Effects of COVID-19 on the Dichotomy

The interaction and interflow between urban and rural is even more pertinent given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are indications that the COVID-19 pandemic has doubled down even further on the dichotomy of space-time compression described by Massey (1993), with the most privileged using their mobility precisely to seek refuge in particular places to which they have attached meanings of safety. In this era where power gaps, including that between urban travelers and rural residents, seem to be only widening, it is important not to lose sight of mobility's relational aspect. Scholarship published since the onset of the virus tends to emphasize how characteristics long associated with urbanity have "become sources of tension and fear" (Malatzky et al. 2020:2). High-density cultural enclaves, buzzing sites of social exchange and progress in the public imagination, have supposedly shifted to take on the connotation of threatening viral epicenters. This shift, by extension, has also "transformed their rural counterparts" (Malatzky et al. 2020:2) into places of refuge, elevating the already appealing aspects of the rural as more natural and utopian.

What this perspective does not acknowledge is that COVID-19 has not introduced a departure from the existing dichotomy, where the rural has actually long existed as an antidote of sorts to the perceived challenges and dangers of the urban. Instead, the element of physical danger from the virus has added a sense of urgency and fear to the desire to escape the city. This interpretation crucially misunderstands how rural America is in flux and is not in fact isolated from mainstream cultural, economic, or other influences, yet the misconception continues to shape behavior. Lichter and Brown emphasize how ascribing nostalgic or sentimental meaning to rural life is dangerous in that it reflects the view that rural populations live simple, uncomplicated lives "that somehow insulate them from the economic assaults and stresses of

modern society" (2011:569). As will be explored in Chapter Four, such assumptions inform the interactions between rural locals and urban newcomers and can be a source of tension.

Chapter 3 — Gentrification, Disaster, and Resilience

3.1 A Note on Gentrification

As Lichter and Brown point out, the breakdown of rural-urban boundaries also means that "nonspatial boundaries" such as racial and class divisions are changing within communities to form part of a larger pattern of increasing rural heterogeneity (2011:567). Gentrification literature in particular has recognized that development patterns are driven by the "globalization of the rural landscape" occurring when "urban professionals with capital relocate to high-amenity destinations", which of course only serves to reinforce the narrative of asymmetrical urban-rural flows discussed in the previous chapter (Thompson et al. 2016:166). Throughout this process, the rural idyll is given as a pull factor for migrants wishing to consume a certain idealized version of rural life. Given this information, it is tempting to write off what is happening in places like Maine as gentrification.

It is crucial, however, to specify what is and isn't meant by this term. *Gentrification* was coined by sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe the displacement of the poor by upper-class people moving to working-class neighborhoods and refurbishing homes there. Though there has since been scholarly debate over the exact criteria for gentrification, fundamentally the term refers to socioeconomic transformation which occurs through the housing market. In regard to our topic in Maine, it is important to underline that gentrification refers to changes across class hierarchy, not spatial boundaries; amenity migrants bringing their city ideas and pocketbooks to small towns does not meet the definition of gentrification simply because these newcomers are "from away".

In this chapter, I present evidence of rising costs of living for Mainers. There are not yet conclusive data, however, showing Mainers actually being displaced by in-migration from urban

areas; for this reason I am cautious in classifying these changes as residential gentrification. Ultimately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to definitively conclude whether or not gentrification is occurring in Maine. Arriving at a term is less important than describing the demographic shifts and understanding what is at stake for long-term residents in amenity destinations. To capture how and why locals are feeling increasingly "out of place" in their own homes, I first examine the rising costs of living and then turn to the emerging concepts of disaster and resilience gentrification to supplement my analysis.

3.2 Rising Costs of Living

The Maine housing market has been booming since before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. A news article published in January of 2020 describes the record-setting 2019 year for real estate in terms of sales volume and median sales price, which mirrored national trends. The article credits tight inventory causing buyers to act quickly, a classic case of supply and demand driving prices upward (Murphy 2020). The consequences for Maine residents have been profound. Higher property valuation has resulted in significant tax increases, raising the costs of living for people who are not even in the market for a home. Residents have struggled to handle the tax hikes; a news article from May of 2021 interviews a South Portland woman considering selling her blood plasma in order to cover her skyrocketing property tax, which according to her home's reevaluation is set to increase by 50% (Stockley 2021). Some Mainers have begun moving away from the coast to back roads and even more isolated areas where properties are cheaper, forced to disrupt ties to their communities, though this evidence is still forthcoming and mostly anecdotal in nature (Thompson et al. 2016:170). Consistent with trends today, Figure 9 depicts how the price increases were especially steep along the coast even back in 2005.

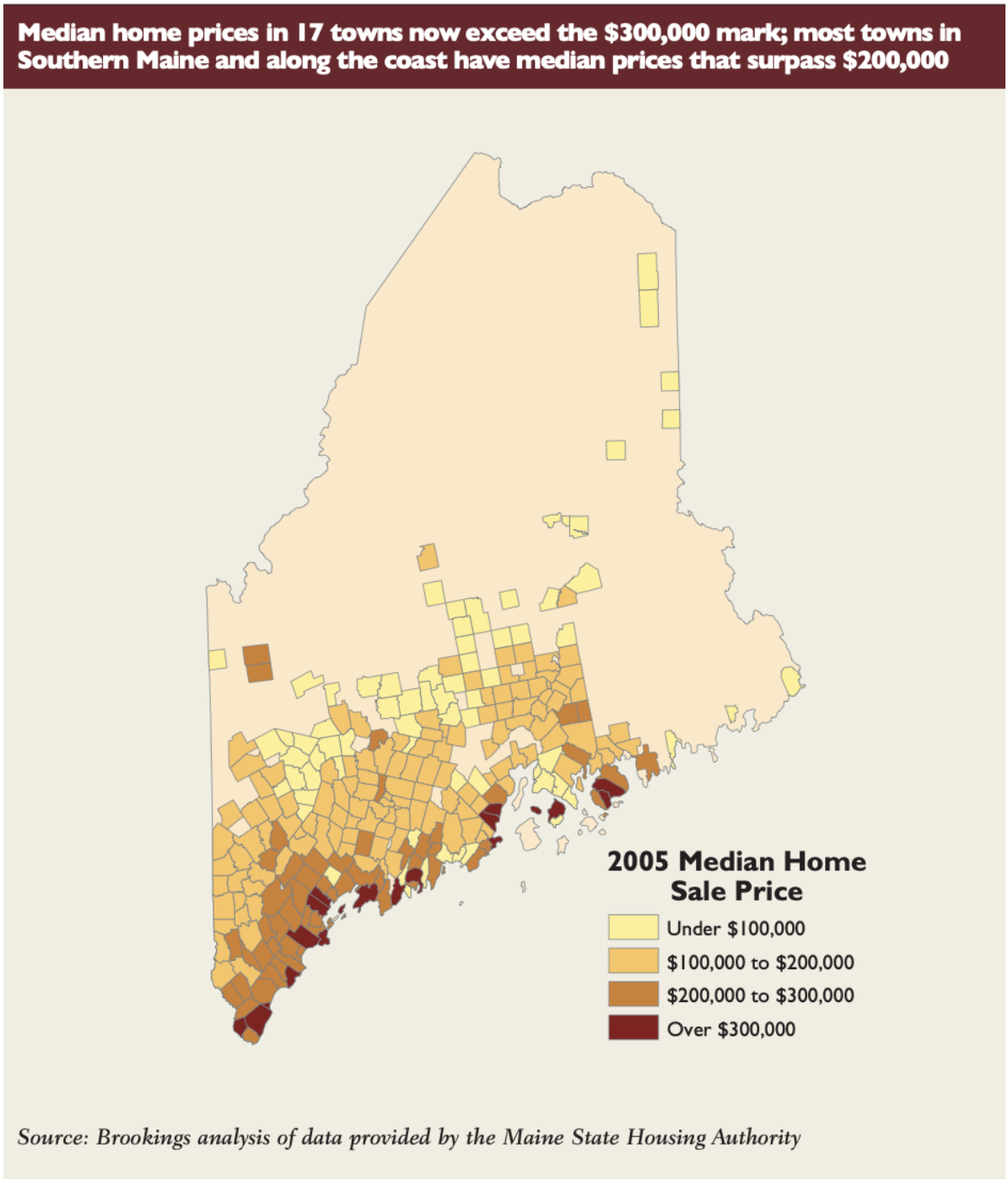

Figure 9: Maine's 2005 median home prices plotted on a map, indicating home value increases with proximity to the coast (Brookings Institution 2006).

Though this trend did not originate with the pandemic, COVID-19 has undoubtedly accelerated it, with home prices continuing to break records. The median single-family home sale price in Maine reached $334,000 in 2022, up 13% from just the year prior (Maine State Housing Authority 2022b). From 2019 to 2022, a span of 36 months, the median home price in Maine increased 48.51%. A report on the state's housing market released in early 2023 attributes the persistently high values to the influx of newcomers "coupled with an already limited inventory" (Griffith 2023). All of this growth is despite the Federal Reserve raising interest rates seven times during 2022 alone, pushing mortgage rates to their highest levels in over a decade; experts note that demand has consequently started to slow but prices remain high given the limited inventory (Maine State Housing Authority 2022b). Figure 10 depicts the progressive unaffordability of homes in Maine.

In an economic context where income and minimum wage have not kept pace with the cost of living, renters in particular have suffered. Eviction filings are documented as rising 22% in 2022. The Maine State Housing Authority (2022) links this statistic to the ending of the state's Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program, which was put in place during the pandemic and funded over $290 million in rent and utility payments—paying back rent for over 34,000 Maine households—in an eighteen-month period in 2021 and 2022. The ERA was created as a one-time federal resource to address financial hardships induced by COVID-19, but, tellingly, the demand never abated. This is indicative of the "pre-pandemic nature and ongoing need for housing and rental assistance" in the state (Maine State Housing Authority 2022b).

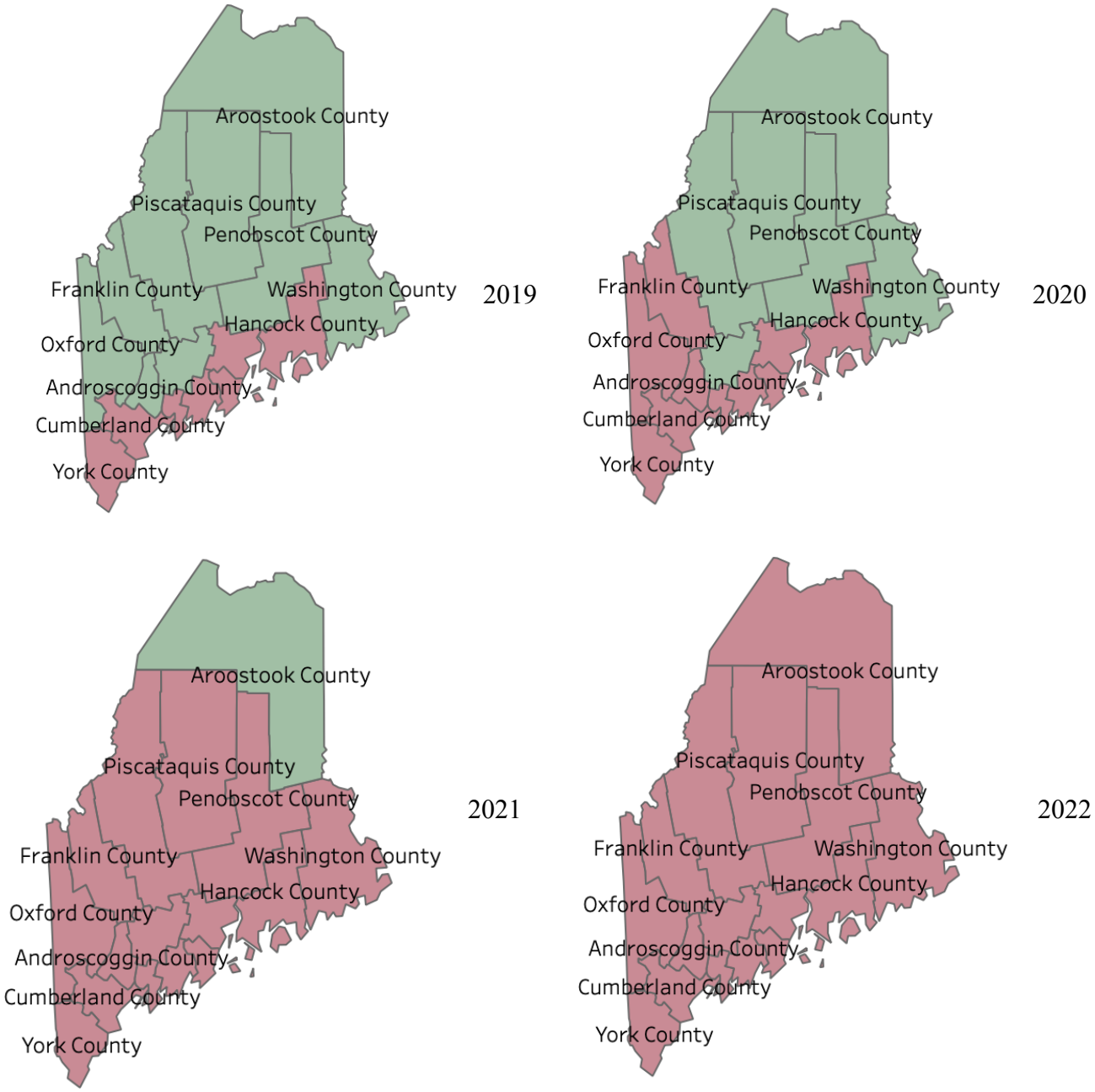

Figure 10: Maps showing counties considered generally affordable (green) or unaffordable (red) by the Homeownership Affordability Index. Unaffordable is defined here as a household earning area median income that could not cover the payment on a median-priced home using less than 28% of gross income (Maine State Housing Authority 2022a). Where in 2019 only the southern coastal region was unaffordable, by 2022 the entire state is red.

3.3 Disaster

Fully taking into account the context of the pandemic requires acknowledging the element of *disaster* affecting the migration patterns, not entirely unlike what was seen in response to the 2007-2009 Great Recession. Existing scholarship on disaster gentrification, however, deals almost exclusively with climate disasters such as hurricanes and, to a lesser extent, non-natural disasters such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Gould and Lewis 2021). The literature recognizes that various disruptive forces in the modern world including urbanization, climate change, and globalization increase disaster vulnerability. Tierney comes closest to acknowledging pandemics in her description of the consequences of urbanization (2015:1333). This makes sense, as people living in close physical proximity increases the potential of disease outbreaks. I argue here that we should expand the conversation of disaster to discuss not only the pandemic but also the 2007-2009 Great Recession. This expanded framework illuminates questions of intolerance, xenophobia and the consequent need for a sense of place "without being reactionary and essentialist" (McIntyre et al. 2006:44).

Despite its failure to explicitly include pandemics or economic crises, the theoretical groundwork developed in the existing literature is still useful. The aftermath of disasters present an opportunity for sustainable redevelopment, but all too often government responses fail to consider equity impacts and, moreover, operate within a dangerous neoliberal discourse that encourages individuals to "adapt" rather than demand structural change (Tierney 2015). Here it is helpful to consider David Harvey's framing of sustainability as "a debate about the preservation of a particular social order rather than a debate about the preservation of nature per se", a reminder that no term or concept is divorced from political reality and power relations (McIntyre et al. 2006).

The imperative to "build back better", beyond President Biden's legislative agenda, speaks to the problematic rhetoric of disaster response efforts such as those spearheaded by the United Nations (UN). There is a certain reliance upon the normalization of climate disasters specifically here, as the logic assumes that existing forms of infrastructure—and the livelihoods and communities inextricably bound to them—must be destroyed "in order for true resilience to be imported from abroad"; understood in this way, building back better is a neocolonial project (Gould and Lewis 2021:2). An explanation of building it back better post-disaster given by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) is an illuminating example. The UNDRR states that the purpose of recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction phases is to "increase the resilience of nations and communities through integrating disaster risk reduction measures into the restoration of physical infrastructure and society systems, and into the revitalization of livelihoods, economies, and the environment" (Gould and Lewis 2021:2). This description is notable because it omits any reference to equity impacts or outcomes and because it references the murky concept of resilience.

3.4 Resilience

As the framework through which much disaster recovery is presented, the concept of resilience and its accompanying discourse merits further examination. The same primary disruptive forces which are recognized as increasing disaster vulnerability (rapid urbanization, climate change, and globalization) also create a supposed need for resilience (Tierney 2015:1333). Resilience is a boundary object, a term that enables communication across disciplines and is thus useful in creating pathways for collaboration between scientific and policy domains (Tierney 2015:1334). Perhaps by consequence, resilience is rather vague and broad,

which also allows its meaning to be diluted and applied to a variety of contexts. In this sense, resilience is a descendant of sustainable development: an abstract "scientific and policy fad" situated in and compatible with a neoliberal discourse and which, as a result, carries considerable ideological baggage (Tierney 2015:1329). Due to the neoliberal call for turning risks into opportunities, individuals become adaptive rather than resisting and demanding change through political action. This is consistent with a long history of public-private partnerships and government policy pressuring already at-risk populations to adapt.

Perhaps most troubling is that the emerging literature on the topic as well as popular discourse often praise resiliency, the ability to "bounce back" and overcome, and frame it as an aspirational trait. The consequences of this perception are dangerous: the rural communities that have been invaded by urban newcomers have not only been conditioned to adapt rather than resist but are actually lauded for doing so. Scholarship is taking notice, and various authors (Nevarez and Simons 2020, Gould and Lewis 2021, Olsson 2015) have called for critical reassessment of how resilience as a term is used in both academic and popular discourse.

This concern has prompted Gould and Lewis (2021) to discuss what they call resilience gentrification. They argue that calls for building back better have the consequences of increasing environmental and housing inequality, framing resilience gentrification as "a greenwashed version of neo-settler colonialism" (Gould and Lewis 2021:3). One of the most common paths to recovery post-disaster, structural mitigation, leads to resilience gentrification by inflating housing costs and has been used to displace local populations and replace them with wealthier settlers. Structural mitigation refers to physical constructions used by the UN to reduce hazard impacts, including buildings, heating and cooling systems, and building codes. These structural measures and their gentrifying effects are most evident in the wake of natural disasters: climate

demolition, such as that inflicted by hurricanes, quite literally makes way for redevelopment efforts to swoop in with increased costs, giving climate-resilient structures only to those who can pay.

Of course, seeing how structural mitigation relates to a global pandemic is less straightforward. Given our expanded framework of disaster, however, we can recognize the gentrifying implications of the COVID-19 pandemic even though its effects may be less visible and dramatic than those of a natural disaster. As quality of life and the rural idyll attain more competitive value, amenity migrants flock to certain areas more than others. In Maine, the southern coast is clearly the most attractive destination. Migration to coastal cities and the development of tourism in these places is increasing despite climate change simultaneously exacerbating storm surges and sea level rise. People continue to settle in areas most vulnerable to these patterns. Structural mitigation raises the cost of redevelopment of coastal real estate in particular, effectively applying the "logic of capital" to the "ecological reality of increasing coastal precarity" (Gould and Lewis 2021:4). This idea of coastal precarity adds a new dimension to the patterns we have seen of amenity migration concentrated along Maine's southern coast, raising questions about who is able to inhabit so-called resilient structures in these exposed locations and who foots the bill for their (re)settlement.

The bottom line is that COVID-19 is not the root cause of urban migration to rural places like Maine, but it has contributed, and because it is situated within existing rhetoric of responding to and rebuilding after disasters, there is danger in how the phenomenon is discussed in academic and popular discourse. Talking about surges in amenity tourism as part of the "resilience" of small-town Maine and elsewhere presents threats to those communities. Most concerning is that the system itself is designed to prevent those communities from recognizing

the threat as external, as institutional, instead promoting infighting among citizens who could otherwise be working towards real change. To address post-disaster recovery in a way that actually prioritizes equity is challenging, as it requires the disruption of existing social and economic structures and thus also necessitates political will and intentionality. Public-private partnerships, as an indicator of neoliberalism, are significant obstacles as they act as "key agents" in reproducing such inequality (Gould and Lewis 2021:3). The system is not broken but is in fact operating exactly as intended, protecting itself to ensure its perpetuity. The following chapter delves into interpersonal tensions emerging as a result of these larger processes of disaster and resilience gentrification.

Chapter 4 — Newcomer-Local Relations

"Does the power reside with the mobile elites (capitalists or amenity seekers) lured to the local, locals trying to lure in amenity-producing capital, or in some negotiation between these various interests?" (McIntyre et al. 2006:49)

4.1 The Tourist Gaze

A radio segment of *Maine Calling*, recurring programming on the Maine Public Broadcasting Network, that aired in June of 2021 features calls from various Maine residents offering their thoughts on the state's position as a relocation hotspot during the pandemic. The program features perspectives ranging from a new resident who chose Maine over areas in the U.S. South for political reasons to a longtime resident concerned that the migration will exacerbate existing income inequality in the state. One interviewee, Charles, discusses challenges he has experienced in the decade he has been in Maine. He recounts how he has had a "devil of a time trying to find a doctor" for his child and complains about the "retiree-favored" nature of his town in trying to pick a school district. He ponders why, in the face of such difficulties, he should stay, asking, "What is the state of Maine going to do to try to keep us here?" (Rooks 2021). The "us" in question refers to amenity migrants like himself, presumably of means. There is a certain extractive nature to his comments, as he never mentions what he might offer to his Maine community. Questions like Charles' evoke the conventional, asymmetrical narrative of urbanizing rural areas and do not acknowledge the potential for a mutually beneficial relationship.

Many of the newcomers interviewed on the program have only positive remarks about their new neighbors and communities, and it makes for an overall heartwarming radio segment.

We should interrogate, however, whether newcomers' perceptions of Mainers are perhaps influenced by their preconceptions about the rural idyll. If they move to the state drawn by a certain "simple" way of life, then it follows that their ideas about the people who live there may also be necessarily simple. This may seem harmless and perhaps inevitable for people coming from such different walks of life, but the newcomers' reductionist views do political work.

The concept of postproductive transition (Hanes 2018) examined in Chapter One, referring to the decline in raw-material extraction and commodity production and the rise of the service-based economy, is also useful here. The accompanying shift in understanding of the rural from a place of production to one of consumption produces what has been called a "tourism landscape", one which is primarily "appreciated for its recreational and aesthetic values" (Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen 2010:195). We should consider how existing populations are subsumed into the tourist gaze and taken as part of that landscape. Reduced to one dimension—their rurality, or quaintness, or easygoingness, or ruggedness—the locals themselves become amenities to be desired and consumed in this postproductive setting.

4.2 Influence of the Service Sector

Several aspects of the service-based economy contribute to local skepticism of newcomers. One of these is the service sector's seasonality. Maine is famous for its short but beautiful, temperate summers and notorious for its long, harsh winters. Expectedly, many amenity migrants only occupy their Maine homes seasonally and head to warmer climates in the colder months, leaving much of the service sector to close down each winter and ramp back up each summer (Thompson et al. 2016). These fair-weather residents are known, not always affectionately, as snowbirds. In 2021, Maine was the only state in the country to have a gross

housing vacancy rate above 20%, a statistic that includes second homes and seasonal units (Callis 2022). This dynamic leaves many service-sector employees without reliable year-round employment, fostering a dependency on the predictable influx of tourists. Already, employment opportunities in the service sector such as retail often pay relatively low wages and can increase the income gap between locals and newcomers. Many workers are forced to find odd jobs in the off months or work enough during the busy period to make up for the inconsistent wages.

Furthermore, an orientation towards tourism, retail, and other consumption represents a departure from manufacturing and, for many coastal towns in particular, a deep-rooted historical dependence on the traditional fishing industry. The people from away are thus seen to be not only taking over the town but essentially transforming its livelihood, which provides substantial grounds for animosity.

4.3 Newcomers and Locals as Demographically Distinct

This sentiment is heightened by locals' perception of the newcomers' "political power and civil engagement"; research suggests that amenity migrants are "readily able to acquire social capital and use it to reach their own goals" which may not be in accordance with those of long-term residents (Thompson et al. 2016:170). Evidence also indicates that long-term rural residents and amenity migrants do in fact occupy different social positions. Because amenity migrants are not seeking socioeconomic gains per se but rather enhanced quality of life, many newcomers to rural areas "do not follow traditional economic theories of migration" and accordingly come in with higher incomes, more education, and occupations that may not fit with those established in the rural region (Onge, Hunter, and Boardman 2007:2). Indeed, between 1999 and 2004, new arrivals to Maine came with an average household income of $48,000

compared to $46,500 for Maine's non-migrants (Brookings Institution 2006). Updated data on income discrepancies are not yet available, but the gap seems poised to widen. Thus these migrants are able to exploit current living costs at the long-term residents' expense. Remote workers are a clear illustration of this, as contractors or the self-employed can choose to work remotely and establish residency in any desirable location within their means. This relationship to a place where one can simply consume the landscape and local commerce but not depend upon it for one's livelihood is explicitly colonial.

Furthermore, despite higher income growth over time for residents in amenity-rich rural areas compared to their low-amenity counterparts, such growth is limited to those with what is known as low baseline occupational prestige (Onge et al. 2007). Occupational prestige, or the socially accepted worthiness of a job, is a useful metric here because unlike income, it only shifts due to a change in employment and thus can reflect socioeconomic status. Evidence suggests that migration to amenity destinations creates primarily low-wage service-sector jobs for the residents there, and many rural communities are consequently "not experiencing collective advancement" (Onge et al. 2007:2). This brings critical nuance to claims of amenity migrants supporting their destinations' economies; while that may technically be true, the relative benefit is only felt by those already at the bottom. Minimum wage earners, for example, may experience a boost from the newcomers opening their wallets, but these workers' incomes are already precarious and their jobs hardly respected.

Moreover, the available data indicate that out-of-state newcomers have different preferences than Mainers themselves. Some of the newcomers' choices are surprising, contradicting the trend of overwhelming migration to the southern coast. From 1999 to 2004, about 4,600 residents of Aroostook— Maine's vast, northernmost county—relocated to a

different county within the state, but 5,900 people settled there from outside Maine during the same period, offsetting the internal movement. Much of this in-migration is attributed to the Boston metro area, which contributed a total of 12,000 migrants to Maine during those five years, 36% of the net inflow to the state (Brookings Institution 2006:25). The difference in internal and external migration patterns supports the idea that the newcomers arriving to the state are distinct from established residents. Additionally, the in-migration evidence reminds us that amenity migrants are not monolithic and do in fact bring a diversity of objectives with them.

Perhaps due to their divergent socioeconomic backgrounds and preferences, there is evidence that the newcomers have not been particularly nice to the locals. A news article from late March of 2020 titled "This Pandemic is Not Your Vacation" calls out people arriving from cities for not thinking about or being courteous of the full time residents (Petersen 2020). Petersen specifically notes the entitlement felt by people of means to so-called spaces of purity, highlighting the association of nature- or amenity-rich environments with escape. She extends this critique by highlighting how such a conception of rural areas or vacation destinations—she uses the word "playgrounds"—obscures the communities who live there year round and, furthermore, the indigenous peoples who have lived there even longer.

4.4 A Difference of Degree

Part of the project of this thesis has been to illustrate that Maine's appeal as an amenity destination is not altogether new. Maine's quality of life has attracted people well before the COVID-19 pandemic and even the 2007-2009 Great Recession. Indeed, the 2006 Brookings Institution report notes that "recent trends suggest Maine is becoming a popular base for telecommuters" and posits that, based on a static unemployment rate but increased labor force,

Maine seems to be drawing "workers who earn paychecks from firms outside the state" (2006:31). It is significant to see such a hypothesis published in a report from this time; 2006 was the same year Facebook opened to the general public and a year before the first-generation Apple iPhone hit the market.

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly brought amenity migration to Maine to the forefront of the news cycle and local consciousness. There is ongoing debate as to whether migration since the outbreak of the pandemic is qualitatively different from that of the decades before, whether the patterns are a continuation and extension of previous behavior or something new altogether. Anecdotal evidence suggests that at least initially, the movement followed a familiar narrative. An immediate reaction to the virus was an urge to escape, which prompted the first wave of COVID-19 migration from concentrated urban areas to more open countryside. This wave consisted of people seeking refuge in their second homes, or even temporarily renting homes in appealing areas with less dense populations. A news article from late March of 2020 describes these people as "renting a house in the countryside on a pandemic-inspired whim", distinct from people who have established residence by paying taxes and consider themselves part of the community (Petersen 2020). Another news article from August 2020, titled "I relocated from central California to a tiny coastal town in Maine. Right now, the extra space and joys of rural living outweigh any drawbacks" provides insight into the mindset and logic of these first-wave newcomers (Kearl 2020). The title itself hints at some of the red flags the article highlights: how will the former city dwellers' short-term thinking play out in the long term? Kearl raises concerns including frustration with the lack of reliable internet providers, commutes to the grocery store and other services, brutal winters, and demographics (i.e. Maine's aging population). This kind of short-term visitation is in line with amenity consumption as discussed

in Chapter One—when people go to areas to experience their amenity offerings without plans to actually settle there.

Preliminary evidence suggests that this first wave has been followed by a slower, more permanent wave as the pandemic moves into its endemic phase. This second wave can truly be classified as amenity migration, as people actually resettle to areas to experience their amenity offerings. Rather than summering or vacationing temporarily in their second homes, people have transferred residence, enrolling their children in school and paying taxes in more rural areas. Data released by the Maine Department of Education show that without exception, each of Maine's sixteen counties saw declines in public school enrollment following the 2019-20 school year when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. However, the state is slowly rebounding, with all but four counties displaying increases in public school enrollment between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years—when education generally resumed as normal after a period of hybrid learning. So far only one county, Lincoln, has surpassed pre-pandemic enrollment levels; notably, it is in the Mid-Coast region (Maine Department of Education 2023). The consequences of these more long-term movements are yet to be seen, but this second phase could have significant implications for the dynamic between newcomers and locals. If the urban arrivals plan to more fully embrace the rural idyll by living there year-round and committing to educating their children there, then perhaps more sustainable long-term growth is possible.

This hopeful take is supported by other research as well. Thompson et al. (2016) acknowledge a vague "community support" brought by the wealthier amenity migrants particularly in the form of philanthropic activities. Their in-migration also presents opportunities for local economies to diversify through tourism capitalizing on natural assets. It should be noted that some residents resent these aspects as well, arguing that the newcomers' activities "follow a

gentrifier's aesthetic", one often focused on the arts (Thompson et al. 2016:172). This is reminiscent of the ways that urbanites sometimes "play at being rural" in engaging with interests such as horseback riding, gardening, or folk festivals (Lichter and Brown 2011:570). Of course, there is still substantial doubt as to whether amenity-driven development can in fact be an effective way to protect and maintain landscapes. Some scholars argue that in fact amenity tourism is merely another form of globalization "reaching out into the hinterland, commodifying what it finds and wresting control from the locals" (McIntyre et al. 2006:34).

Ultimately, we should be careful to avoid narrative portraying Mainers as monolithic or homogenous, either universally against or in support of newcomers. Given the previous chapter's discussion of resiliency, we should also be critical of lauding residents or communities for adapting to changes that may ultimately not be in their best interests. Recall, too, the diversity across the state in terms of demographics highlighted in the opening chapter, particularly the differences between the interior northern and southern coastal regions. The implications of amenity migration on these distinct areas will vary and have disparate impacts on the residents there.

Conclusion

Nevarez noted in 2003 that it was beyond the scope of that book to "conclude whether place-based quality of life will prove an enduring dynamic in the new industrial space" (2003:78). Reilly and Renski recognized in 2008 that quality of place, so closely tied to quality of life, would increase in importance "as the economy becomes increasingly knowledge and technology intensive" (2008:17). It is clear now that quality of life has indeed persisted as a pull factor for amenity migrants and become even more pertinent in our more mobile, globalized, modern world. Part of my project in writing this thesis was to speak back to the rural monolith and add nuance to debates of amenity migration and tourism. I have aimed to use the sociological imagination as a way to make sense of my own experience as a Mainer and the larger trends of community change occurring in my home at the local and global levels.

My analysis has been limited to an evaluation of available secondary sources. An ethnography of amenity migration in Maine could provide a richer picture of the phenomenon, taking into account street-level interactions and surveying other sorts of community institutions such as schools. Chapter Four in particular would be enriched by hearing directly from both long-term residents and newcomers. What changes have they noticed and what tensions do they feel? What do they do for work, and how do they view their jobs in connection to their communities? Personal narratives can offer a more holistic sense of the kinds of relationships amenity migrants are forming with their new homes and neighbors. There is also room here for a deeper investigation of remote work, an area where much formal research has yet to be done and which will undoubtedly continue to shape the mobility of amenity migrants in the digital age. Will employers tighten restrictions on remote work policies, bringing employees back into

offices? Or will the freedom to work from anywhere continue to grow post-pandemic, inspiring more people to abandon daily commutes for higher perceived quality of life?

Of course, Maine is simply a case study; yes, it is a place close to my heart, but in a broader sense it does not tell a unique story of community change. Future work should examine Maine alongside other geographic contexts such as upstate New York, Montana, and Florida to identify similarities and differences across regions. How might amenity migrants' preference for Maine's southern coast, for example, translate to a landlocked area in the American West? What are the distinct brands and qualities of life attracting people to other places, and how might those migrants be qualitatively different from the people moving to Maine? Have other amenity destinations developed strategies for negotiating newcomer-local relations that could be applied in other contexts?

Much still remains to be seen. The long-term implications for both the urban transplants and established rural residents are unclear: is there hope for successful integration into these communities? Perhaps the pandemic has prompted people with means to reevaluate their priorities in an enduring way and move across the country to prove it. Or will the city slickers ultimately find themselves at odds with the realities of small-town life, unable to commit to the long haul? Will the power imbalances, deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic, only grow with time? I hope my analysis here offers a framework for interpreting new data relating to in- and out-migration, tourism, housing markets, school enrollment, local perceptions, etc. as they come in.

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