Hello and good day. I hope this report finds you well.

From our initial analysis it’s easy to see that rural population centers within the continental United States are beginning to show a population decline tied to a decrease in economic opportunity. While this development is not unique to specifically the United States nor its rural communities, it is the focus of our project. As a side tangent, we can see this same shift in demographics within New York city and its boroughs.

Our primary portion of the analysis focused on the macro scale, namely demographic changes of states rather than counties. Counties being something that could be further explored to show a more detailed picture of every shifting economics of the Rural American experience and life.

One of the key indicators that we were able to procure through analysis, looking back in our dated set to the early 2000s, was the type of industries that were often consolidated around specific factors. The easiest vector in this regard is of course, coal. Many states throughout the country had vast and prosperous coal mining Industries as well as natural gas or raw materials, such as copper. While natural gas was able to evolve into fracking, industrial exploitation of resources has been curbed by regulations on the Federal level. The coal industry has widely ceased operations in many rural communities. For the sake of this report, Virginia and West Virginia will be the targets of choice. Both states have a long history of resource exploitation and to a degree tourism, West Virginia for instance accounted for coal mining as generated a total of 7.4 billion dollars in revenue in 2022. In 2019, the state of West Virginia reported 27 thousand jobs within its mining sector overall, with 9.2% being current or former miners in the coal specific sector. Using meta data we were able to track this specific development within West Virginia. The average amount of tons extracted from the earth has been in steady decline since 1997, when it peaked at 180 million tons of coal, shrinking down to the current amount of 98.21 million tons of coal in 2023.

Mining specific jobs are either being transferred to other parts of the industry, such as fracking or metals, but are ending up miles beyond where some people are capable of driving to. Some small towns shrink in population over time. According to WalletHub, West Virginia is one of the two worst states for jobs.

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