Prologue:

The Demographer’s Ken: 50 Years of Growth and Change

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INTRODUCTION

The field of demography (also referred to as population studies) has evolved significantly since the mid-twentieth Century. A useful benchmark for gauging the nature and extent of change of the field is Hauser and Duncan’s landmark work, The Study of Population: An Inventory and Appraisal, published in 1959. The 33 chapters contained in that volume were grouped into four sections. Part I, Demography as a Science, contained four chapters laying out the substantive, methodological, epistemological, and organizational foundations of the discipline (Hauser and Duncan 1959a, 1959b, 1959c, 1959d). Part II, Development and Current Status of Demography, offered eight chapters portraying the origins and practice of demography in selected nations, along with an insightful overview of disciplinary history (Lorimer 1959). Part III, Elements of Demography, included a dozen chapters covering elements of the demographic equation (structure and components of change), as well as assessments of demographic data. Finally, Part IV, Population Studies in Various Disciplines, contained seven chapters discussing common interests of demography and selected disciplines, including

1 The notion of the demographer’s ken is borrowed from Ryder (1964).
2 See Davis (1948, pp. 551–594) for the original elaboration of this concept.
sociology (Moore 1959), economics (Spengler 1959), and human ecology (Duncan 1959). See the Epilogue to this *Handbook* by Poston, Baumle, and Micklin for more discussion.

Not surprisingly, this *Handbook* covers many of the same topics as *The Study of Population*, but they are organized a little differently to reflect the evolution of population studies. This Prologue highlights the principal developments in the field during the past 45 years and thus serves at least three purposes. First, it provides an account, albeit abbreviated, of the significant ways in which the demography of today differs from the field on which *The Study of Population* was based—substantively, methodologically, and in terms of its use for public policy guidance. Second, it illustrates how demographic science has expanded to incorporate portions of heretofore peripheral disciplines, resulting in much wider recognition of the significance and impacts of demographic phenomena. Third, it shows how changes in population studies over the past five decades have been influenced by the expansion of the infrastructure on which modern scientific disciplines depend, namely, information, technology, and organizational structures.

**THE EVOLUTION OF DEMOGRAPHY:**
**CA. 1950–2000**

A commonly recognized definition of *demography* is “the study of the size, territorial distribution, and composition of population, changes therein, and the components of such changes, . . . [namely], natality, mortality, territorial movement, and social mobility [change of status]” (Hauser and Duncan 1959d). How this activity, the study of population, is carried out, and the results it produces, depend on a set of disciplinary resources. Demographic theories and models are statements of the evident or hypothesized course, causes, and/or consequences of these phenomena at varying levels of aggregation (Coale and Trussell 1996; Coleman and Schofield 1986; Hauser and Duncan 1959b). Demographic methods comprise a body of procedures and techniques for collecting, evaluating, adjusting, estimating, and analyzing demographic data, while demographic materials consist of the sources of raw data such as censuses, vital registration systems, population registers, and sample surveys (Hauser and Duncan 1959a; also see Siegel and Swanson 2004).

The infrastructure of demography consists of the professional organizations, modes of disseminating ideas and research findings, and institutional sources of research support that influence the kinds of work done under the banner of the discipline and how the results are portrayed and received.

Finally, demographic praxis refers to the use of demographic data and research findings by governments, businesses, and other organizations for predicting, planning, monitoring, and evaluating a wide range of demographic and nondemographic conditions, events, and trends (Siegel 2002).

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3 As of 2004, the front cover of the journal *Demography*, the official journal of the Population Association of America, offers a concise definition: “the statistical study of human populations.”

4 The resources listed are probably important for the operation of most, if not all, disciplines, but do not exhaust the class of resources that might be mentioned. For an interesting discussion of the context and social structure of scientific disciplines see Abbott, 2001, Chapter 5, though he is more interested in relations among disciplines than in the kinds of resources that make disciplinary activity possible.