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WILLIAM LANE AUSTIN, Director (Retired January 31, 1941)

PHILIP M. HAUSER, Assistant Director



SIXTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES : 1940

# POPULATION

## COMPARATIVE OCCUPATION STATISTICS FOR THE UNITED STATES, 1870 TO 1940

A comparison of the 1930 and the 1940 census occupation and  
industry classifications and statistics; a comparable  
series of occupation statistics, 1870 to 1930;  
and a social-economic grouping of the  
labor force, 1910 to 1940

*Bureau of the Census  
Library*

By

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Prepared under the supervision of  
Dr. LEON E. TRUESDELL  
Chief Statistician for Population

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## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE,  
Bureau of the Census,  
*Washington, D. C., June 30, 1943.*

SIR:

I transmit herewith a volume presenting Comparative Occupation Statistics for the United States for the period from 1870 to 1940.

The Bureau of the Census is fortunate in having available for the preparation of this report Dr. Alba M. Edwards, who has been responsible for the occupational classification of workers during the latter half of the rapidly changing 70-year period covered by the report and has contributed materially to the development of occupational and industrial classifications and of methods of tabulation in this complex statistical field. His treatment of many of the special problems involved in the preparation of the series of statistics herewith presented is based largely upon his contact with the tabulation and analysis of the returns from the later censuses and upon his association with the staff members responsible for the censuses of 1900 and earlier. Dr. Edwards has made a unique contribution in the development of the social-economic grouping of workers presented in Part III of this volume.

Associated with Dr. Edwards in the preparation of this report were Zora P. McCracken, Ruth S. Buckner, and M. Claire Casey, each of whom had had many years of experience in census occupation statistics, and Dr. John D. Durand, who collaborated in the preparation of Chapter IV of Part I of the report, the chapter entitled "Adjustment of 1930 Gainful Worker Statistics and 1940 Labor Force Statistics to a Comparable Basis."

Respectfully,

J. C. CAPT,  
*Director of the Census.*

Hon. JESSE H. JONES,  
*Secretary of Commerce.*

# CONTENTS

Foreword.....	Page IX	Preface.....	Page XI
<b>PART I.—COMPARATIVE OCCUPATION AND INDUSTRY STATISTICS, 1930 AND 1940</b>			
<p>Chapter I.—Introduction..... 3</p> <p>Chapter II.—The occupation and industry classifications..... 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">The 1940 census occupation classification..... 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">The 1940 census industry classification..... 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Major differences between the 1930 and the 1940 classifications..... 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Study of changes made in the classifications..... 5</p> <p>Chapter III.—The principal factors that affect the comparability of the statistics..... 7</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">The "gainful worker" concept of 1930 and the "labor force" concept of 1940..... 7</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Changes in instructions to census enumerators..... 7</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The 1930 instructions..... 7</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The 1940 instructions..... 7</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Instructions in regard to specific groups..... 8</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Effect of differences in questions and instructions..... 8</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Other factors that affect the statistics..... 8</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Differences in processing methods..... 9</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Decline in employment opportunities..... 9</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Increased legal restrictions relating to youth..... 9</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Increase in retirement of old workers..... 9</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Increase in proportion of females at work..... 9</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Increase in urban residence..... 9</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Changes in age distribution of population..... 10</p> <p>Chapter IV.—Adjustment of 1930 gainful worker statistics and 1940 labor force statistics to a comparable basis..... 11</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Summary of adjusted figures..... 12</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Derivation of adjustments..... 13</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">New workers..... 13</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Seasonal workers..... 13</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Inmates of institutions..... 14</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Retired and disabled workers..... 15</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Omitted entries..... 15</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Public emergency workers..... 16</p> <p>Chapter V.—Limitations of comparisons made..... 17</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Comparative figures not compiled for States..... 17</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Comparative figures not compiled for cities..... 17</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Comparative figures not compiled for major occupation groups..... 17</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Comparative figures not compiled by sex..... 17</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Figures by sex approximately comparable in certain cases..... 18</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Comparative figures not compiled by color or race or by age..... 18</p> <p>Chapter VI.—The occupation statistics..... 19</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Description of occupation tables 1 to 5..... 19</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Degree of comparability between the 1930 and the 1940 occupation figures for the United States..... 22</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Total figures..... 22</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Figures for occupations..... 22</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Occupations of public emergency workers..... 23</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Unusual occupations of females..... 23</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Occupations only apparently comparable..... 23</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Occupations classified with difficulty..... 24</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Technical engineers..... 24</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Farm workers..... 24</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Retail and wholesale merchants..... 28</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Newsboys..... 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Clerks in stores and salesmen and saleswomen..... 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Workers in the building trades..... 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Cabinetmakers and tailors..... 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Locomotive engineers and firemen..... 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Machinists..... 29</p>	<p>Chapter VI.—The occupation statistics—Continued..... 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Degree of comparability between the 1930 and the 1940 occupation figures for the United States—Con. Occupations classified with difficulty—Con..... 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Painters..... 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Operatives and laborers..... 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Apprentices..... 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Dressmakers and seamstresses..... 30</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Fruit and vegetable graders and packers, except in cannery..... 30</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Housekeepers and servants, private family..... 30</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Laundresses..... 30</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Boarding house and lodgginghouse keepers..... 30</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Practical nurses and midwives..... 30</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Fishermen and oystermen..... 30</p> <p>Chapter VII.—The industry statistics..... 31</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Description of industry tables 6 and 7..... 31</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Degree of comparability between the 1930 and the 1940 figures for the United States..... 31</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Total figures..... 31</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Figures for industries..... 32</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Numbers of emergency workers affected figures for certain industries appreciably..... 32</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Construction..... 33</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Fishery..... 33</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Industries classified with difficulty..... 33</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Bakery products..... 33</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Railway express service..... 33</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Wholesale trade and retail trade..... 33</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Automobile storage and repair, motor vehicle retailing, and filling stations..... 33</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Firm names..... 33</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Industry not reported..... 34</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">Miscellaneous industries..... 34</p>		
<b>TEXT TABLES</b>			
Chapter IV			
Table			
<p>I. Estimated number of persons in the labor force, by age and sex, for the United States: 1930 and 1940..... 12</p> <p>II. Estimated number of persons in the labor force, 1940 and 1930, and estimated number of gainful workers, 1930 and 1900, by age and sex, for the United States..... 13</p> <p>III. Estimated adjustment for seasonal workers enumerated as gainful workers, by age and sex, for the United States: 1930..... 14</p> <p>IV. Estimated number of inmates of specified institutions enumerated as gainful workers, by age and sex, for the United States: 1930..... 15</p> <p>V. Estimated number of retired and disabled persons enumerated as gainful workers, by sex, for the United States: 1930..... 15</p> <p>VI. Estimated number of persons actually gainfully occupied who were not classified as gainful workers because of omitted occupation entries, by age and sex, for the United States: 1930..... 16</p> <p>VII. Estimated number of persons actually in the labor force who were not classified as such because of omitted employment status entries, by age and sex, for the United States: 1940..... 16</p>			

Chapter VI	
Table	Page
VIII. Comparison between the last and the usual occupations of experienced workers seeking work, and between the assigned and the usual occupations of public emergency workers, by major occupation group and sex: 1940.....	20
IX. Occupations only apparently comparable: 1930 and 1940.....	24
X. Male technical engineers in specified age groups: 1930 and 1940.....	24
XI. Farm workers in the United States: 1930 and 1940.....	25
XII. Farm laborers, by sex, for divisions and States: 1930 and 1940.....	27

## Chapter VII

XIII. Emergency workers, by usual industry, compared with total workers, by sex, for specified industries: 1940.....	32
--	----

## DETAILED TABLES

1.—Occupations of the 1940 census classification with the corresponding occupations of the 1930 census classification and an adjustment factor, for the United States.....	35
--	----

## PART II.—COMPARATIVE OCCUPATION STATISTICS, 1870-1930

Chapter	Page
Chapter VIII.—Introduction.....	87
Changes in scope of occupation inquiry and in form of classification.....	87
Changes in work content of occupations and in occupational terminology.....	88
Changes in the schedule.....	88
Changes in instructions to enumerators.....	88
Changes in the occupation classification.....	89
Changes in method of presentation.....	89
The estimates made.....	89
Chapter IX.—Number and proportion of persons gainfully occupied.....	90
Population 10 years old and over.....	90
Children and adults.....	91
Chapter X.—Age composition of the Nation's labor force.....	93
Chapter XI.—Children and adults in gainful occupations. In agricultural and nonagricultural pursuits.....	97
Sex distribution.....	98
Chapter XII.—Distribution of the Nation's labor force by general divisions of occupations.....	100
Chapter XIII.—Occupational distribution of the Nation's labor force.....	104
Appendix A.—Estimates involved in the statistics presented in Part II of the report.....	137
Appendix B.—Hitherto unpublished Thirteenth Census occupation statistics (Tables 12 to 15).....	157

## TEXT TABLES

## Chapter IX

Table	Page
XIV. Number and proportion of persons gainfully occupied, by sex, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	91
XV. Number and proportion of children and of adults gainfully occupied, by sex, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	92

## Chapter X

XVI. Number and proportion of persons gainfully occupied, by age and sex, for the United States: 1890 to 1930.....	93
XVII. Percent distribution of gainful workers, by age and sex, for the United States: 1890 to 1930.....	95

Table	Page
2.—Persons 14 years old and over in the labor force (except new workers), 1940, and gainful workers 14 years old and over, 1930, by occupation and sex, with an adjustment factor and adjusted 1930 total figures, for the United States.....	49
3.—Persons 14 years old and over in the labor force (except new workers) in 1940, and gainful workers 14 years old and over in 1930, in 1920, and in 1910, in selected occupations, with an adjustment factor and adjusted 1930, 1920, and 1910 figures, for the United States.....	59
4.—Gainful workers 14 years old and over, by occupation and sex, for the United States: 1930, 1920, and 1910.....	63
5.—Children 10 to 13 years old, by occupation and sex, for the United States: 1930, 1920, and 1910.....	73
6.—Industries of the 1940 census classification with the corresponding industries of the 1930 census classification and an adjustment factor, for the United States.....	79
7.—Persons 14 years old and over in the labor force (except new workers), 1940, and gainful workers 14 years old and over, 1930, by industry and sex, with an adjustment factor and adjusted 1930 total figures, for the United States.....	81

## Chapter XI

Table	Page
XVIII. Number and proportion of children 10 to 15 years old engaged in all occupations, in agricultural pursuits, and in nonagricultural pursuits, by sex, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	97
XIX. Number and proportion of persons 16 years old and over engaged in all occupations, in agricultural pursuits, and in nonagricultural pursuits, by sex, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	98
XX. Percent distribution, by sex, of all workers, of children 10-15 years old, and of persons 16 and over, in all occupations, in agricultural pursuits, and in nonagricultural pursuits, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	99

## Chapter XII

XXI. Gainful workers 10 years old and over, by general divisions of occupations and sex, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	100
XXII. Percent distribution, by general divisions of occupations, of gainful workers 10 years old and over, by sex, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	101

## DETAILED TABLES

8.—Total gainful workers 10 years old and over, by occupation, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	104
9.—Male gainful workers 10 years old and over, by occupation, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	113
10.—Female gainful workers 10 years old and over, by occupation, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	122
11.—Gainful workers of the United States 10 years old and over, by occupation and sex, 1930 and 1900, with the occupations arranged largely according to the classification of 1930.....	130
12.—Gainful workers 10 years old and over, by sex, age, and general divisions of occupations, for the United States: 1910.....	157
13.—Gainful workers 10 years old and over, by sex, color or race, nativity, and parentage, and general divisions of occupations, for the United States: 1910.....	158
14.—Male gainful workers 10 years old and over, by occupation, age, color or race, nativity, and parentage, for the United States: 1910.....	159
15.—Female gainful workers 10 years old and over by occupation, age, color or race, nativity, and parentage, for the United States: 1910.....	166

APPENDIX A

ESTIMATES INVOLVED IN THE STATISTICS PRESENTED IN PART II OF THE REPORT

Estimate	Page
1. Overcount of agricultural workers in 1910.....	137
2. Undercount of gainful workers in 1920.....	138
2a. Undercount of child workers in 1920.....	138
2b. Undercount of female workers 16 years old and over in 1920.....	139
2c. Undercount of male workers 16 years old and over in 1920.....	140
3. Undercount in 1870.....	141
4. Number of workers in agriculture, 1870-1900.....	141
5. Distribution of Laborers (not specified), 1870-1900.....	143
5a. Agriculture.....	143
5b. Transportation.....	143
5c. Public service (not elsewhere classified).....	144
5d. Professional service.....	144
5e. Domestic and personal service.....	144
5f. Forestry, Extraction of minerals, Manufacturing, and Trade.....	144
5g. Summary.....	144
6. Foresters, forest rangers, and timber cruisers, 1870-1900.....	145
7. Turpentine farmers and laborers, 1880-1900.....	145
8. Employees in stockyards, 1870-1900.....	145
9. Stock raisers, and Stock herders and drovers, 1890.....	145
10. Draymen, hackmen, teamsters, etc., 1870-1900.....	145
10a. Teamsters and haulers, forestry.....	145
10b. Deliverymen, laundries.....	145
10c. Deliverymen, bakeries and stores, and Draymen, teamsters, and carriage drivers.....	145
11. Operators, managers, and officials, and Inspectors, mining, 1880 and 1890.....	146
12. Apprentices to other building and hand trades, 1930.....	146
13. Dressmakers' and milliners' apprentices, 1930.....	146
14. Electricians, and Electrical engineers, 1910.....	146
15. Electricians, and Engineers (civil, etc.) and surveyors, 1870-1890.....	146
16. Foremen and overseers, trade and transportation, 1890 and 1900.....	147
17. Officials of banks and companies, 1870-1890.....	147
18. Baggage men, 1920.....	147
19. Freight agents, 1920.....	147
20. Ticket and station agents, 1920.....	147
21. Letter and mail carriers, 1870-1890.....	147
22. Officials (government), 1870-1900.....	148
23. Messengers and errand and office boys, 1870-1900.....	148
24. Other occupations, telegraph and telephone, 1930.....	148
25. Packers and shippers, 1870-1900.....	148
26. Other persons in trade and transportation, 1870-1900.....	148
27. Agents, 1870-1900.....	149

Estimate	Page
28. Butchers, 1870-1900.....	149
29. Clerks in stores, 1890 and 1900.....	149
30. Porters and helpers (in stores, etc.), 1870-1900.....	150
31. Teachers and professors in colleges, etc., 1870-1900.....	150
32. Weighers, gaugers, and measurers, 1870-1900.....	150
33. Watchmen, policemen, firemen, etc., 1870-1900.....	150
34. Nurses and midwives, 1870-1890.....	150
35. Saloon keepers, 1890 and 1900.....	151
36. Restaurant keepers, and Saloon keepers and bartenders, 1870.....	151
37. Servants and waiters, and Housekeepers and stewards, 1870-1900.....	151
38. Other domestic and personal service, 1870-1900.....	152
38a. Garbage men and scavengers.....	152
38b. Fortune tellers, hypnotists, spiritualists, etc.....	152
38c. Stage hands and circus helpers, and Theater ushers.....	152
39. Other professional service, 1880.....	152
40. Manicurists, 1870-1900.....	152
41. Technicians and laboratory assistants, 1870-1920.....	152
42. Bookkeepers and accountants, 1870 and 1880.....	152
43. Clerks and copyists, 1870-1900.....	153
44. Stenographers and typewriters, 1880.....	153
45. Age distribution of workers added because of undercount in 1920.....	154
46. Number of workers of unknown age in 1910.....	154
47. Age distribution of workers 45 years old and over in 1910.....	154
48. Age distribution of workers deducted because of overcount in 1910.....	154
49. Age distribution of population and of workers added because of undercount in 1870.....	155
50. Age distribution of gainful workers 16 to 44 years old, 1890-1930.....	155
51. Age distribution of Laborers (not specified), 1870-1900.....	155
52. Agricultural workers and nonagricultural workers, by sex and age in 1890.....	156
53. Sex and age distribution of agricultural workers and of nonagricultural workers added because of undercount in 1870.....	156

DIAGRAMS

1. Proportion of persons gainfully occupied, by sex and age, for the United States: 1890 to 1930.....	94
2. Distribution of gainful workers, by sex and age, for the United States: 1890 to 1930.....	96
3. Trends in the distribution of gainful workers by general divisions of occupations, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	102
4. Percent distribution of gainful workers by general divisions of occupations, for the United States: 1870 to 1930.....	103

PART III.—A SOCIAL-ECONOMIC GROUPING OF THE NATION'S LABOR FORCE, 1910-1940

	Page		Page
Chapter XIV.—Introduction.....	175	Chapter XV.—The statistics for the United States—Con.	
The social-economic groups.....	176	Probable future trends—Continued.	
Significance of the social-economic groups.....	179	Skilled workers probably will decrease in relative importance after the war.....	185
Sufficiency of the social-economic groups as a scale.....	180	Semiskilled workers will become the largest group.....	185
Chapter XV.—The statistics for the United States.....	183	Unskilled workers will continue to decrease in relative importance.....	185
Social-economic status of the workers by sex.....	183	The upward trend in the social-economic status of the labor force will continue.....	186
The statistics for 1940.....	183	Social-economic status of employed workers by color.....	188
Comparative statistics, 1910 to 1940.....	183	Chapter XVI.—The statistics for divisions and States.....	190
Effect of changes on the labor force as a whole.....	183	Statistics for the total employed workers.....	190
Probable future trends.....	184	Statistics for white employed workers.....	190
The labor force will continue to increase.....	184	Statistics for Negro employed workers.....	191
The professional class will grow in relative importance.....	184	Distribution of employed as index of distribution of total workers.....	203
Farmers will decrease and other proprietors will increase in relative importance.....	185		
Clerks and kindred workers may continue to increase in relative importance.....	185		

## TEXT TABLES

Table	Page	Table	Page
Chapter XIV			
XXIII. Persons in the labor force (except new workers), classified into social-economic groups, by sex and occupation, for the United States: 1940.....	178	XXXIV. Percent distribution, by social-economic groups, of white employed workers (except on public emergency work), by sex, for divisions and States: 1940.....	198
XXIV. Wage or salary income received in 1939 by experienced workers in the labor force (except those on public emergency work), in selected major occupation groups in 1940, who worked 12 months in 1939, for the United States.....	181	XXXV. Negro male employed workers (except on public emergency work), by social-economic groups, by divisions and States: 1940.....	200
XXV. Years of school completed by experienced workers in the labor force (except those on public emergency work), by major occupation group, for the United States: 1940.....	181	XXXVI. Negro female employed workers (except on public emergency work), by social-economic groups, by divisions and States: 1940.....	201
Chapter XV		XXXVII. Percent distribution, by social-economic groups, of Negro employed workers (except on public emergency work), by sex, for divisions and States: 1940.....	203
XXVI. Persons in the labor force (except new workers), classified into social-economic groups, by employment status and sex, for the United States: 1940.....	186	XXXVIII. Percent distribution of the total labor force, by employment status and sex, for divisions and States: 1940.....	204
XXVII. Persons 14 years old and over in the labor force (except new workers) in 1940, and gainful workers 14 years old and over in 1930, in 1920, and in 1910, classified into social-economic groups, by sex, for the United States.....	187	XXXIX. Persons on public emergency work, by major occupation group and sex, by divisions and States: 1940.....	205
XXVIII. Employed workers (except on public emergency work), classified into social-economic groups, by color and sex, for the United States: 1940.....	189	XI. Experienced workers seeking work, by major occupation group and sex, by divisions and States: 1940.....	206
Chapter XVI		DIAGRAMS	
XXIX. Male employed workers (except on public emergency work), by social-economic groups, by divisions and States: 1940.....	192	Diagram	
XXX. Female employed workers (except on public emergency work), by social-economic groups, by divisions and States: 1940.....	193	5. Trend of social-economic groups in the United States, by sex: 1910-1940.....	185
XXXI. Percent distribution, by social-economic groups, of employed workers (except on public emergency work), by sex, for divisions and States: 1940.....	194	6. Social-economic groups of employed workers (except on public emergency work), by color and sex, for the United States: 1940.....	188
XXXII. White male employed workers (except on public emergency work), by social-economic groups, by divisions and States: 1940.....	196	7. Distribution, by social-economic groups, of the male employed workers (except on public emergency work), in each State: 1940.....	195
XXXIII. White female employed workers (except on public emergency work), by social-economic groups, by divisions and States: 1940.....	197	8. Distribution, by social-economic groups, of the female employed workers (except on public emergency work), in each State: 1940.....	195
		9. Distribution, by social-economic groups, of the white male employed workers (except on public emergency work), in each State: 1940.....	199
		10. Distribution, by social-economic groups, of the white female employed workers (except on public emergency work), in each State: 1940.....	199
		11. Distribution, by social-economic groups, of the Negro male employed workers (except on public emergency work), in each State: 1940.....	202
		12. Distribution, by social-economic groups, of the Negro female employed workers (except on public emergency work), in each State: 1940.....	202

## FOREWORD

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The work of an occupational statistician is fraught with difficulties which may not be evident to the casual user of his products. Some problems which are common to many fields of statistical compilation and analysis occur in especially acute forms in occupational statistics.

First there is the dilemma of classification, whose two horns are theoretical nicety and practical utility. General Francis A. Walker, the superintendent of the Ninth Census, of 1870, wrote concerning the classification of occupations:

"The plan pursued in the compilation of these tables has been . . . to constitute as many distinct subdivisions as the nature of the material furnished by the enumerators would allow to be formed with a reasonable approach to completeness . . . ."

General Walker went on to admit that the resulting classification was "rough and ready" and not scientifically precise. Since he joined the Bureau of the Census in 1909, Dr. Edwards has borne a central share of responsibility for devising and improving the schemes of classification by which to distill from the census-takers' returns for millions in the population a coherent and meaningful statistical picture of the occupations of Americans. In this task he has had to attempt to meet needs as widely different as those of academic scholars interested in structural changes in the economy and those of employment agents or personnel managers in search of particular kinds of workmen.

A second dilemma is created by the need for historical comparability of data and the necessity of adapting statistical methods to continually changing circumstances. Many of the specific occupations which bulk large in the 1940 census were undreamed of in 1870; and even broad occupational groupings have so changed in meaning or content that a description of the present population in terms of the "rough and ready" categories of 1870 would be unrealistic. Dr. Edwards has performed a valuable service by making available in this volume a collation of seventy years' occupational statistics, critically edited to reveal the real trends in the American social and economic structure which have been concealed behind the changing occupational tables of successive censuses. No one else is so well qualified as Dr. Edwards for this task, and his accomplishment presented in the following pages is a fitting culmination of his long identification with the promotion of better occupational statistics for the United States.

STUART A. RICE

## PREFACE

The most nearly dominant single influence in a man's life is probably his occupation. More than anything else, perhaps, a man's occupation determines his course and his contribution in life. And when life's span is ended, quite likely there is no other single set of facts that will tell so well the kind of man he was and the part he played in life as will a detailed and chronological statement of the occupation, or occupations, he pursued. Indeed, there is no other single characteristic that tells so much about a man and his status—social, intellectual, and economic—as does his occupation. A man's occupation not only tells, for each workday, what he does during one-half of his waking hours, but it indicates, with some degree of accuracy, his manner of life during the other half—the kind of associates he will have, the kind of clothes he will wear, the kind of house he will live in, and even, to some extent, the kind of food he will eat. And; usually, it indicates, in some degree, the cultural level of his family.

In similar manner there probably is no single set of closely related facts that tell so much about a nation as do detailed statistics of the occupations of its workers. The occupations of a people influence directly their lives, their customs, their institutions—indeed, their very numbers. In fact, the social and the economic status of a people is largely determined by the social and economic status of its gainful workers. And, were the figures available, the social and industrial history of a people might be traced more accurately through detailed statistics of the occupations of its gainful workers than through records of its wars, its territorial conquests, and its political struggles.

With present-day interest in social problems and in their statistical measurement, it has become quite evident that statistics which show the actual life conditions of 40 percent of the population for one-third of each workday, and which give at least a rough index of their life conditions for the balance of the time—as well as giving a rough index of the life conditions of those dependent upon them—are far too important to be neglected.

In the United States, today, there is a real need and an urgent demand for statistics relating to the occupations of the people. Indeed, such statistics are basic to the efficient functioning of many present-day activities of Federal and State governments. Such data are of central importance in the recruitment and placement functions of both public and private employment services in the present war period, when necessity for rapid readjustments calls for accurate statistics on the skills, both of present workers and of potential workers. Carefully classified occupation statistics are essential, also, to agencies and individuals concerned with vocational guidance and with occupational training. In fact, whether the problem under consideration be one of those which affect mainly the working classes or one of those which affect society as a whole, occupation is usually an important factor in its solution.

Along with the growing recognition that occupation is a leading factor in many present-day social and economic problems has come a greatly increased demand for a comparable series of occupation and industry statistics for the United States, extending over a considerable period and showing not only the occupational and industrial distribution of the Nation's labor force at different points of time but showing, also, the occupational and industrial trends that have obtained.

Among those who have desired to consider the Nation's labor force in its broader aspects, rather than in detail by occupation, there has come a recognition of the significance of statistics presenting a summary grouping of the workers into a few large social-economic groups or strata, such as professional persons, clerical workers, skilled workers, etc. To facilitate their analysis of the labor force on this broader plane, they have experienced the need for summary statistics, extending over several decades and showing trends in the social-economic stratification of the labor force.

Because of differences in the scope of the several decennial censuses of occupations, and because of differences in the enumeration, in the processing of the returns, and in the presentation of the resulting statistics, the occupation statistics for the different censuses frequently are not directly comparable. It is appropriate that the Bureau of the Census undertake to put the occupation statistics resulting from its different enumerations into comparable form. The present report represents an effort by the Bureau to fill the gaps and to smooth out the irregularities in its statistics and thus to facilitate the study of occupational and industrial trends over the 70-year period from 1870 to 1940—a period during which the United States changed from a predominantly agricultural nation to a highly industrialized urban nation—a period, also, during which the Nation's population more than trebled and its labor force more than quadrupled.

Part II of the present report was substantially completed before the beginning of the 1940-42 census period. It applies, therefore, to the period 1870 to 1930 and includes no data from the 1940 census. Because of the marked differences between the Standard Occupational Classification adopted for use at the 1940 census and the classifications followed at the 1930 and earlier censuses, it is impossible to regroup the occupations reported at the 1930 and earlier censuses according to the 1940 census classification. For the same reason, numerous estimates would be involved in regrouping the 1940 census occupations according to the 1930 classification, which is the classification followed in the 1870 to 1930 series of statistics presented in Part II of this report. Since the preparation of such estimates would have further delayed the release of the valuable historical data presented in Part II, it was deemed advisable to present the 1930-40 comparisons separately. This is done in Part I.

A. M. E.