

A CENTURY OF POPULATION GROWTH.

FROM THE FIRST TO THE TWELFTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1790-1900.

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INTRODUCTION.

The results of a modern census have been accurately defined as a national account of stock. Early censuses were merely counts of inhabitants; additional facts relating to population were next secured; and the most recent step in census taking, especially in the United States, has been to include practically all lines of human activity. The modern census is thus the result of evolution.

In this evolution, however, civilized nations have not advanced equally. A decided and rather significant difference of opinion exists as to the practical value of census taking. Some nations attach great importance to statistics, and take accurate and detailed censuses at frequent and regular intervals; others manifest little interest, and make their enumerations at irregular intervals, with the result that such statistics as are obtained are neither comparable nor satisfactory.

The attitude of a nation toward a census is largely the result of education. A considerable element in every community fails to perceive the influence exerted by statistics upon legislation, and even morals; and it is only when a sufficient number of the citizens of a country have become educated to the value of accurate statistical information, either by their own national requirements or by observation of valuable results which have followed census taking in other countries, that periodic enumerations of population are instituted. It does not always happen, however, that nations composed of highly educated, methodical, and businesslike communities reach the greatest perfection in census taking, and obtain the most accurate and illuminating statistics.

The marked differences in the attitude of communities toward the systematic collection of statistics are well illustrated by the various states of the United States. Some maintain statistical bureaus and take a state census for the quinquennial year in each decade, while others depend entirely upon the Federal census for such statistical information as they require. Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York have taken state censuses for many years; certain neighboring states, as Connecticut and Pennsylvania, have

never done so. At the present time the state censuses of Massachusetts and Rhode Island are elaborate, scientific, and accurate, and in some of their details surpass the Federal census. Although eleven other states¹ make an intercensal enumeration, with varying degrees of accuracy and detail, no other state approaches these two in the amount and variety of information secured.

In view of the great importance to which statistical science has attained in nearly all civilized nations at the present time, it is interesting to note that the practice of making periodic censuses, or enumerations, of population is of comparatively recent origin. Except in Sweden (where a count of inhabitants has been made at stated intervals since the middle of the eighteenth century), accurate and periodic enumerations of population were practically unknown, alike upon the continent of Europe and in the British Isles, until the nineteenth century.²

In both France and Great Britain, the first census was taken in 1801. It is probable, in view of the supremacy of Napoleon at that time, that in France the motive for making an enumeration was principally to determine the military resources of the French nation. In Great Britain, however, while the census was in some degree the result of a demand for definite information of value to the military authorities, it was also the result of the great interest in the study of statistics aroused by the results of important economic researches described in publications that had appeared toward the

¹ Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

² "We know also that the three Scandinavian countries have been making enumerations ever since those of 1750 and 1769; that the United States of America, which began the series of their decennial enumerations in 1790, also preceded France in this respect; and that England commenced these enumerations the same year as France. Other nations have followed the example little by little, and the subject-matter has increased. There are only a very small number of civilized countries which do not undertake at a fixed time, or which have not undertaken at least once, the enumeration of their population; and almost all, in Europe at least, publish the statements of the movement of their population. We recall that the first census having a really scientific character is that of Belgium in 1846, and that it is due in large measure to Quetelet and Heuschling. The first census of the same kind taken in Germany is that of 1871." *Levasseur, La Population Française, vol. 1, page 292.*

close of the eighteenth century. The most important of these were Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Sources of the Wealth of Nations*, which appeared in 1776, and Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, which appeared in 1798. These two books raised new problems as to the increase or decrease in wealth and in population, which could not be intelligently discussed without the aid of accurate statistics.

The enumerations of 1801 in France and Great Britain undoubtedly formed an object lesson to the other nations of Europe and served to turn their attention to the importance of obtaining precise statistical information. There were also other factors at work. The beginning of the nineteenth century was marked by extraordinary military activity; changes in the boundaries of countries resulted, and consequently great changes in national population—on the one hand by loss through war, and on the other by gain through the acquisition of new territory. Statesmen began to appreciate the value of having definite information concerning military strength and national resources. Moreover, the marked increase in population and the industrial awakening which were concurrent early in the century made the estimates with which previous generations had been content increasingly unreliable. As all these factors operated over a large area, it is not surprising that several countries entered upon an era of census taking at nearly the same period.

The dates at which various European countries made the first complete enumeration of their inhabitants were as follows:

Sweden.....	1749
Spain.....	1798
France.....	1801
Great Britain.....	1801
Prussia.....	1810
Norway.....	1815
Saxony.....	1815
Baden.....	1816
Austria.....	1818
Bavaria.....	1818
Greece.....	1836
Switzerland.....	1860
Italy.....	1861
Russia.....	1897

The first census of the entire United States was taken in 1790, or nearly ten years before the first census in any European country, except Sweden. Because of this fact the United States has received much credit. The French statistician, Moreau de Jonnés, declared that the United States presents a phenomenon without a parallel in history—"that of a people who instituted the statistics of their country on the very day when they founded their government, and who regulated by the same instrument the census of inhabitants, their civil and political rights, and the destinies of the nation."

Against such a position, it has frequently been claimed that the United States did not undertake a

systematic periodic enumeration with a deliberate statistical purpose; that, on the contrary, the statistical results of Federal census taking were merely a by-product of an enumeration of population provided for in the Constitution for purposes of apportionment, as a prerequisite to representative government. From this, it is claimed, resulted the statistics of population which accidentally placed the United States in the position of having led the way in the most important economic evolution of the age—periodic census taking.

While there is an element of truth in this contention, it is significant that several of the states composing the young Republic had formed the habit of making frequent enumerations of their inhabitants during their existence as colonies. It is probable that none of these enumerations was made for purposes of apportionment. At many of them the information secured was as full as at the first Federal census, and at several the statistics obtained were far more complete and significant. It was reasonable to expect, therefore, that consideration of the earlier censuses taken in America should lead the representatives of the states in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to incorporate in the organic law of the nation a requirement for a periodic census. It was equally consistent that the members of the First Congress, in providing for the first Federal enumeration, influenced by the earlier practice of census taking, should require more than the mere count of inhabitants specified by the Constitution.

James Madison, who was instrumental in securing the expansion of census inquiry under the first act from a mere count of inhabitants to a schedule covering name of head of family, two age groups of white males, and freedom or servitude of the colored population, was an influential member of the Constitutional Convention, and the author of the Madison papers, which are accepted as the most authoritative record of the deliberations of that convention. It is reasonable to suppose that the enlightened and statesmanlike position assumed by Mr. Madison in the congressional debates upon the First Census act reflected convictions held and possibly expressed by him during the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention.

The influence of pre-Constitutional censuses upon the subsequent statistical history of the United States is a subject that hitherto has received but little consideration. So far as the present Census authorities are aware, the subject has never been discussed in the report of any census except that of 1850. In view of their peculiar historical significance, and their evident influence and bearing upon the beginnings of census taking in the United States, it is believed that a discussion of pre-Constitutional enumerations, with reproductions of all the authentic returns of such enumerations, forms a fitting introduction to a discussion of the history and statistics of the first Federal census, and the growth of national population.