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David A. Swanson

# The Washington State Census Board and Its Demographic Legacy

 Springer

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# Foreword

For the world’s leading democracy, the USA and all of us (Americans) are, in general, very poorly informed about our government and how it works. Some common misconceptions include:

- Problems are simple. (I believe, on the contrary, that any proposed solution to a problem that begins with “all ya gotta do is...” is wrong.)
- Bureaucrats are stupid and lazy. Who needs ‘em?
- Government would be better if it stuck to just a few big things and left the rest to us.
- Get rid of all the non-essentials, which included everything the government does that you never heard of. (Most of which are not only important, but essential.)
- Government cannot do anything right.

Well I could go on—but so could you. We have all said these things in times of exasperation—usually when our real target is our politicians, not the government per se.

This book—which is not designed to deal with any of these things—in fact deals with them all—indirectly, but effectively. Its topic is very simple: How do we keep track of how many of us are there. How do we count Americans, or Californians, or Seattleites or the size of next year’s freshman class that our high school has to be ready for. If you have never thought about this, do not beat yourself up. You have other problems: the mortgage, the kids, your aging parents, the boss, and your life. But fortunately, there are people who do take care of that for you ... for us. They are the bureaucrats that we often casually disdain. No, not loafers who spend their time leaning on the “shovels” of their work. They are experts in a narrow, specialized field. They hold doctorates, have wide experience in their field, and provide every level of government with population information that is essential if we are to make good decisions on a myriad of important areas. Who knew?

In this short book, we can trace how population figures were gathered, compared, and projected at a time when the hand calculator was the technological cutting edge. We learn how the process was refined and improved as technology

permitted. We see how these “bureaucrats” innovated and developed whole new methods of obtaining and, more importantly, utilizing the population information.

This is a book that everybody can learn from. If you are a layman like me, do not try to decipher the complexities. (There are mathematical formulas for which my computer does not even have keys.) They are just a tiny part of the book and are there, so experts can benefit from it as well. And if you are an expert in the math field, you may learn something new about its history, about how your profession got to be what it is, and how information spread and new approaches were adopted.

But, whether layman or expert, think of this. This is a book that you can read cover to cover if you have the interest and the background. However, as I read it, I kept in mind the relief I felt when, in an introduction to the great Spanish novel, *Don Quixote*, the editor gave the reader “permission” to skip pages and sort through the book. He said in effect that it was a great, but long book. It had beautiful passages that sometimes seem endless. So he advised us to read it with a sense of wonder because it is a wonderful book. But do not ruin the wonder by force-feeding it. Likewise, this book is a small wonder. You may not become an expert in working with populations. But perhaps you may learn a lot about the important “little things” that government does—well—for all of us.

Al Swift  
US representative, 1978–1994  
Washington  
2nd Congressional District

# Preface

Demography may not be destiny, but demographic facts, understanding, and models play a very important role in modern societies. Governments, businesses, and most organizations need information to plan for the future. In fact, they need information to be able to do almost anything—allocate resources, provide services, anticipate customer demand, hire staff, maintain inventories, and make investments. Traditionally, managerial and entrepreneurial decisions in most organizations were little more than simple extensions based on last year’s activities, feedback from various constituencies, and intuition. Not too surprisingly, few organizations were able to adapt to changing circumstances. The very word, bureaucracy, conjures up a negative image of low organizational performance.

With the development of the tools of social science, along with improved data collection and modern accounting, public administration and business management have become professional vocations and also fields of academic specialization that train practitioners and inform data-driven decision making. In this fascinating book, David Swanson tells the story of how demographic data and models became an important input into public administration in Washington State in the 1940s and 1950s. The case study is one of the particulars—of how farsighted academic researchers responded to the needs of local governments, but Swanson also tells a larger story of how the field of applied demography was created and evolved.

In the early 1940s, many towns and cities in Washington State were overwhelmed with hundreds of thousands of migrants who came to work in industries that seemed to develop overnight with the mobilization for World War II. The public sector was struggling to keep up with unexpected needs for housing, transportation, schools, and public utilities. The decision that the Washington State government should allocate resources to local governments based on population numbers seems perfectly rational today, but it was a very innovative step at the time. The only problem was that 1940 census data were outdated even before they became available. Data were needed on current populations, including their size, distribution, and composition that incorporated the high levels of recent in-migration. The Washington State Census Board, established in 1943, enlisted

Dr. Calvin Schmid, a demographer and professor of sociology at the University of Washington, to solve the problem. Schmid was more than equal to the challenge. He adapted existing methods of population estimation, developed new techniques, and applied them on a scale that had few precedents. In addition to his technical expertise, Schmid was a gifted administrator—he worked well with state agencies and could keep costs to a minimum. For the next two decades, Schmid, while continuing to work full time as a professor at the University of Washington, produced intercensal population estimates for the state of Washington and local governments throughout the state.

In Swanson's well-informed account, there are two important legacies of Calvin Schmid's innovative application of demographic expertise to the Washington State Census Board. The first is the development of applied demography, both as a scientific field and as a key function of public agencies (and also in the corporate sector). The methods of demographic estimation and projection (which Swanson summarizes in a valuable appendix) have continued to progress with contributions by many demographers in universities, in the US Census Bureau, and in many state governments. The Washington State Population Unit in the Office of Financial Management in Olympia is the direct successor of the Washington State Census Board. Over the decades, the Population Unit has been staffed by many distinguished demographers and continued to be an innovative agency with an expansive mandate for providing demographic data, analyses, and projections for Washington State. At present, governmental agencies, marketing firms, and many corporate units routinely use demographic data and models to assess needs and to plan for the future. Calvin Schmid and many of his students were key figures in the development of applied demography.

The second major legacy of Calvin Schmid was the institutionalization of demographic research and training at the University of Washington. In the late 1940s, Schmid parlayed the modest funds received from the Washington State Census Board to launch the Office of Population Research at the University of Washington, one of the earliest academic centers focused on demographic research and training in the USA. Over the course of his career, Schmid supervised 30 Ph.D. students and many more master's students. In addition to their academic training, many of Schmid's students gained practical experience in conducting population censuses and surveys for various municipalities in Washington State. The projects produced timely demographic data requested by their sponsors and were the significant source of financial support for graduate students. Many of Schmid's students went on to have distinguished academic careers, and others became innovative practitioners of applied demography.

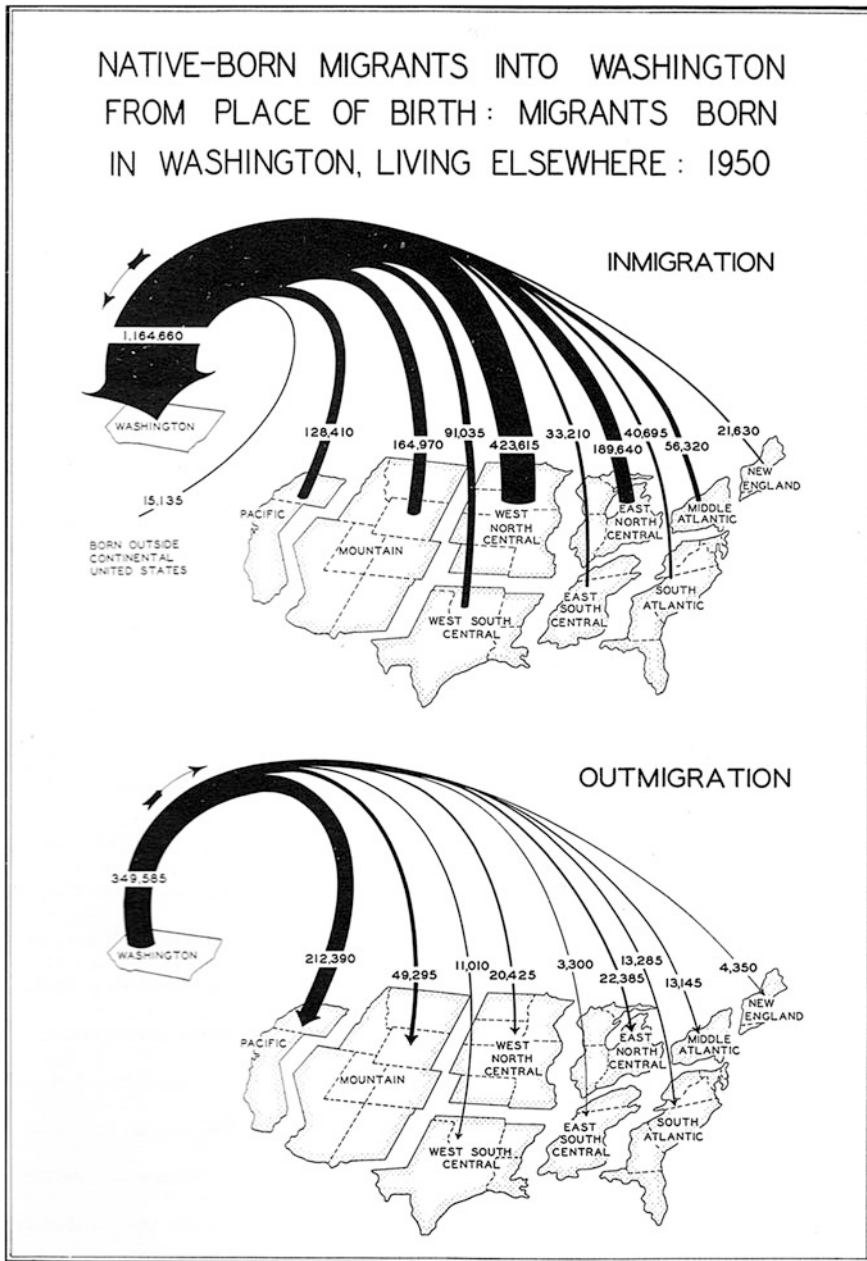
The Office of Population Research at the University of Washington was renamed the Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology (CSDE) in the late 1960s and has continued to be one of the leading university-based centers for demographic research and training. At present, there are over 100 University of Washington faculty members (and researchers from nearby institutions) affiliated with CSDE. Every year, dozens of graduate students take courses on population theory, demographic methods, fertility and mortality, migration, urbanization, and many



other demographic topics. Through competitive grant applications, CSDE receives core funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to support population research and training. CSDE faculty affiliates also apply for competitive research grants for NIH and the National Science Foundation to conduct research on a broad variety of basic and applied topics.

The origins of scientific fields and the founding figures of institutions are generally well known by those who were active at the time, but with the passing of generations, history is often lost. Documents are archived, memories begin to fade and then disappear, and new challenges rivet the minds of successive generations. I am particularly grateful to David Swanson for his well-written and carefully documented history of the Washington State Census Board and of the personal account of Calvin Schmid, the founder of demography at the University of Washington. Their legacy is alive and well in the office of the Population Unit in the Washington State government in Olympia and in CSDE at the University of Washington.

Charles Hirschman  
Boeing International Professor of Sociology  
University of Washington



**Exhibit 1** Flows of migrants into Washington by region of birth for those residing in Washington in 1950 and out of Washington by region of residence in 1950 for those born in Washington. Source Schmid et al. (1955: Fig. 1.8, p. 15)

Exhibit 1 is characteristic of the graphics produced by the Washington State Census Board and its affiliated organization at the University of Washington, the Office of Population Research, both of which were under the direction of Calvin Schmid. In this exhibit, migration to and from the state of Washington by region in 1950 is shown as the width of the “arrows,” with the inflows pointed at Washington from the region of origin and the outflows pointed at the region of destination from Washington. The flows are based on a question in the 1950 census that asked respondents their state of birth and their current state of residence. The fact that the flows into Washington far exceed the flows out of Washington gives an indication of the magnitude of the migration between 1940 and 1950 that profoundly and forever changed Washington. Calvin Schmid was a master at getting pictures to tell meaningful and factually correct stories.

## Reference

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# Abstract

This is the story of the Washington State Census Board and its demographic legacy. Established in 1943 and abolished in 1967, the Board's legacy lives on. Within the state of Washington, the Board's legacy is found today in two organizations: (1) the Population Unit, part of the Forecasting Division of the Governor's Office of Financial Management, and (2) the Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology at the University of Washington. Beyond Washington State, the legacy lives on through many demographers trained under the Board's auspices and the University of Washington.

The book is divided into five chapters and a technical appendix, which contains general descriptions of methods used to estimate and forecast populations. In Chap. 1, an overview is provided, while in Chap. 2, the history of the Board and its activities is found. Chapter 3 starts the story of the Board's legacy when it was abolished in 1967 and its functions moved to a state agency. Chapter 4 expands the legacy beyond the borders of Washington State. Chapter 5 brings us full circle back to the reason why the functions of the Board continue today: the high levels of population growth experienced by Washington since World War II, levels that in 1943 constituted an emergency that never really went away.