A New Estimate of the Hawaiian Population for 1778, the Year of First European Contact

Featured Speaker: Dr. David Swanson

Date: Friday, February 13, 2015
Time: 2:30 – 4:30 pm
Location: Saunders Hall – Room 244

As part of the Sociology Colloquium Series

Description

A high level of uncertainty surrounds the size of the Hawaiian population at the time of first European contact in 1778. Estimates range from less than 300,000 to 800,000. While some estimates have more of an empirical base than others, none of them is done using “backcasting,” a demographic forecasting method run in reverse from known data. Using a commonly used technique for this purpose, the 1910 count of Native Hawaiians by age in Hawai‘i is taken back to 1770 in decennial cycles. Interpolating between the 1780 and 1770 estimates yields an estimated 683,200 Hawaiians in 1778.

It is not surprising that uncertainty would surround the number of Hawaiians, a pre-literate population, at the time of first European contact in the year 1778. No known census of this population at that time exists and without a full count, the only recourse is to estimate the size of this population. Even the estimates based on data and for which methodological descriptions are available, however, represent attempts to reconstruct the Hawaiian population in 1778 using information available at the time of European contact or earlier. These estimates include the use of counts of houses in villages visited or observed by the Europeans, their estimates of average household size, and extrapolation of these estimates to all of Hawai‘i. It appears that post-contact data in the form of 19th and 20th century census data has not been used in a retrospective extrapolation, a “backcast,” to estimate the size of the Hawaiian population at first contact. The post-contact information used in this study is in the form of US Census Bureau counts of the Native Hawaiian population in Hawai‘i by age (and sex) in 1910, 1920, and 1930. The standard forecasting technique employed (in reverse) is known in demographic circles as the Hamilton-Perry method.

David A. Swanson received his PhD in Sociology from University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. He served as member of the U. S. Census Bureau’s Scientific Advisory Committee for six years and chaired the group for two years. He also has served as: Program Organizer for the 2007 and 2010 Applied Demography Conferences; Publications Officer (2001-2) for the Government Statistics Section, American Statistical Association; Chair of the Applied Demography Committee of the Population Association of America (2000-1); Secretary-Treasurer of the Southern Demographic Association (1995-7 and 2003-7); and the editor of Population Research and Policy Review (2004-7). Currently, he is a member of the Development Committee of the Population Association of America and serves as a peer reviewer for the Republic of Georgia’s National Science Agency, the Rustaveli Foundation. He is now a Professor of Sociology at the University of California-Riverside.

Following the event is a reception hosted by the Graduate Student Sociological Association
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