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A STATISTICAL PROFILE OF  
SAMOANS IN THE UNITED STATES

Part I: Demography

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## INTRODUCTION

The selected category "Samoan" appeared for the first time as a separate category on a United States census in 1980. Before 1980, estimates of the number of Samoans in the United States were little more than approximations based on a limited supply of poor quality migration statistics, some community-level studies, and the assessments of community leaders. The 1980 census was therefore the first actual count of Samoans using a specified category, and the first to describe the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of this immigrant group.

The numbers of Samoans, both total counts and for selected characteristics, in this paper have been derived from the "race" question on the U.S. Census. The race question was asked of all persons in the United States. The numbers for any particular ethnic or racial category will depend on the definition employed. The concept of race used by the Census Bureau is based on self-identification, that is, the data represent self-classification by people according to the race with which they identify. Race does not denote any clear-cut scientific definition of biological stock. Since no attempt is made to distinguish number of generations or degree of affiliation, other definitions of Samoan ethnicity may result in different numbers.

Although the 1980 census is the principal source of data on Samoans, information can also be taken from ethnographic and social surveys conducted in the recent past. This paper is intended to provide a broad overview of the demographic and economic situation of Samoans in the United States

rather than a detailed analysis of any one issue or community. For this reason, not all of the community-level data contained in the references have been used. Although the 1980 United States census reported Samoans in every state, a state-by-state comparison is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, we have focussed particularly on the Samoan populations of Hawaii, California and Washington, with the remainder of the population treated as one group - despite the geographical dispersion. In some subject areas the population of American Samoa in 1980 is also described to provide comparative perspective.

#### TOTAL POPULATION

The 1980 census counted 41,948 Samoans living in the United States on April 1, 1980 (Table 1). Intercensal comparative methods cannot be used to determine the relative accuracy of this figure because Samoans were not treated as a separate category in 1970. The growth of the Samoan population since the 1980 census also cannot be determined since there are no accurate immigration statistics. Assuming that immigration continued at the same estimated rate of 1900 per year as in the 1976-79 period and that natural increase averaged 3.0 percent per year, a 1983 population of about 50,000 would be possible. Until more precise immigration figures become available, this 1983 population estimate should be used cautiously.

## POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

Although the 1980 census found Samoans in every state, about 90 percent were in the Western region of the country. The most important concentrations were in California (48 percent), Hawaii (33), and Washington (4). These three states accounted for 86 percent of the population; no other state contained more than 2 percent of the total (Table 1). The Samoan population of the United States outnumbered the population of American Samoa by almost 10,000, or about 30 percent.

The Samoan population of the United States is highly urbanized. About 96 percent of Samoans lived in urban areas in 1980 and 87 percent lived either in central cities (43 percent) or on the fringe of such cities. Only 4 percent (1,643) lived in rural areas in 1980.

## AGE COMPOSITION

High rates of natural increase among Samoans in Samoa and among immigrants have produced a very young Samoan population in the United States. As table 1 shows, the median age of Samoans was 19.5 in 1980, substantially below the United States median of 30 years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983:23). Of all the selected racial groups reported in the 1980 census, Samoans had the lowest median age and the next youngest group - Eskimos - had a median age almost two years higher (USBC, 1983:50).

The median age of Samoans in Hawaii (17.5 years) was two years below the total Samoan population (19.5) and slightly more than one year

below the median of 18.8 reported for American Samoa. Hawaii's lower median age implies either that fertility was higher there than elsewhere in the United States or that Hawaii attracted younger immigrants from Samoa - or some combination of the two. The median age of Samoans outside of the major concentrations in the West (22.7 years) was substantially higher than that reported for the Samoan population as a whole, California or Washington, pointing to important differences in population dynamics of the various areas.

The median age was about the same for males and females except in Hawaii where the male median was slightly lower than the female (tables 2 and 3). This age differential also appeared in the American Samoa data.

Hawaii's slightly younger population showed a greater concentration in the 0-14 year age group than in the other locations (Table 4). The 0-4 age group was 15.3 percent of the total in Hawaii compared to 13.0 percent in California and 13.8 percent in the total Samoan population. The proportion of the Hawaii population aged 0-4 was not only greater than reported elsewhere in the United States, but was also higher than in American Samoa (14.8 percent). While the difference between the two figures may not be statistically significant, it nevertheless would appear that in this respect at least the structure of the Samoan population in Hawaii is more like that of American Samoa than the Samoan population on the mainland. Census data do not show that Samoans in Hawaii have higher fertility rates than their counterparts in California, elsewhere in the United States, or in American Samoa, although they do tend to have their children at younger ages. It is possible that more American Samoan women with younger children immigrate to Hawaii, an easier and

less expensive trip than to California or Washington. It is also possible that young children from other families accompany families to Hawaii to take advantage of better schools and medical facilities; they obtain the advantages of a more developed economy, while remaining a fairly short plane trip away from home.

Since in broad terms the age structure of the males and female population was identical (tables 5 and 6), if immigration was selective of one age-sex category over others it was not evident in the age structure.

Some variation between regions is apparent in the proportion of the female population in the child-bearing years (15-44). Hawaii had the smallest proportion (46 percent) while the highest was found in the group of states other than California, Hawaii, and Washington (table 6). In this respect Hawaii was more like American Samoa than California or the other states.

There was little regional variation in the proportion of the Samoan population 65 years and over, although Washington had the smallest (2 percent) and American Samoa the largest (3 percent). Hawaii was no different than California or the Samoan population as a whole. The Samoan population is basically a young, migrating population, so that too few families have become established to create an aging population, one with a large proportion of older people.

The 15-64 age group, normally the most active economically, varied from 55 percent in Hawaii to 68 percent of the population outside the major concentrations (Table 4). This variation was also apparent in the "dependency ratio" which shows the number of "dependents" which must be supported by every 100 "workers". This ratio was 83 in Hawaii compared to 71 in California, 69 in Washington and 78 in American Samoa. The

balance of the states taken together had a ratio of 48. By contrast, the dependency ratio for the total United States population in 1980 was 51, indicating that every two workers had to support approximately one dependent. In Hawaii, every two Samoans of working age had to support about 1.7 dependents, a considerably greater burden than for the United States as a whole or for Samoans elsewhere (including American Samoa).

The contrast between the age structure of the Samoan population of the United States and the total United States population is illustrated by Table 7 and Figure 1. A much larger proportion of Samoans was under 20 years of age while a larger proportion of the total United States population was over age 44. The nature of the "dependency burden" in the two populations is therefore quite different: Samoans face a "youth dependency" problem characteristic of many developing countries; the United States has an "aged dependency" problem typical of industrialized countries which have passed through the demographic transition.

In summary, the Samoan population was the youngest of all the selected Asian-Pacific minorities in the United States in 1980 with those in Hawaii tending to be younger than their counterparts elsewhere. The dependency burden faced by working-age Samoans is greater than for most other groups in the United States and is greater for Samoans in Hawaii than elsewhere. So far the burden of dependency is from youth, rather than from the aged.

#### SEX COMPOSITION

The Samoan population of the United States had a sex ratio of 103 in 1980, virtually identical to that of American Samoa (table 8). California had the most even balance between the sexes while Washington and the other states showed considerable male-dominance. Hawaii differed from

the other regions in that its sex ratio of 98 showed a small surplus of females. The relative surplus was particularly noticeable in the 40-54 age group and since this is the same group which had a high sex ratio in California, male out-migration from Hawaii to California seems likely. In broad terms, the working-age Samoan population appears to be female-dominant in Hawaii and male-dominant in California. While the difference between the sex ratios of the 15-64 population in the two states was not large (103 in California compared to 96 in Hawaii), an additional measure of dependency in Hawaii beyond that seen in the age composition is implied.

#### FERTILITY

While information on the fertility of Samoan women has been collected in a number of surveys (Cook, 1983; Lyons, 1980; Harbison and Weishaar, 1981), not all of it has been published and no studies have focussed on mainland Samoans. The 1980 census is therefore the only source of fertility data for the total Samoan population in the United States.

Samoans have high fertility relative to other ethnic groups reported in the 1980 census. Although the number of children ever born to women aged 15-24 was higher among Aleuts and Eskimos, no other racial group had higher fertility than Samoans in the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups (table 9). If the number of children ever born to women aged 35-44 is taken as an indicator of completed fertility, the average Samoan woman would have about 4.3 children at 1980 fertility rates. By contrast, Japanese and Korean women in the United States would have about 2 children. Of the other Asian and Pacific Islander groups, only Guamanians had a completed fertility rate approaching 4. The Hawaiian rate of 3.3 was exactly one child less than the Samoan rate.

There was little difference in the fertility rates of Samoan women in Hawaii and California. Although those aged 15-34 in Hawaii had more children on average than their counterparts in California, the number of children ever born to women aged 35-44 was similar (table 9).

Some variation between the fertility levels of Samoans living in different communities on the island of Oahu has been noted by Harbison and Weishaar (1981). Migrants who settle in the more cohesive, conservative and less urbanized Samoan communities tend to have higher fertility than those who settle in the less integrated, urbanized communities near Honolulu. This difference appears to be partly attributable to migrant pre-selection rather than to the effects of migration itself. Migrants to the more urban communities tend to have higher pre-migration education levels and lower pre-migration fertility than other immigrants. Those who migrate to the less urban communities have generally spent a larger proportion of their reproductive lives under the influence of rural Samoan norms regarding family size and contraceptive practice - both because they migrate later than other women and because they are less exposed to modernizing influences in Hawaii (Harbison and Weishaar, 1981:270-272).

Migrant pre-selection may also account for the higher fertility of Samoan women aged 15-34 in Hawaii compared to those in California. Families and individuals of rural origin and higher fertility may find it easier to migrate to Hawaii which has more of the socio-cultural character of Samoa than can be found in California. Furthermore, since in 1980 a larger proportion of Hawaii's Samoan population was Samoa-born than is the case in California (61.5 percent compared to 48.6 percent), it is likely that Samoan women in Hawaii had been less exposed to those aspects of urban

life which are usually associated with fertility decline than their counterparts in California.

Analysis of 1980 census data using the "own children" method (Levin and Retherford, 1983), indicates that the fertility rate of Samoan women in the United States has been declining since the mid-1960s. The total fertility rate (TFR) decreased from 5.6 children in the 1965-69 period to 4.1 in 1974-78, a 27 percent reduction during the period (table 10). Fertility decline was particularly apparent among women aged 30 years and older although only a small decrease had occurred in the 15-29 age group.

Although information is lacking on the contraceptive practices of Samoan women throughout the United States, survey data from Hawaii indicate that two-thirds of Samoan women have used contraceptives at some stage of their reproductive lives (Harbison and Weishaar, 1981:270). Baker (1976:14), using the same data set, reported that only 20 percent of women aged 18 and over used contraceptives, a figure presumably referring to the proportion currently practising contraception whereas the former figure refers to the proportion which had ever used contraception. There is some evidence to indicate that contraceptive use by Samoan women in Hawaii is greater in the more urbanized communities than in the more conservative rural ones (Harbison and Weishaar, 1981:270).

The ideal family size for Samoan women in Hawaii in 1975 ranged from an average of 4.4 for women aged 25-30 to 9.3 for women 50 years and older (Baker 1976:15). It is extremely unlikely that this difference was simply a function of age. Rather, younger women accepted family-

size norms closer to (but still higher than) the urban ideal, whereas older Samoan women beyond their child-bearing years probably recall the reproductive values of their rural past.

Whether we use the TFR calculated from vital statistics (table 11) or the number of children ever born to women nearing completed fertility (table 9), Samoan women in Hawaii around 1980 were having an average of just over four children. Although the TFR is not a direct reflection of ideal family size, the broad implication is that Samoan women in Hawaii were on average having about the number of children they desired.

As table 11 shows, the overall fertility of Samoans in the United States in the late 1970s was lower than in American Samoa (TFRs of 4.1 and 4.7, respectively), but not by a very large margin. Below the age of 25, Samoans in the United States had higher fertility rates than their age-mates in American Samoa, but above the age of 30 the reverse was true.

In summary, the fertility of Samoans in the United States is high by United States standards. Samoan women were having just over four children on average in the late 1970s which is approximately double the number necessary for replacement. The crude birth rate in 1980 of 35.1 per 1,000 and the crude death rate of 5.2 per 1,000, made about 3.0 percent natural increase. At this rate of increase, the Samoan population would double in 23 years from natural increase alone - even if immigration ceased. It is more likely, however, that fertility will continue to fall during the 1980s. If the TFR declines at the same rate as it did during the 1970s, Samoan women would be having one less child on average by 1990 (TFR of 3.0); but at this rate of decline Samoan fertility would not reach the level presently experienced by some Asian