

# EDITORS' PREFACE

*Historical Statistics of the United States* has long been the standard source for quantitative indicators of American history. It has not been revised, however, since the Bicentennial Edition, which was published in 1975 and provided data through 1970. The period since then has witnessed an explosion of quantitative scholarship and the general expansion of the government's statistical record keeping. By one estimate, more than three fourths of the data output of the U.S. government and more than 80 percent of the historical data series generated by scholars have been produced since 1970. No subject area and few data series have remained untouched by this phenomenal growth of the American quantitative record.

The revised, updated, and expanded Millennial Edition contains considerably more information than its immediate predecessor: five volumes rather than two, more than twice as many pages of data and documentation, and a tripling of the number of data series – 37,339 in the new edition. This expansion occurred along several dimensions. Most series from the previous edition were extended by roughly thirty years, and the coverage of most topics was enhanced. More than a dozen new topics were added: American Indians, slavery, outlying areas, poverty, nonprofit organizations, and the Confederate States of America, to list a few examples. Finally, the chapters in the new edition are preceded by essays that introduce the quantitative history of their subject, provide a guide to the sources, and offer expert advice on the reliability of the data and the limits that might be placed on their interpretation.

Unlike the previous three editions of *Historical Statistics of the United States*, the Millennial Edition was not produced by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.\* Representatives of three academic organizations (the Economic History Association, the Cliometrics Society, and the Social Science History Association) met with Census Bureau officials in November 1993 to urge the Bureau to compile and issue a fourth edition of *Historical Statistics of the United States*. Despite agreement that a new edition was both long overdue and vitally important, it became clear that such a project could

not be a priority for the Bureau in the foreseeable future. Instead, more than eighty scholars contributed their efforts and expertise to assemble and document the data, to write the introductory essays, and to raise funds as needed to support their work. As a consequence, we have no single sponsor, but rather more than seventy separate funding sources, public as well as private. The donation of time, energy, and funding resources by so many testifies to the status of the project as a landmark of collaborative scholarship.

Although the Census Bureau indicated clearly that it was not going to publish another edition, it authorized us to treat this edition as an approved successor to the previous editions. At the same time, it gave us encouragement, advice, and permission to draw freely from previous editions, a privilege of which we have taken full advantage. For all of these courtesies, we are extremely grateful.

This work is also available in electronic form from Cambridge University Press. The data are readily available for charting, or statistical analysis, or regrouping across tables, which should greatly facilitate the efforts of scholars, journalists, students, and other researchers.

Work on this project exposed many lacunas in the statistical record and revealed opportunities to make existing data series more reliable by reworking information in the original sources. Although we asked our contributors to confine their efforts to compiling and verifying previously published data, many could not resist the temptation and submitted newly developed historical data series to these volumes. We hope that this new edition will encourage a continued expansion of quantitative history: research deploying data from the Millennial Edition to revise historical interpretations; efforts to improve and perhaps render obsolete the statistics presented here; and ultimately the need for a revision of *Historical Statistics of the United States* in far less time than has elapsed since the publication of the Bicentennial Edition.

SUSAN B. CARTER  
SCOTT SIGMUND GARTNER  
MICHAEL R. HAINES  
ALAN L. OLMSTEAD  
RICHARD SUTCH  
GAVIN WRIGHT

---

\* For a discussion of the origin and early history of *Historical Statistics of the United States* at the Census Bureau, see Appendix 3.