

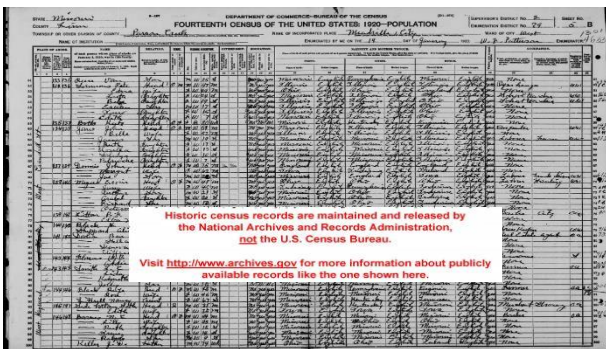
Irene Barnes Taeuber

U.S. Census Consultant, Author, and Demographic Pioneer

The U.S. Census Bureau has always been ahead of the curve when it comes to employing women. Ever since 1880, when it started using professional enumerators rather than U.S. marshals, the Census Office has employed women in that role. With the advent of the Hollerith tabulating machine in 1890, women moved into the role of keypunchers. By 1909, 10 years before the 19th Amendment granted national women's suffrage, over 50 percent of the Census Bureau's 624 permanent employees were women. As women proved themselves as capable as the men, and with the increasing number of women in the workforce, it became harder for the Census Bureau to justify assigning all supervisory positions to men. By 1920, the Census Bureau would once again push forward appointing the first five female supervisors, as well as the first three female expert chiefs of divisions. Many of these pioneering women who worked on the census in these early years also broke through in other fields, such as law, medicine, education, activism, journalism, and the arts.



The Dispatch (Moline, Illinois) November 1, 1955



Irene's 1920 census, showing her living with her father, mother, older sister, younger brother, and grandfather in Meadville, Missouri.

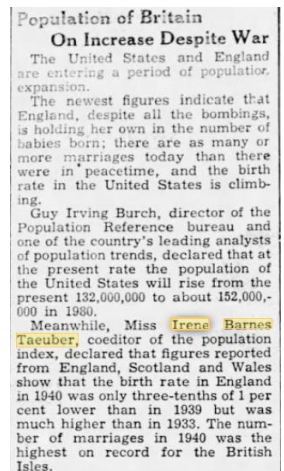
Irene Barnes was born on Christmas Day in 1906, in Meadville, Missouri. Irene's father, N.C. Barnes, worked as a barber, while her mother, Lilly, took care of Irene, her older sister, Ruth, and her younger brother, Ralph. Working hard to pursue higher education, Irene earned her BA at the University of Missouri (1927), her master's degree in Anthropology at Northwestern University (1928), and a PhD in Sociology at the University of Minnesota in 1931. It was here that she met and married fellow graduate student Conrad Taeuber in 1929. After graduation, Irene and Conrad moved to Massachusetts and taught at Mt. Holyoke for three years. The Taeubers

then moved to Washington, D.C. in 1934, after Conrad accepted a job at the Federal Emergency Relief Agency, thus beginning his 39-year career as a civil servant. Conrad eventually became the Associate Director for Demographic Fields at the U.S. Census Bureau from 1968 to 1973.

Paralleling her husband's rise in the emerging field of demography, Irene started work as contributing author for the journal *Population Literature* of the Population Association of America in 1935. A year later, she joined the research staff of Princeton University's Office of Population Research, where she started as a part-time research associate and one of the editors of the *Population Index*, the successor journal to the *Population Literature*. Irene served as an editor of the *Population Index* for 17 years and received a promotion to senior research demographer in 1961.

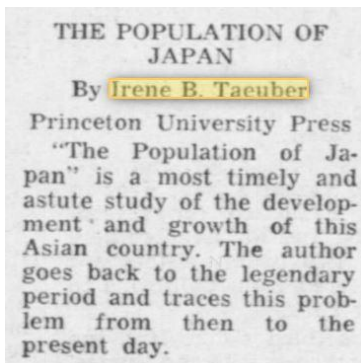
Given her expertise, Irene also worked as a researcher for various academic and government agencies, including the U.S. Census Bureau, throughout her career. Specifically, Irene directed the Census Library Project from 1941-1944. Designed as a joint venture between the Library of

Congress and the Census Bureau, Irene and her colleagues sought to create “a single depository library of all population census, and statistical publications...” for students, academics, and policymakers interested in learning more about populations of the Americas. Seeking to address the U.S. government’s immediate need for detailed demographic and statistical information, Irene supervised the compilation of materials that became the *General Censuses and Vital Statistics in the Americas*. With the publication of the *General Censuses and Vital Statistics* in 1943 and other special reports, U.S. government officials and military leaders gleaned insights for fighting a world war and planning an international reconstruction effort.



Mendocino Coast Beacon (Mendocino, California) May 2, 1942.

After World War II, Irene continued working as a research demographer for the Office of Population Research, as a government consultant, and noted author. Throughout her career, Irene authored or co-authored a dozen influential books and some 250 articles and chapters. Among these publications, Irene and Conrad co-wrote two monographs for the U.S. Census Bureau, entitled *The Changing Population of the United States* (1958) and *People of the United States in the Twentieth Century* (1972). These monographs analyzed the results of the 1950 and 1960 decennial censuses, respectively, and were well-received by Census Bureau employees and external academics.



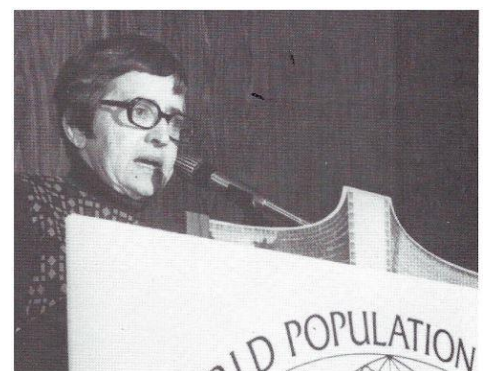
Honolulu Star-Bulletin (Honolulu, Hawaii) July 4, 1959.

Despite earning high praise for her Census Bureau publications, Irene’s most famous publication was a book entitled, *The Population of Japan* (1958). In this 462-page manuscript, Irene provided a detailed description of Japan’s evolving society post-World War II using censuses, vital statistics, and other demographic evidence to bolster her observations. Irene’s manuscript was so well-received in Japan that the Mainichi Press published a Japanese version ten years after it was published in the United States.

In addition to her impressive bibliography, Irene also held membership in several professional associations the American Association for the

Advancement of Science, the American Sociological Association, including the American Statistical Association, and the American Academy of Arts and Science. Furthermore, she served as first woman President of the Population Association of America from 1953 to 1954, as Secretary of the American Sociological Society in 1945, and as the Vice President of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population from 1961 to 1965. Irene received the University of Missouri’s Award of Distinction in 1964 and the Centennial Honors Award in 1967, the University of Minnesota’s Regents Award for Distinguished Achievement in 1967, and the District of Columbia Sociological Society Stuart A. Rice Merit Award in 1972. In 1977, the Population Association of American established the biennial Irene B. Taeuber Award for innovative or important population research.

Ultimately, Irene left a significant imprint on the field of demography and each university or federal agency she worked at different points during her 42-year-career. In 1973, Irene retired from her position as senior demographer at the Office of Population Research. However, despite her retirement, Irene remained engaged in her field as she worked on a book about China that would mirror the scope of *The Population of Japan*. Unfortunately, Irene passed away on February 24, 1974, at the age of 67, before completing the book. Today, she is survived by two sons, Richard and Karl (both also demographers), five grandchildren, and several great-grandchildren. The Census Bureau is proud of Irene’s pioneering work in demography and her career as a selfless civil servant.



Retrieved from *Demographic Destinies: Interviews with Presidents of the Population Association of America*.