

Preface

The elderly population of the United States grew from 12.5 million in 1950 to nearly 30 million in 1987, with prospects for continuing rapid growth to the fourth decade of the next century. More significantly, the proportion of elderly has grown from 8 percent in 1950 to 12 percent in 1987 and is expected to grow to 22 percent in 2030. Demographic changes of this kind will be accompanied by many social and economic changes and political problems, which will require new policy formulations. This volume brings together a wide body of demographic facts regarding aging and the elderly population necessary to identify the policy options. It describes and analyzes the residential and migration patterns of the elderly, their length of life and health conditions, living arrangements and family status, educational level, work and retirement characteristics, income and wealth, and finally, their housing conditions, mainly for the period from 1950 to 1985.

In this analysis, a life-course perspective was applied to the demographer's grist. It asked the question: How did a particular demographic characteristic or event evolve as cohorts aged from youth or midlife to old age? The life-course perspective has tremendous implications for public policy since the character of life in the older years is strongly influenced, if not often closely determined, by experiences in earlier years. Particular emphasis is placed on cohort/cross-sectional comparisons to elucidate the difference between the variations over the age scale that the population displays in a particular year and the age variations that it experiences over its lifetime and to identify the emerging characteristics of the elderly more adequately.

The relative numbers of the elderly and various other age segments of the population have important social and economic implications. Accordingly, the numbers of the elderly in relation to the working-age pop-

ulation and in relation to the number of their children receives special attention. The sharp rise in the so-called burden of older persons on society and the family in the next century will be associated with numerous policy issues, particularly those relating to long-term care and Social Security funding.

The attributes of the elderly population have been highlighted by contrasting them with the attributes of the younger population or the total population, from which they often differ notably. Much attention is also given here to the variation in the characteristics of the age groups that make up the elderly population. This variation is considerable since, at the least, a wide span of years is included. Like many others before it, this study emphasizes the diversity of the older population, with the hope that policy formulations will take this diversity into account.

Although this volume is included in the 1980 Census Monograph Series, it makes liberal use of other sources of demographic data in addition to the 1980 decennial census. These include not only the censuses of 1950, 1960, and 1970 but also the Current Population Survey, the National Health Survey, the population estimates and projections of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, vital statistics data and life tables of the National Center for Health Statistics, and other appropriate sources. The recourse to multiple sources made possible a greater currency in the analysis and wider coverage of demographic topics and issues pertaining to the elderly than the 1980 census alone would have afforded.

GENERAL NOTES

This study relates principally to the United States as a whole. It is the geographic area referred to unless another area, such as a geographic subdivision of the United States or a foreign country, is specifically identified.

Much of the data presented in this monograph are sample data, whether from the census or sample surveys. These data and the differences between them are, therefore, subject to sampling error. Confidence intervals corresponding to the sample data and their differences are not given, however. The author has been careful not to refer to differences between the sample data unless such differences would be supported by a complete census.

The following standard symbols are employed in the various tables:

- X Not applicable
- NA Not available, or not computed because the basic data are not available.

- B Base is too small to produce reliable results. Base required is given in each table.
- Value is zero or rounds to zero (0 or 0.0).
The value may be an absolute number or a percentage.