To my husband, John H. Romani
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This book is an introduction to social demography for undergraduate and graduate students. Although some methodological and technical material is included, its main purpose is to make the substantive material understandable.

I first was introduced to demography as an undergraduate math major at the University of Chicago in the 1960s. I was always interested in what made things work, and in that setting, I was trying to understand the massive social and political changes in the United States, at a time of the struggle for civil rights, the emergence of feminism, and the turmoil related to the Vietnam War.

I was concerned with social change, and I had never been impressed by “great men theories” of history. I did not believe that the king sneezed and the world changed. I also did not care very much about the fate of a small, privileged elite. What first attracted me to demography was its populist nature. If there was a change in some demographic indicator, you did not immediately know the causes or consequences of that change, but you could be sure that something had happened that affected the lives of a large part of the population.

Although I remained concerned about the challenges and the problems facing the U.S. population, as I learned about developing countries, their problems seemed even more daunting than those in the United States. In addition, I became increasingly convinced that understanding the historical and cultural setting was key to understanding the meaning of all social change, including demographic change.

These perspectives have informed how I have taught undergraduate and graduate students about demographic and social change for almost 40 years at Yale University, Brown University, and the University of Michigan. I take an historical and comparative approach that places demographic conditions and changes in context and illuminates their importance in the past, in the present, and in years to come.

Many people have provided helpful input to this book. Mary Beth Olstedal, Arland Thornton, Silvia Pedraza, and Elizabeth Mosley of the University of Michigan; Hania Zlotnik, Gerhard Heilig, and Patrick Gerland of the United Nations Population Division; Victoria Velkoff of the U.S. Census Bureau; Wayne Parent of Louisiana State University; Bryan Vincent of House Legislative Services of the Louisiana Legislature; and Yunah Sung, Korean Studies Librarian of the Asia Library at the University of Michigan, answered specific questions. Howard Kimeldorf and Kiyo Tsutsui of the University of Michigan gave helpful comments and reactions. Renee Anspach of the University of Michigan and Arun Rajmohan of Argon ST, a subsidiary of Boeing Company, read extensive sections and provided comments. Michael McCarthy of the University of Michigan, Theresa Anderson of the Urban Institute, Claudette Smith of Wayne State University, Pamela McMullin-Messier of Central Washington University, Josh Packard of the University of Northern Colorado, and Veena Kulkarni of Arkansas State University read the entire manuscript and provided numerous helpful comments. John Romani of the University of Michigan was supportive, helpful, and constructive throughout the entire book production process.

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