

Democracy's Data - The Hidden Stories in the U.S. Census and How to Read Them by Dan Bouk.

This book examines the crucial 1940 census, uncovering what those numbers both condense and cleverly abstract: a universe of meaning and uncertainty of cultural negotiation and political struggle. The author introduces us to the individuals employed as census takers, bringing us with them as they go door-to door to make a detailed yet imperfect record of their neighbors' lives. He takes us into the makeshift halls of the Census Bureau, where hundreds of civil servants labored with pencils, paper, and machines to divide and conquer the nation's data. And he uses a series of data points to paint bigger pictures about the systems that govern us, such as the unchecked influence of white supremacy, the place of queer people within straight systems, and the struggle of ordinary people to be seen by the state as they see themselves.

Although at times I found it providing more detail than I would remember, it opened up my eyes as to how the census questions are formulated and why we see so many mistakes when we are looking at census records for our genealogical research. How the census data is used and controversies over the years. I especially liked the Epilogue chapter where the author talks about the 2020 census which I remember completing and having similar questions that he raises and changes in the censuses since 1940 that now allow for sampling and self-enumeration.