

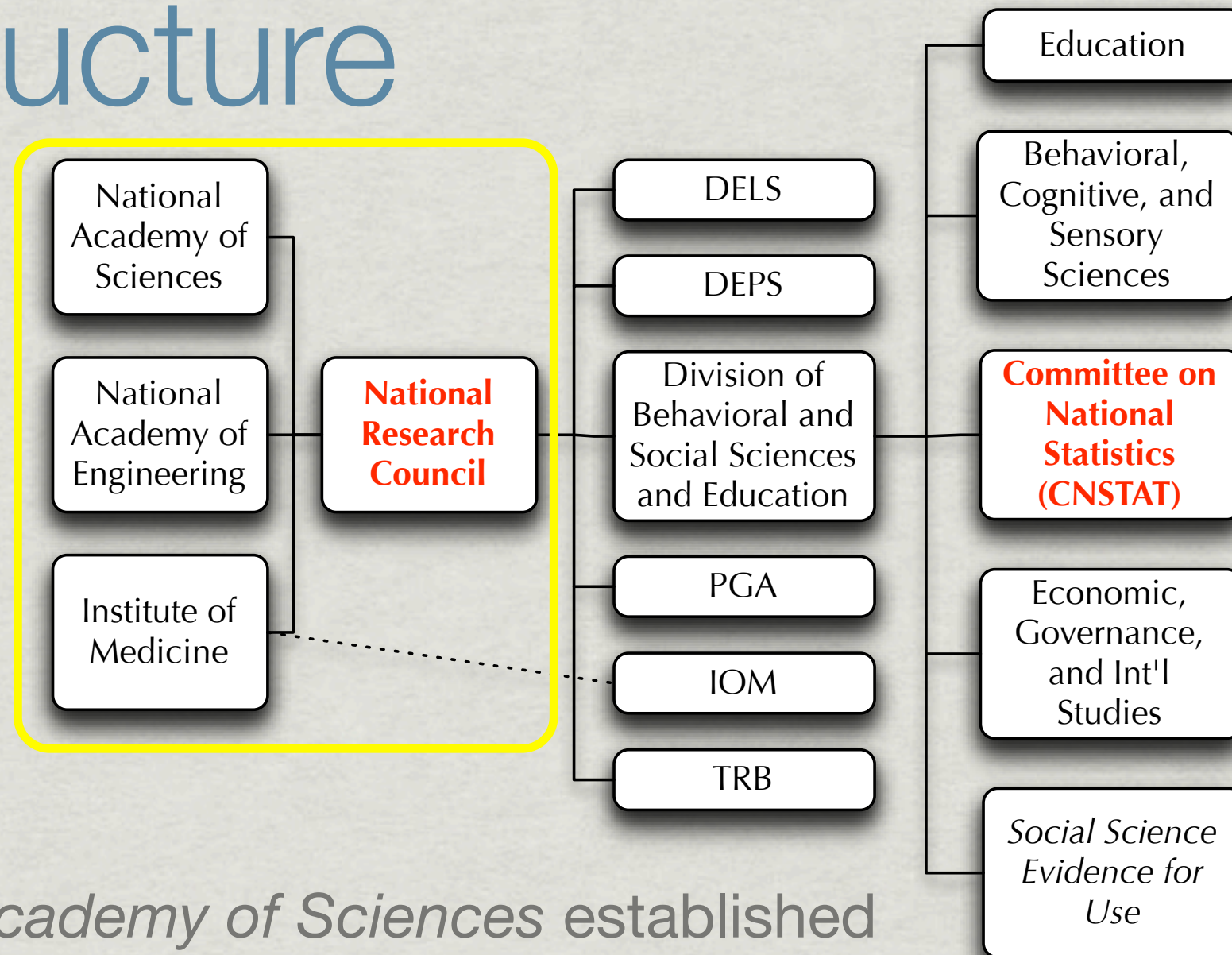
**The U.S. Census and the
Committee on National Statistics:**
30 Years of External, Scientific Evaluation

Daniel Cork

*Committee on National Statistics,
U.S. National Academy of Sciences*

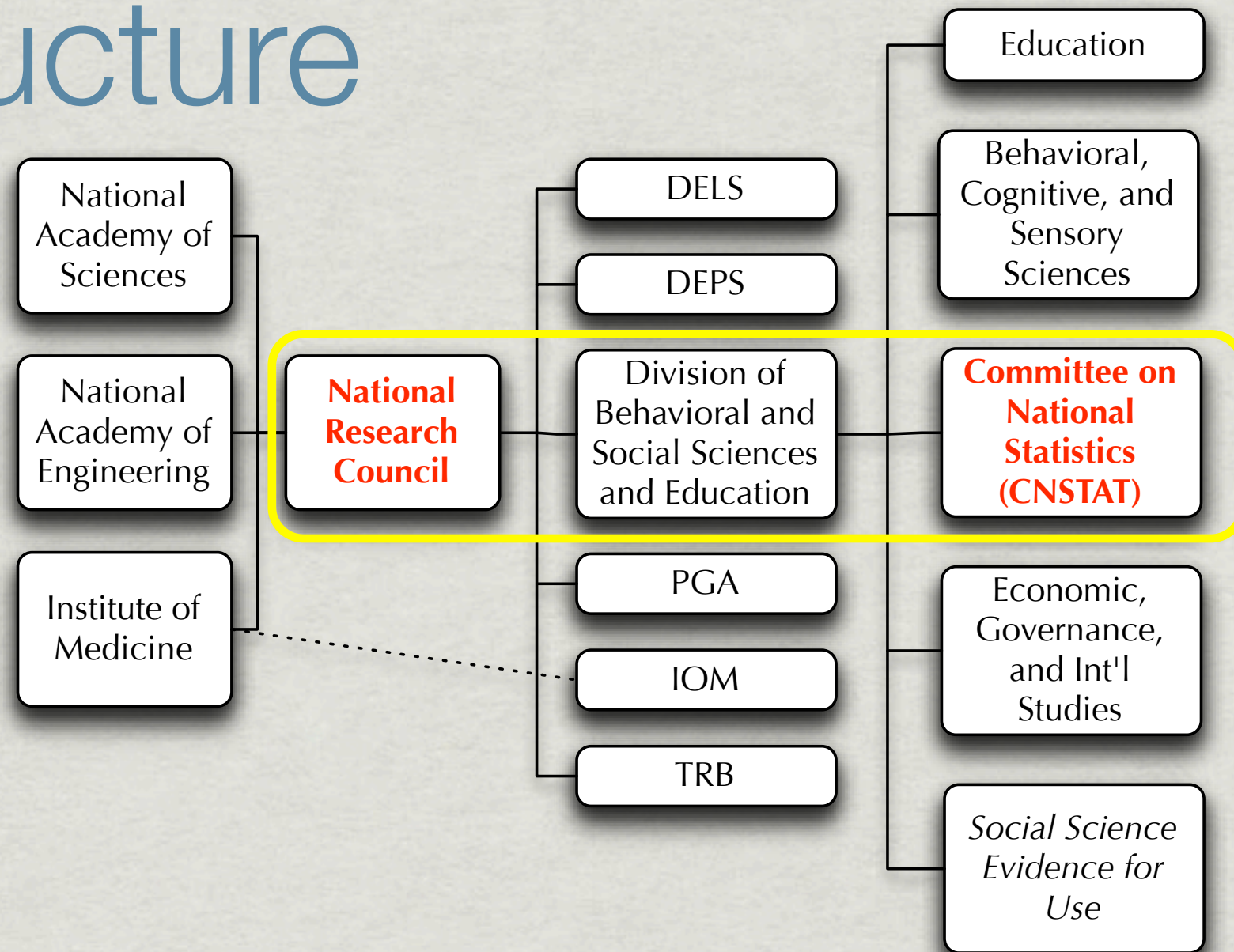
**Joint UNECE/Eurostat Meeting on Population and Housing Censuses:
Census Quality Assurance and Evaluation
Geneva • May 13–15, 2008**

U.S. National Academies Structure



- * *National Academy of Sciences* established by law in 1863
- * Separate honorary societies for *engineering, medicine* added in 1964, 1970
- * *National Research Council* created as operational, staff arm in 1916

U.S. National Academies Structure

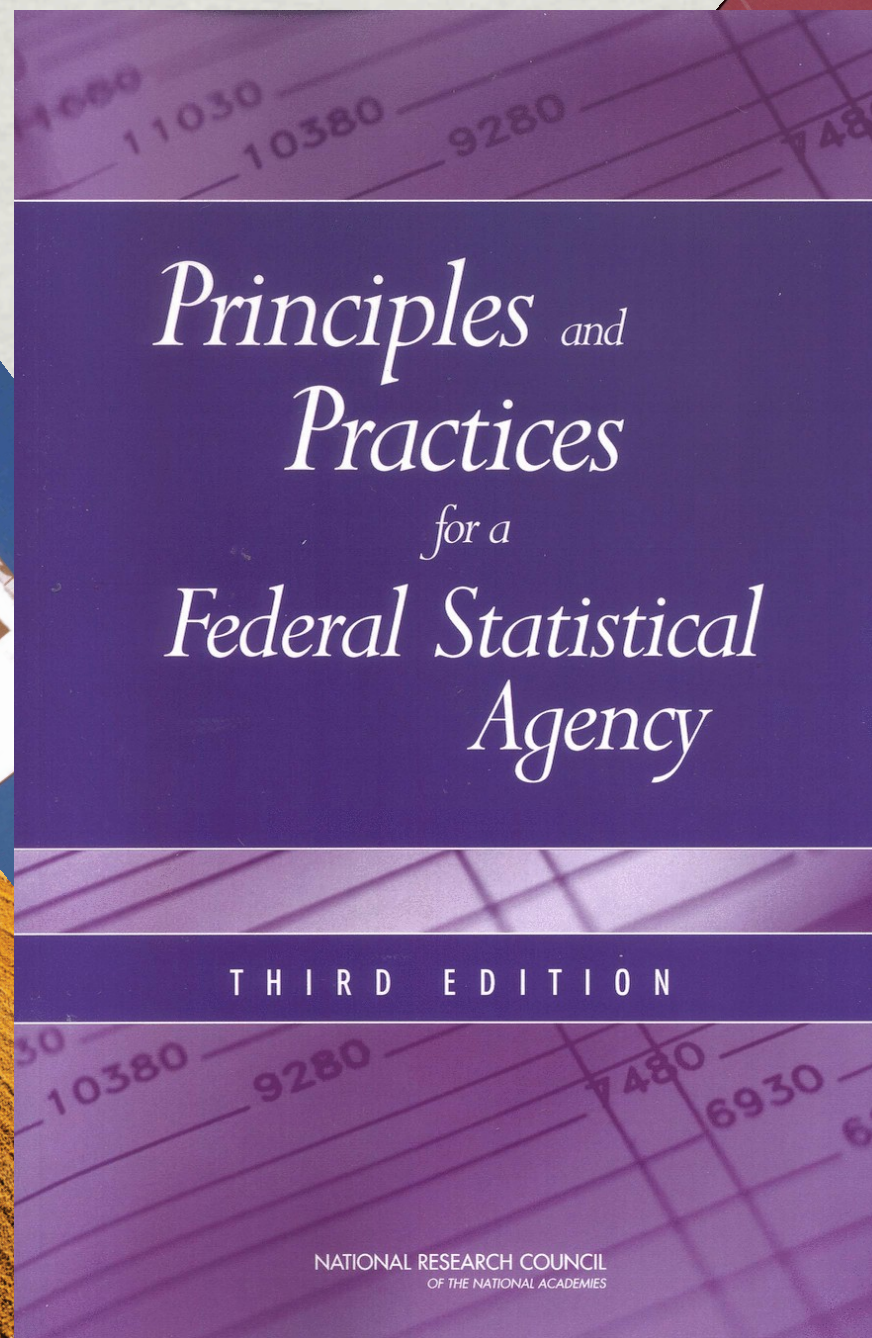
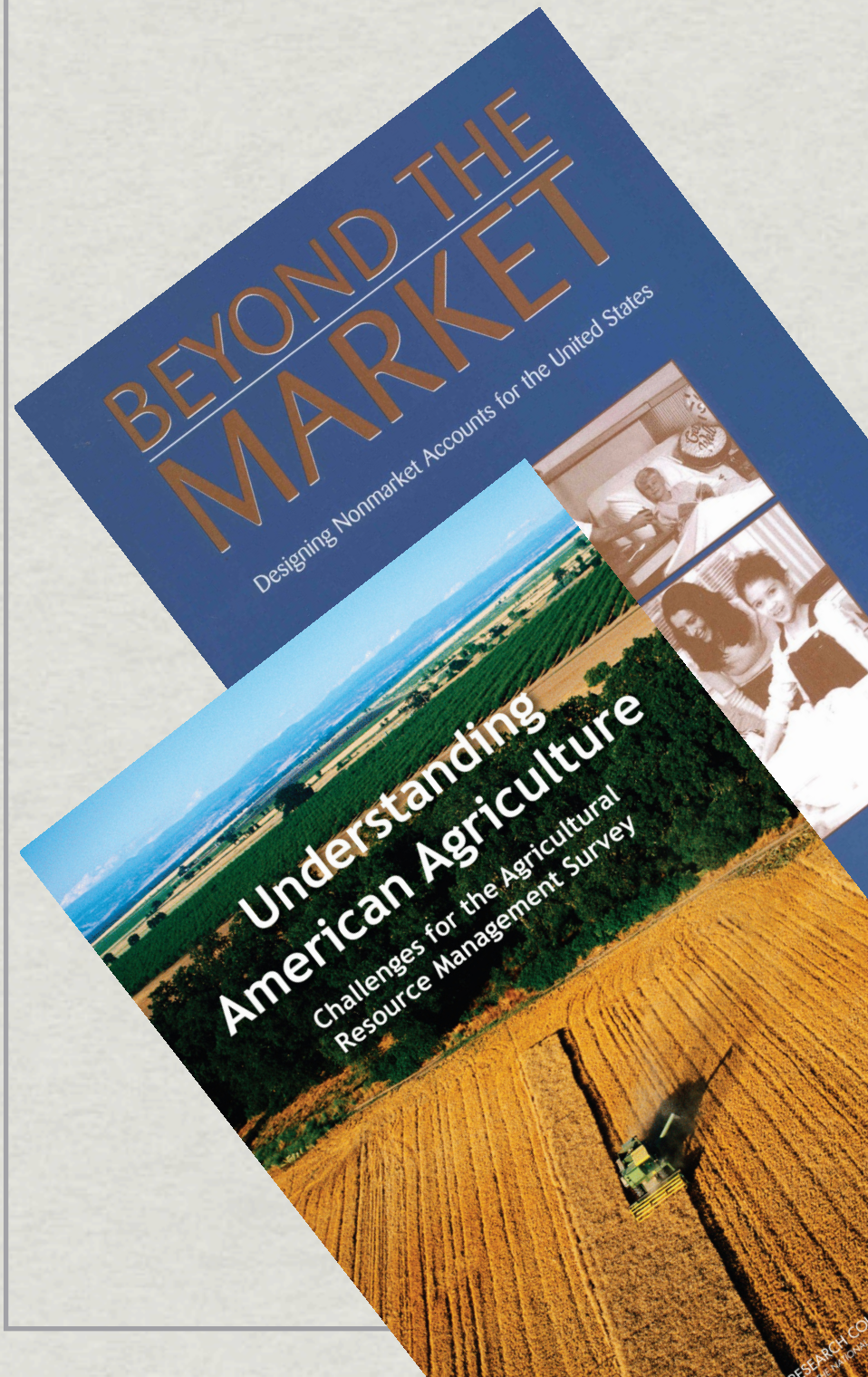


- * NRC divided into major operational units
- * *Committee on National Statistics* is standing board under the social sciences

Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT)

- * Created in 1972 on recommendation of President's Commission on Federal Statistics: “to provide an outside review of federal statistical activities”
- * Unique among other Academies units, foreign science academies for its focus on the U.S. national statistical system
- * In part, plays a “centralizing” role in otherwise decentralized U.S. system

Range of CNSTAT Studies



Key Features of Academies/CNSTAT Work

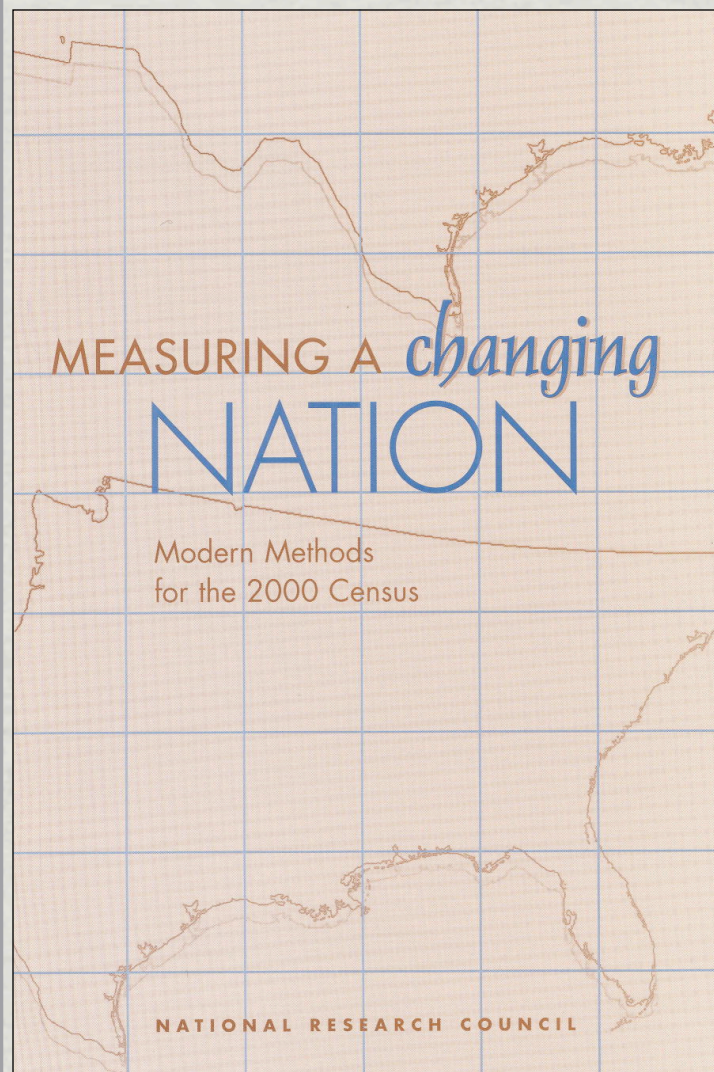
- ✱ *Volunteers:* Members of study panels serve *pro bono* (reimbursed only for expenses)
- ✱ *Independence from Sponsor Control:* Sponsors have no veto on panel membership and have no access to report until final release
- ✱ *Rigorous External Review:* Overseen by Academies' Report Review Committee; reviewers chosen for expertise and balance

CNSTAT and Census

- * Census Bureau has historically been leading sponsor of CNSTAT panels, most of them on aspects of the decennial census
- * Typology of decennial census-related studies:
 - * *Early Appraisals of Next-Census Plans*
 - * *Alternative Census Designs and Methods*
 - * *Evaluation of In-Progress Census Operations*

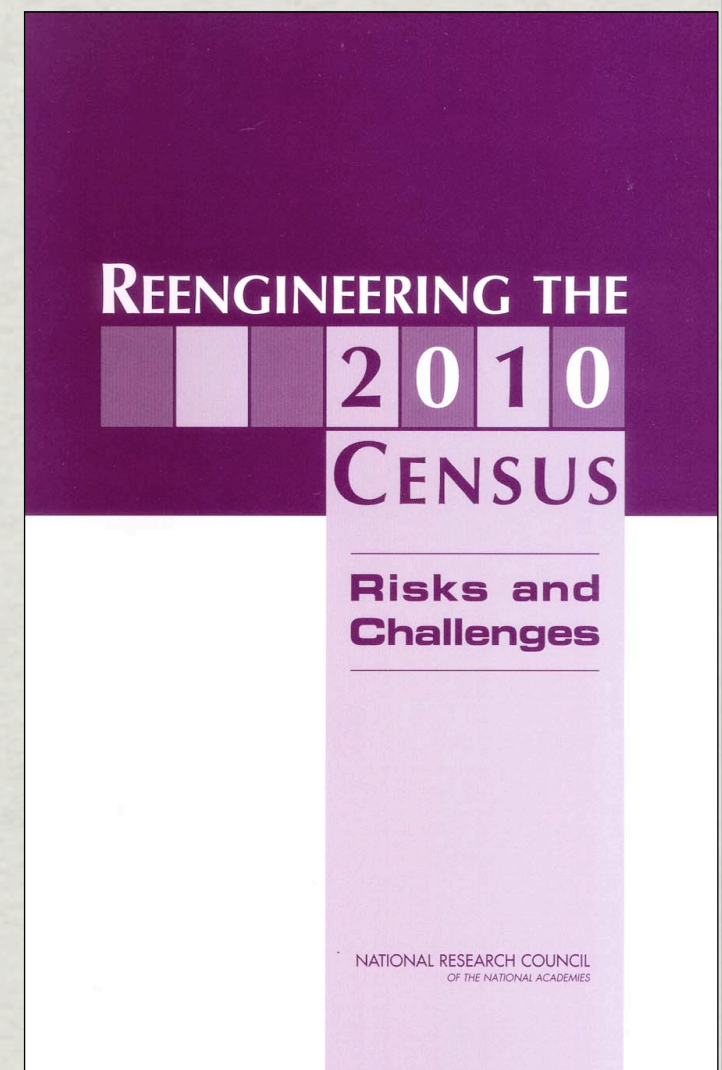
“Next Census” Planning

- ✱ Panel reviewed 1980 census plan prior to dress rehearsal
- ✱ Pre-2000, *Measuring a Changing Nation:*
 - ✱ assessed Bureau’s strategy for constructing a continuous Master Address File
 - ✱ reviewed and endorsed sampling for nonresponse follow-up and “integrated coverage measurement plans”



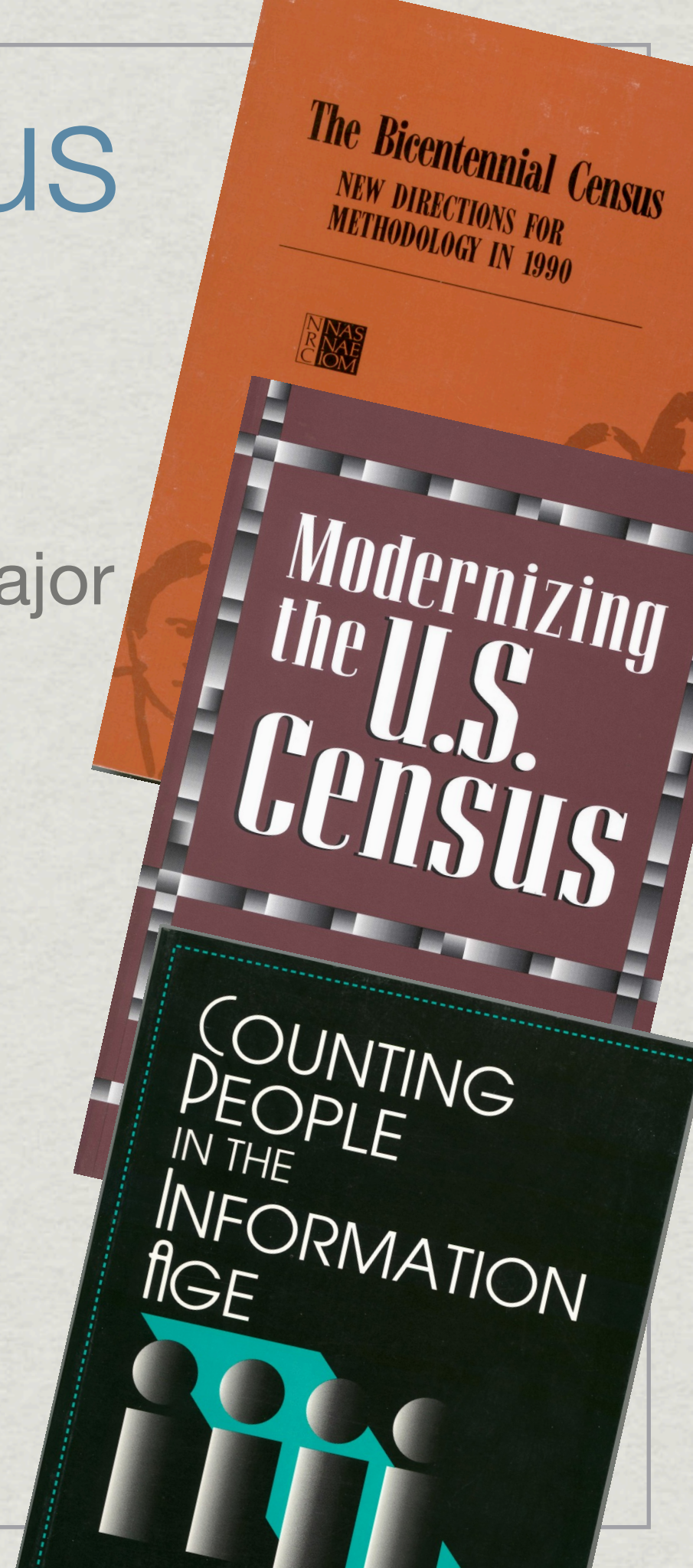
“Next Census” Planning

- * Panel on Research on Future Census Methods reviewed emerging 2010 census plan, including replacing long-form sample with American Community Survey (ACS)
- * As early as 2001 letter report—and with particular strength in 2004 final report—panel presaged Bureau’s current problems with handheld computers
- * Recommended “system architect,” attention to logical architecture
- * Warned of failure to focus on requirements

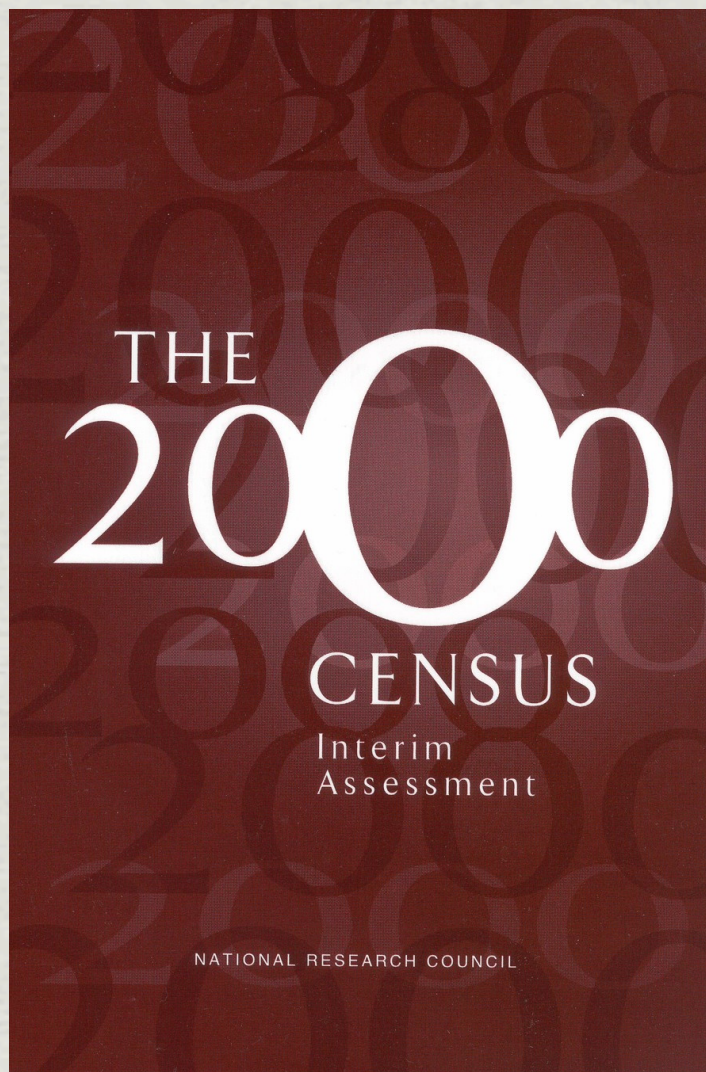


Alternative Census Designs

- ✱ Landmark 1985 study suggested major possible roles for dual-systems estimation, administrative records, ethnographic observation
- ✱ Parallel studies in mid-1990s took “blank sheet” approach to census, reviewing new techniques in survey methodology, small-area estimation



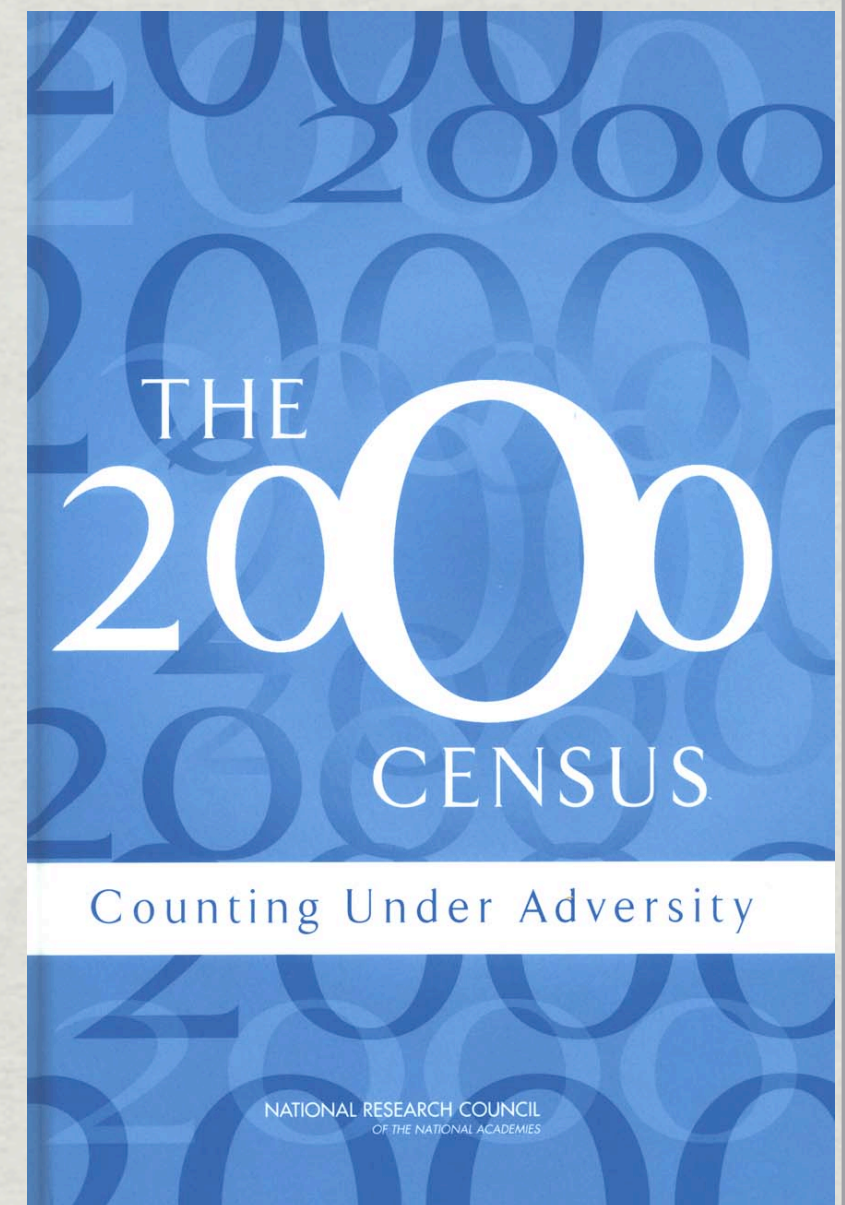
Census-in-Progress



- * “Real-time” consultation and evaluation rare for Academies
- * Build-up to 2000 census particularly contentious, with separate Monitoring Boards set up by legislative, executive branches
- * CNSTAT engaged by Census Bureau to provide independent, scientific review

Panel to Review the 2000 Census

- * Small in number of members, but extraordinarily active
- * Four reports (two letters, one interim, one final)
- * 23 site visits to NRFU, coverage measurement activities
- * Working group on Local Update of Census Addresses
- * 3 full workshop sessions



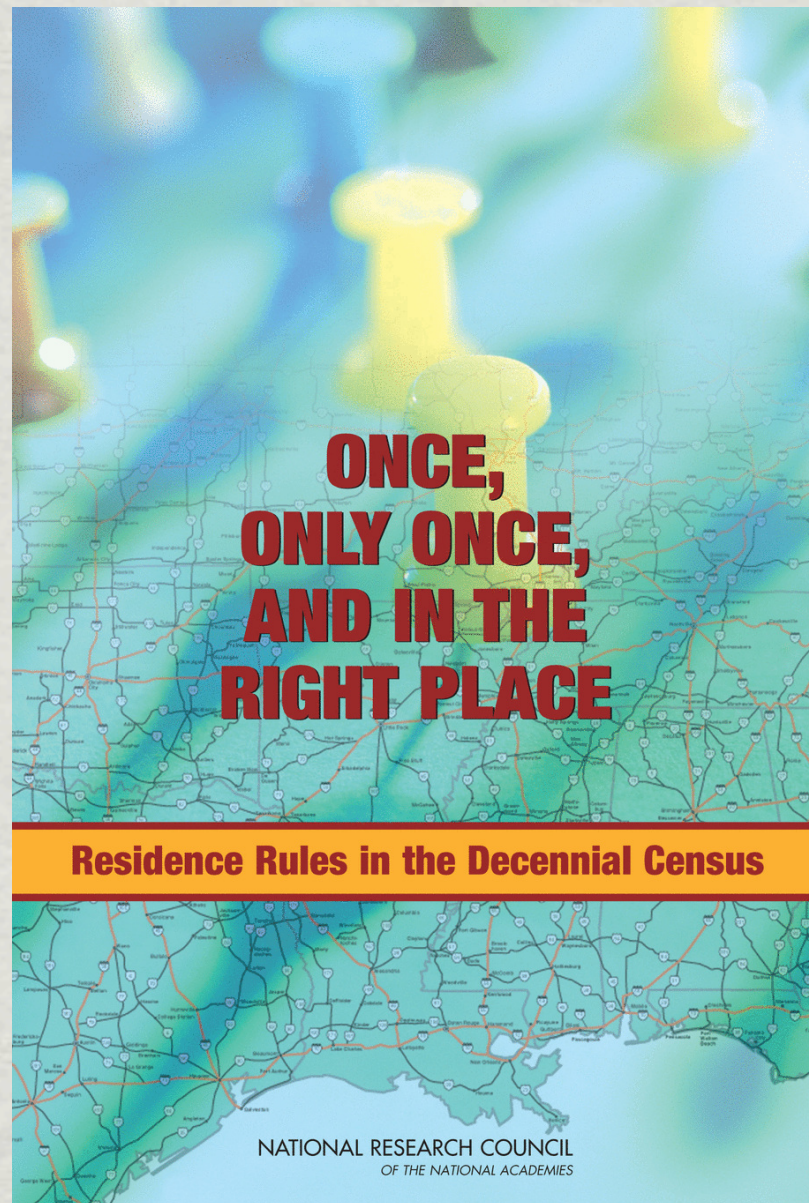
“Virtues” of External, Scientific Review

- ✱ *Credibility and Objective Weight:* Mid-1990s panel reviews were authoritative on census uses
- ✱ *Benefit of Critical, Open Discourse:* “Calmness,” thoroughness of 2000 panel’s workshops strengthened coverage evaluation reports
- ✱ *Breadth of Perspective:* 2010 planning panel’s review covered everything from detailed IT architecture to details of address list updating
- ✱ *Engaging the Broader Research Community*

“Vices” of External, Scientific Review

- * In a politically-tense environment like the census, process can become *involuntarily political* (e.g., “pro-adjustment” labels can stick, regardless of scientific arguments)
- * Thorough study by volunteer panels can be *time-intensive* and can be outpaced by events
 - * E.g., sampling for NRFU struck down by U.S. Supreme Court while panel report in review
- * Reports are *public but not always easy to access for free*

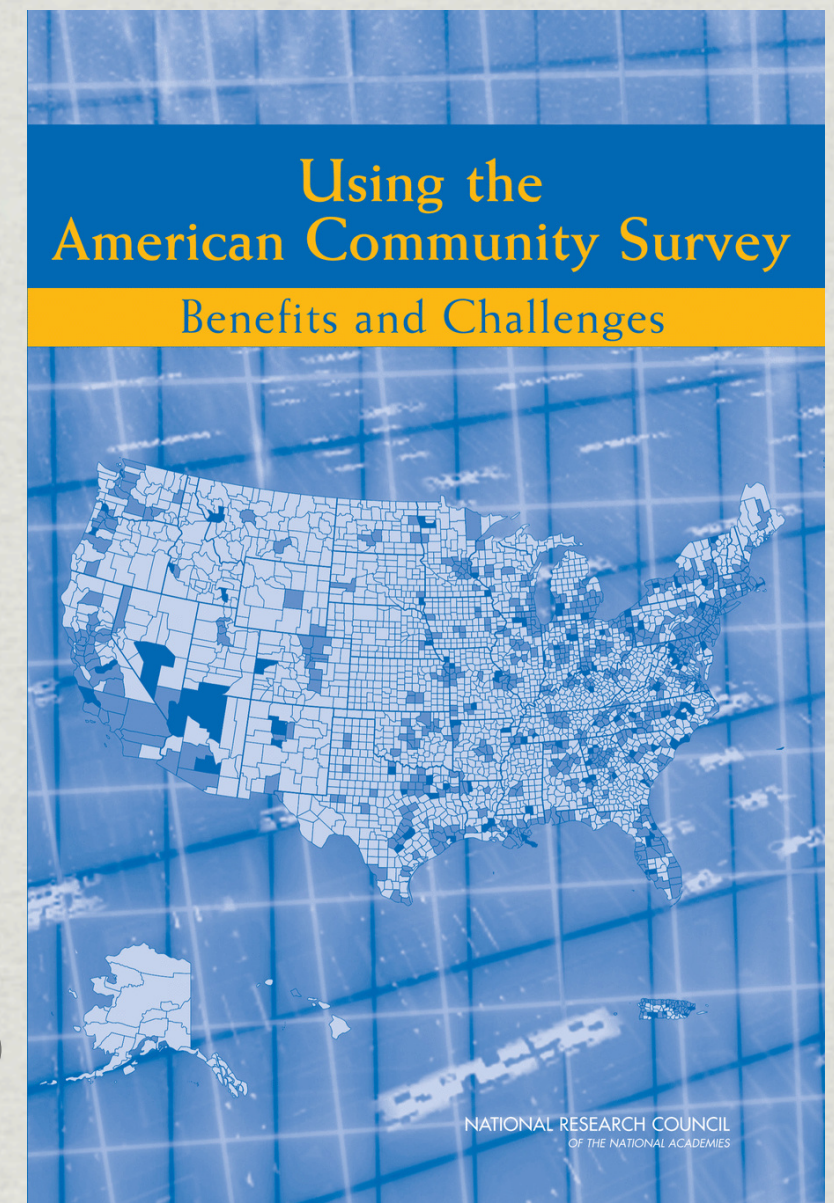
Recent Work



- ✳ First comprehensive review of U.S.'s "usual residence" standard for the census in 20 years

- ✳ Continued work on scope of 2010 coverage measurement program

- ✳ Detailed review of estimation strategies for new American Community Survey, with attention to meeting needs of data users



Current Work

- ✱ Current panel is involved with early design of 2010 Census Program of Evaluations and Experiments
- ✱ Recently completed work on a custom addition to the American Community Survey—a question on field of study, used by National Science Foundation to survey recent graduates
- ✱ Hope to initiate review of Census Bureau's program of intercensal population estimates

Questions?/Feedback

- * <http://www.nationalacademies.org/cnstat>
- * Reports: <http://www.nap.edu>
- * Daniel Cork; dcork@nas.edu; (202) 334-2573