

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

BEYOND THE HEADLINES: POPULATION CHANGE IN SELECTED COUNTIES OF MONTANA^{MAS}

Christiane von Reichert, Jay Harland, Andrew Kies, Pamela Pack, Jay Raiford,
Barry Walter, and Mace Wescott

Department of Geography, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812

The purpose of this paper was to examine-since 1980-Components of population change in selected counties of Montana. We focus on counties such as Cascade, Flathead, Gallatin, Hill, Jefferson, Missoula, and Yellowstone, and on their components of change, namely deaths (mortality), births (fertility) and netmigration. In the 1980s, the State of Montana grew by very little (1.6%), but in the- 1990s the State's population grew by 10 percent. While deaths rose, and births declined, netmigration switched from a significant loss in the late 1980s (-53,000) to an astounding gain in the first half of the 1990s (+53,000). We use the cohort component approach as it provides a much better understanding as to what drives population change. We show, in particular, how the components of change are dependent upon age but also how they affect the age structure of our counties. Our study of components and cohorts and their effect on population change offers insight, for instance, why elementary school enrollment is declining while high schools are bursting at the seams. An understanding of these complex relationships is important for decision makers in communities and counties faced with population change.