

Full of Errors

COLLEGE—The 1970 federal census counted 6,453 fewer natives than had been projected by the state's vital statistics, Dr. George W. Rogers contends in "Alaska Native Population Trends and Vital Statistics, 1950-1985," the latest "Research Note" published by the University of Alaska's Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research.

The census indicated there are 51,700 natives in Alaska.

There usually are differences between the census and vital statistics figures but those between the latest "were greater both in absolute and relative terms than in 1960," the economist reports.

The differences usually stem from the fact that the vital statistics computations of growth—excess of births over deaths—do not take into account migration in or out of a given region of the state.

Errors and changes in racial classification procedures could also account for differences between the federal and state native population figures, Rogers points out in the research paper.

Since 1960 members of a household have classified themselves for the federal census but racial classification for vital statistics has consistently been made by the attending doctor or public officials.

"Thus, the disparities between the census reports and vital records could be caused in part by the people of native or part-native blood who lived in urban centers and no longer considered themselves as native," states Rogers.

He adds in a footnote: "Prior to the rise in the mid and late 1960's of a strong statewide native political movement, as represented in the Alaska Federation of Natives, regional organizations, and the land claims issue, it would not be unexpected for persons of fractional native blood who had left their traditional villages to find it useful or desirable to 'pass' as white or non-native."

Native population by place as established by the now-defunct Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska, which differs from both the 1970 census and projections from the combined 1960 census and vital statistics data, "also indicates the probability of a significant undercount of natives in the 1970 census," Rogers writes.

In the latest census, "error appears as a more likely cause of part of these differences (between federal and stat. figures) than in past census reports," says the economist.

A recount in the Anchorage area, upon demand of local government and community organizations, revealed that some areas had not been canvassed, and the area population was 126,333, not 124,542, he points out.

Residents of Tanana also challenged the federal enumeration and the subsequent recount "raised the population to 405, a correction of 286 otherwise lost," says Rogers.

The economist reports that the village of Napaskiak, with an estimated population of 188, was missed entirely by the census takers, and apparently only Federal Aviation Agency employees and their families were counted at Northway.

"These are errors that have so far been authenticated and corrected," he says. "There may be others."