

Yukichi Mikami

Giving an International Voice to the Census

The U.S. Census Bureau has always highlighted American diversity through its decennial snapshots of the population. As the United States grew and the population became more diverse, the Census Bureau's workforce adapted to represent the country's people and needs. As immigration from non-European countries increased in the 19th century, the Census Bureau tried to hire enumerators that lived in the neighborhoods and spoke the language. Others became a part of the operations in Washington, DC. From the first surges of Chinese immigration into California in the 19th century, immigrants of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage have long contributed to the Census Bureau's mission, both at headquarters and in the field.

Yukichi Mikami was born around 1874 and raised in the Yamanashi prefecture on the main Japanese island of Honshu. Yukichi started his education in a private school under the direction of Nakamura Masnao, a noted scholar and educator. In 1887, he began studying at the prestigious Keio University in Tokyo, where he resided for three years. Yukichi worked for the Anglo-Japanese Industrial



The Honolulu Advertiser (Honolulu, HI)
28 July 1912.

A snippet of a 1910 U.S. Census record for Yukichi Mikami. The record is a grid with columns for name, age, sex, race, and other demographic information. The name "Yukichi Mikami" is clearly visible in the first column. Below the grid, there is a red box containing text: "Historic census records are maintained and released by the National Archives and Records Administration, not the U.S. Census Bureau. Visit <http://www.archives.gov> for more information about publicly available records like the one shown here."

Mikami's 1910 Census.

society of Tokyo before moving to Hawaii around 1903 to work as an editor at a newly formed progressive Japanese newspaper, the *Shin Nippon*. He continued this work at various Japanese newspapers including the *Jiyu Shinbun* and the *Hawaii Shinpo*, where he was an editor. Yukichi also worked with a large group of Hawaiian industries and manufacturers, participated in Japanese social organizations, and through these activities, became one of the most reliable Japanese-English translators on the islands.

After Hawaii became a U.S. territory in 1898, the Census Bureau first enumerated the islands during the 1900 Census and counted 154,001. However, communication difficulties (56.6 percent of the population over the age of 10 did not speak English), exacerbated by a plague outbreak, had significantly delayed the counting. Additionally, because previous governments had used censuses for taxation, there was a deep cultural bias against enumerators, which often erupted into violence.

The Census Bureau recognized that it had to do a better job reaching the Hawaiian people and educating them on the importance of participation ahead of the 1910 Census.



Mikami and the staff of the *Hawaii Shinpo*, c. 1910.

The Honolulu Advertiser (Honolulu, HI)
2 January 1910.



Yukichi, second from the left, touring Oregon with Japanese officials and journalists in 1917.

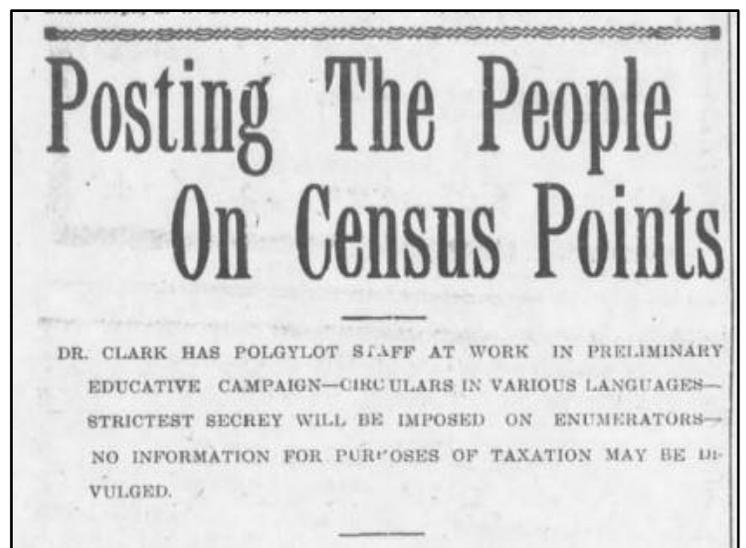
The Oregon Daily Journal (Portland, OR) 21 November 1917.

To this end, a group of locals representing the many languages spoken on Hawaii assembled under Dr. Victor Clark, the special agent in charge of the census. The group created lessons in various languages to disseminate at schools and other public areas in order to familiarize the people with the population, agriculture, and manufacturing schedules.

Yukichi became the linguist for the Japanese population, which comprised 42.3 percent of the total population. The first necessary step was gaining permission for a noncitizen to work as a

special agent in the census—according to directions given to the supervisors, only citizens were supposed to be eligible. Due to Yukichi’s proven interpreting skills, the Census Bureau quickly granted this exception. His business contacts also proved useful when he worked as one of the four agents conducting the survey of manufactures.

The 1910 outreach campaign was successful, although it did not completely ameliorate local animosity towards the census takers. Following Yukichi’s work as a translator and special agent of the census, he continued in his role as editor of the *Hawaii Shinpo* until 1911, when he went to work full time as the secretary of the Japanese Merchants Association. Throughout this period, Yukichi continued to work to improve ties between Japan and the United States, often hosting parties for the officials of each country and working in the community to highlight Japanese culture by supporting events like the Japanese Lantern Festival. In order to convince businessmen and manufacturers of the importance of Japan as a trading partner, the Japanese consulate gave him an area to set up a manufacturers’ display. He also traveled extensively to mainland America in order to spread his message of friendship and cooperation between the two nations—an impressive and time-consuming task when air travel was uncommon.



The Hawaiian Star (Honolulu, HI) 3 February 1910.



Japan Times (Tokyo, Japan) 1 October 1924.

In 1916, at the age of 42, Yukichi quit his job as secretary of the Japanese Merchants Association and announced his intention to sail to New York enroute to Yale where he would study economics for four years. The results of this trip are unknown, but Yukichi sailed back to Hawaii in late 1917, and returned to working as a newspaper consultant in conjunction with the Japanese embassy. Yukichi’s story becomes harder to follow through the historical records at this point. Indeed, neither he nor his wife appear in any census, travel, or public documents after this date, so it is possible that they moved back to Japan. Yukichi does appear one more time, in 1924, when he participated in a special edition of the English language newspaper, *Japan Times*, where he once again voiced his opinion that the two countries could best benefit by working together. Throughout his work as a journalist, businessman, interpreter, and census taker, Yukichi continuously worked towards a goal of harmony between neighbors and nations.