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Disciplining Statistics: Demography and Vital Statistics in France and England, 1830-1885 (New edition)

By Libby Schweber

Duke University Press. Paperback. Book Condition: new. BRAND NEW, Disciplining Statistics: Demography and Vital Statistics in France and England, 1830-1885 (New edition), Libby Schweber, In "Disciplining Statistics" Libby Schweber compares the science of population statistics in England and France during the nineteenth century, demonstrating radical differences in the interpretation and use of statistical knowledge. Through a comparison of vital statistics and demography, Schweber describes how the English government embraced statistics, using probabilistic interpretations of statistical data to analyze issues related to poverty and public health. The French were far less enthusiastic. Political and scientific elites in France struggled with the 'reality' of statistical populations, wrestling with concerns about the accuracy of figures that aggregated heterogeneous groups such as the rich and poor and rejecting probabilistic interpretations. Tracing the introduction and promotion of vital statistics and demography, Schweber identifies the institutional conditions that account for the contrasting styles of reasoning. She shows that the different reactions to statistics stemmed from different criteria for what counted as scientific knowledge. The French wanted certain knowledge, a one-to-one correspondence between observations and numbers. The English adopted an instrumental approach, using the numbers to influence public opinion and evaluate and justify legislation. Schweber

Reviews

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