

At the beginning and the middle of the century, the most populous 5-year age group was under age 5. In 2000, people age 35 to 39 years outnumbered all other age groups.

The number of people in each age group grew during the course of the 20th century, but some age groups grew much more than others. The growth and the changing age and sex composition of the U.S. population can be portrayed through the use of population pyramids. The overall shape of the pyramid and the size of the bars for each age group depict the changes.

Both the male and female populations increased between 1900 and 1950 and again between 1950 and 2000 for every 5-year age group. This is shown in the superimposed population pyramids in Figure 2-1.

Under age 5 represented the largest 5-year age group in 1900, with a population of 9.2 million (4.6 million males and 4.5 million females). As Figure 2-1 shows, each successive age group in 1900 was smaller than the preceding age group, creating the traditional pyramid shape or “broad-based” population.

In 1920, the largest 5-year age group was still children under age 5, with a population of 11.6 million (see Appendix Table 5). The sizable decline in fertility starting in the 1920s and continuing through the Depression changed the age composition. By 1940,

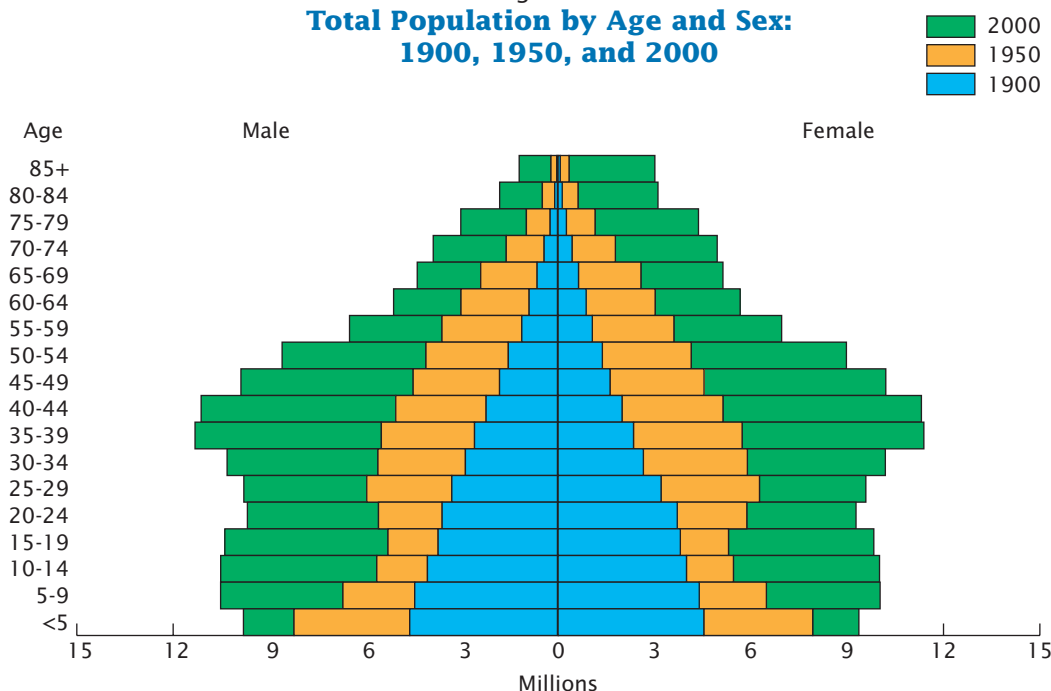
the 15-to-19 year age group (corresponding essentially to people born from 1920 to 1924) was the largest (12.3 million).

In 1950, as a result of the post-World War II baby boom (1946 to 1964), the group under age 5 was again the largest, with a population of 16.2 million. With each passing decade since 1950, the largest 5-year age group has fallen in the range of ages that included the baby boomers. In 2000, the largest age groups were the 35-to-39 and 40-to-44 age groups (corresponding essentially to people born from 1960 to 1964 and 1955 to 1959, respectively).²²

Further evidence of the impact of the baby boom on the U.S. age structure is seen in the measure of total population growth by age group from 1900 to 2000. The age groups 35-to-39 years, 40-to-44 years, and 45-to-49 years experienced the largest increases in population of any age group from the beginning to the end of the century (17.7 million, 18.2 million, and 16.6 million, respectively).

²² See U.S. Census Bureau. 2001a. *Age: 2000*, by Julie Meyer.

Figure 2-1.
**Total Population by Age and Sex:
1900, 1950, and 2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial census of population, 1900, 1950, and 2000.