

Population Growth Has Consequences

Social, political, economic examples given

Book Review by Leon Bouvier

Abbott and Costello were perhaps the most famous comedy duo of the 1930s; a far more sophisticated duo was the musical comedy writing team of Oscar Hammerstein and Richard Rodgers. Their contributions to 20th century music will last forever.

It may seem peculiar for the author of a book review about demographics to begin with Abbott and Costello, but the point is that in countless fields and disciplines, many “duos” have contributed significantly to their respective areas of expertise.

Demography may be on the verge of offering its own artistic duo. I refer to the combined work of Michael Teitelbaum and Jay Winter. While this is intended as a brief review of their latest monograph, *Question of Numbers*, one cannot truly appreciate this work without having first read their earlier piece, *The Fear of Population Decline*.¹

Both concentrate on the recent and current changes in demographic variables. That is to say, fertility has reached all-time lows in most advanced countries while fertility remains high (though falling slightly) in most developing nations. At the same time, immigration from the latter to the former regions is increasing at a rapid pace.

In their earlier work, the authors devoted considerable space to the history of the fears of being “overtaken” by outsiders, especially in certain European

countries. However, in the present text, attention is concentrated on the typical receiving countries — notably in Europe and North America.

Teitelbaum and Winter admit that “they are fully aware, though, that the boundaries between these two [i.e. North and South] are porous, and the fact that populations move both within the countries of each and from other parts of the world is central to this book (p.3).” Thus the stage is set for a well-written monograph (in

English and not “demographese”) that examines the enormous shifts in population behavior that have taken place in recent decades.

From the outset, it is obvious that this is not a strictly demographic piece. While the shifts that have taken place in population behavior since the end of the second World War are enormous, much of this book is devoted to the political and historical changes that have either been affected by demographic changes or

have caused such changes.

After a brief and extremely useful introduction, the authors assign the next few chapters to how the three major Western European nations (i.e. France, Germany and Great Britain) have reacted in the last few decades to their new demographic challenges. As the authors point out, each has responded very differently to new immigration and, especially in the case of France, the extremely low fertility.

Within these chapters are included a number of interesting “anecdotes” such as the long-running controversy among prominent French demographers over the *true* meaning of the total fertility rate vis-a-vis completed fertility. The different approaches to demographic changes of the three countries make for fascinating reading.

**A Question of
Numbers: High
Migration, Low
Fertility and the
Politics of National Identity
Since 1960**

by Michael S. Teitelbaum
and Jay M. Winter
New York: Hill & Wang, Inc., 1998
290 pages, \$26.00



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The authors then turn their attention to the more recent occurrences in Eastern Europe ---especially in what was Yugoslavia and the USSR. Considerable historical as well as political information is included in this (and other chapters) that allow for a better understanding of why countries react differently to massive demographic shifts. A separate chapter is set aside for the horrendous situation that has taken place in Romania, and here, much of Teitelbaum's well-known earlier research is included.

Throughout these chapters dealing primarily with European countries, the authors insert interesting and related "sidebars" of interest. For example, the Salman Rushdie affair is dealt with in some detail as is the development of the eugenics movement in Great Britain. In other words, the authors do not limit themselves to a "question of numbers." Rather, they delve further into each subject, as appropriate, so that the reader can become better informed of the overall socio-political situation in specified areas.

Following the various chapters on the European situation, Teitelbaum and Winter turn their attention to North America — namely the United States and Canada. While the United States demographic situation is already fairly well-known, the authors consign considerable space to the general controversy that has engulfed the three most recent World Population Conferences and the changing positions taken by the United States. They are, in this reviewer's opinion, correct in criticizing rather strongly the Reagan position (led by his "advisers" James Buckley and Ben Wattenberg) at the Mexico City conference. They also noted, rather dryly, that the Catholic and Communist positions seemed to have almost reached rapprochement, albeit unintentionally. This chapter, together with the following two on the "demographic debate in the United States" and "American political interests and population statistics" are sufficient reason to purchase this extremely well-written book.

In the latter chapter on the United States, the authors cite a census report that:

Responses about ancestry on the 1980 and 1990 U.S. censuses indicate, implausibly, that during this ten-year period the numbers reporting German, Italian, and Polish ancestry increased by 18, 21, and 14 percent, respectively, while those reporting French and

English ancestry declined by 20 and 34 percent, respectively. Over the same decade, those reporting themselves as Cajun mysteriously increased 67-fold, while the numbers reporting Croatian ancestry increased by more than 100 percent (p.155).

Without criticizing the Census Bureau, these serve as an example of the care one has to take when using such sources of data. The authors also delve into the entire shady process of "gerrymandering" and page 159 illustrates this process with a graph of North Carolina's convoluted 12th Congressional district. We cite these examples from the book, not especially for their own direct interest, but to illustrate how far the authors have

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gone from simply a "question of numbers."

Chapter 9 concentrates on the Canadian (or more specifically Quebecker) problem. This is an excellent example of how "numbers" become very important in determining the political future of a country or a part of a country. Here, once again, the reader is treated to an excellent, though brief, history of the long-simmering French-English feud among our northern neighbors. (It should be added that the book was completed prior to the recent Canadian Supreme Court decision which denied the right of a province to secede from the confederation.)

After two interesting and quite detailed chapters concentrating on immigration, refugees and the accompanying problems these often bring to a country, chapter 12 (with considerable foresight) discusses Islamic Fundamentalism and the West. Following the recent tragedies in the Near East, assumed to be the work of certain extremist Islamic groups, such a chapter could not have been more timely.

Much evidence (here and elsewhere) suggests that immigrant Muslims do not assimilate into their new places of residence as do other groups. Fundamental Islam is a

force to be reckoned with as we enter the next century — if only because of its enormous population growth. The authors sum-marize it well:

The implications of this social force for migration, fertility, and national identity in both the Islamic world and neighboring regions are widespread and serious. Muslim migrants are numerous in every major European country. Fundamentalists are among them, and whenever the migrants think of themselves as mistreated by their European or American hosts, fundamentalism tends to grow. Many do not subscribe to Western views on assimilation and citizenship, preferring to tolerate the rule of infidels so long as they can practice Islam. Though tens of thousands live in the West, their hearts are not in it (pp.224-225).

The authors argue vehemently for more international meetings on the importance of demographic changes and what they mean for all nations.

It is alarming that the power of demographic paradigms to guide our understanding of population change has decreased in direct proportion to the increasing prominence of migration as a demographic force. Remedying that situation is in the interests of policy makers, demographers, and the public (p.246).

From the outset the authors make it clear that they are concerned, not only with numbers, but also with what they mean politically, historically, and economically for the nation(s) involved. They have succeeded brilliantly. However, as a reviewer whose prime field is demography, I always wonder if the arguments used on the non-demographic issues are correct. Most of the non-demographic information included in this monograph is surely correct, but errors can crop up.

One example that came to the attention of this reviewer is found on page 156: “The first [compromise]... led to the creation of a legislature consisting of two elected houses.” However, it was not until the Constitution was amended in 1913 that senators were elected directly by the people. Prior to that they were selected by the respective state governments. Amendment XVII reads: “The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each

state, elected by the people thereof...” Only after 1913 can it be said that “the legislature consists of two [directly] elected houses.”

This, of course, is a minor error, but others may have been included that were missed by this demographically-trained reviewer. While, for the most part, I have lauded this book for its courage in going well beyond demography to better explain social situations, demographers themselves may be a little disappointed that more demography is not included. For example, very little is said about the extremely low fertility rates in Europe (as compared to the rest of the world) and what that might mean for the future. Indeed, very little is said about the 21st century. This is not intended as a criticism — it

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undoubtedly was not the intention of the authors to speculate that far into the future.

At the beginning of this review, I mentioned the teams of Abbott and Costello, Hammerstein and Rodgers. Perhaps a third Teitelbaum-Winter book will address some of the 21st century issues that may evolve from the enormous demographic shifts now taking place, not only in Europe and America, but throughout the world. They will then be, without question, a “demographic duo.”

I highly recommend this book (as well as its predecessor) not only to demographers, but to anyone interested in our planet, its people, and where we are going. It is extremely well written and it is clear and concise. In other words, it is a must for anyone interested in the overall topic of demography as it relates to other issues.

NOTE

¹See Teitelbaum and Winter, *The Fear of Population Decline*, 1985.