

POPULATION PROBLEMS: A CULTURAL INTERPRETATION¹

THE field of population study has generally had the character of an interstitial science to which biologists, economists, and sociologists have all made important contributions. But for purposes of instruction in colleges and universities the field has usually been considered a branch of sociology. In his new book on *POPULATION PROBLEMS: A CULTURAL INTERPRETATION* Landis has attempted to provide a textbook with a sociological orientation consonant with the fact that most population courses are taught by sociologists.

Landis has attained his objective. He adequately demonstrates the decisive importance of socio-cultural factors in determining reproductive behavior, the incidence of mortality, and migration, which collectively determine the size and composition of the population. Though Landis perhaps over-emphasizes the novelty and distinctiveness of his approach it is a highly useful one for the interpretation of population phenomena to the layman.

The influence of the approach is reflected in the organization of the book. The first section, "Population Facts and Population Theories," is a short one, in which "naturalistic" and philosophical theories of population are summarily disposed of. Part 2, "Cultural Forces in Vital Processes," is much the longest. Four chapters are devoted to aspects and causes of differential fertility, and there is a good discussion of cultural norms as determinants of reproductive behavior. Part 3, "Sex, Age, and Ethnic Composition," is a briefer and more conventional treatment of the biological elements in population structure. Part 4, "Socio-cultural Factors in the Distribution of Population," is concerned with both geographical distribution and distribution of the population by functional roles. Part 5, "Problems of Migration," is followed by a concluding chapter on "A Population Policy for the United States." In the latter, Landis outlines the cultural forces likely to stimulate a positive population policy in this country and correctly points out that any attempt to increase numbers must focus on the birth rate. He wisely observes that "Economic incentives probably will prove inadequate for raising the birth rate" and feels that "Modification of the birth rate in an upward direction will be dependent upon a remotivation of the American people and a revolution

¹ Landis, Paul H.: *POPULATION PROBLEMS: A CULTURAL INTERPRETATION*. New York, American Book Company, 1943. 500 pp. \$3.75.

in social organization as well." He advocates a population policy closely modeled after the Swedish program with its emphasis on broad humanitarian objectives.

The text is notable for the completeness of its references and citations. It is obvious that the author has made diligent use of current materials. However, in reading the book the reviewer was drawn to reflections on the unfortunate influence of systematic note-taking, as originally dictated by graduate work and thesis writing, upon the quality of scientific and textbook English in the United States. Much of Landis's book consists of digests of secondary sources loosely strung together in more or less logical sequence. There is much repetition both of language and of ideas. A single example may suffice to illustrate a common failing of the book:

"The female holds to life more tenaciously than the male." (p. 214)

"—the female clings to life somewhat more tenaciously than the male."

(p. 252)

"Females hold on to life somewhat more tenaciously." (p. 274)

Despite the evidence of wide reading, there are several serious lacunae in the subject matter covered. Though nominally a book on population problems, it almost completely ignores the two most significant demographic problems to be faced in the modern world. Thus, first, the problem of overpopulation and population pressure is the object of only casual reference despite its enormous importance for the future welfare of the world. Certainly no longstanding resolution of the world's political dilemma can be found without some solution of the problem of population pressure in the Orient. Landis contributes nothing to an understanding either of the situation or its implications. In this and other ways the author displays an anachronistic absorption with purely American problems that is highly inappropriate in a world in which American well-being will be shaped as much by population trends outside as by those inside her boundaries. Even had the book been given the more appropriate title of "American Population Problems" it would still suffer from the defect of having no systematic treatment of the relationship between population and resources.

A more excusable omission is the absence of any organized discussion of the economic and social implications of a declining population. The problems of a stationary or declining population are speculative, but

obviously of vital importance to this country. In fact, a population policy without reference to these problems is meaningless. Though Landis might understandably have chosen not to venture an original contribution on the implications of a declining population, the value of his book would have been greatly enhanced by a critical summary of the exploratory work in this field carried on by Reddaway, Myrdal, Thompson, and others.

Despite these and other omissions (as for instance the neglect of the demographic effects of war except as regards the sex ratio) the book may serve a useful purpose in an expanding field. It is plentifully illustrated with effective graphic materials, which, combined with a relatively simple and straight-forward style, should make a somewhat technical subject readily intelligible to beginners in the field.

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COSTS OF DENTAL CARE¹

IT HAS been well known for a long time that the prevalence of neglected dental disorders is very high. The extent and seriousness of the problem has been further emphasized recently by reports on physical examinations of young men for military service which indicate that defective or missing teeth were the greatest single cause of rejections. Many persons in public health and the dental profession realize the importance of better dental care for the health of the population and various plans for financing dental care, as well as medical care, have been under discussion. There are several distinctive features about dental care as compared with medical care which affect the cost of essential dental service; specifically, everyone should receive prophylaxis and diagnostic care regularly, tooth decay does not heal spontaneously, and the volume of service required for the accumulated dental defects is enormous. In order to obtain actual data on the cost of providing needed dental care, a study of complete service to a group of adults was sponsored by the American College of Dentists. The report on this study furnishes valuable information on the costs of

¹ Costs of Dental Care for Adults Under Specific Clinical Conditions, by Dorothy Fahs Beck, assisted by Mary Frost Jessup. Socio-Economics Committee, American College of Dentists, 4952 Maryland Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.