

TRENDS IN BIRTH RATES IN THE UNITED STATES  
SINCE 1870<sup>1</sup>

THIS book contains three chapters. Two of them deal with trends in ratios of young children to population, for whites and Negroes, respectively. The third chapter presents a taxonomic listing of some of the factors that may have contributed to declines in human fertility.

Nearly all of the materials presented in the first two chapters are based on comparisons of geometric averages of decennial census data for the period 1870–1910 with averages for the period 1910–1950. Thus, time trends are not explored in detail. The geometric averages were obtained from the Kuznets-Thomas Study of Population Redistribution and Economic Growth. Brief account is taken of the effect of mortality and migration of population between the birthdate of the children and the date of the census, and of the effect of undercounting of young children in the censuses, but most of the work is with unadjusted data. States are used as units of measurement.

The first chapter gives attention to the influence on declining birth ratios among whites of (a) demographic changes in the age, sex, and nativity composition and (b) economic changes as implied by changes in the distribution of population by urban and rural residence and in the proportion living in large cities. Okun shows that neither (a) nor (b) explains much of the decline in the fertility of whites. He concludes that changes in the reproductive patterns of persons living in fixed environmental settings have been more important causes of decline in birth rates of whites than the effect of urbanization of the population.

The second chapter makes a similar study for Negroes. Unlike the situation among whites, the rural-to-urban shift of population was a significant factor in the decline of birth rates for Negroes.

The third chapter contains a brief review of hypotheses and methods used by others to explain or describe variations in human fertility. For example, the advantages of a longitudinal study over a cross-sectional approach are briefly discussed. A

<sup>1</sup>Okun, Bernard: *TRENDS IN BIRTH RATES IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE 1870*. The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1958, 203 + viii pp., \$3.50, paper.

taxonomic list of some of the factors that may have contributed to declines in fertility is based in part on European experience or hypotheses that have no clear relation to American experience, and whose relevancy, accuracy, or importance for the latter is moot. Thus, the famous Bradleigh-Bessant trial in England in 1877 is cited as evidence of a wide spread of knowledge of birth control methods after 1870. (American birth rates declined sharply and steadily at a much earlier time.) The writings of a German author in the 19th century are cited as evidence of "the declining influence of the Catholic Church." The Catholic Church is incorrectly stated to oppose birth control; it actually opposes only certain methods of control.

The book is a valuable reference source for those who wish a competent and scholarly analysis of ratios of young children to population and simple measures of the trend, by States, for the period from 1870 to 1950. In this reviewer's opinion, the most valuable contribution the book makes is the demonstration that the decline in fertility ratios among whites is probably in only a small part a result of urbanization of the population.

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## MIGRATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN RHODE ISLAND<sup>1</sup>

THIS monograph is the second of a series of reports on the population of Rhode Island. It was preceded by Mayer's "Economic Development and Population Growth in Rhode Island." It is concerned with the relationship between population fluctuations due to migratory currents and economic developments in Rhode Island.

The authors point out that in the past the subject of migration has received less attention than have fertility and mor-

<sup>1</sup> Mayer, Kurt B., and Goldstein, Sidney: *MIGRATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN RHODE ISLAND*. Providence, Rhode Island, Brown University Press, 1958, 63 pp. (Paper) \$1.75.