Norman Ryder

Norman Ryder was born in Hamilton, Ontario on August 23, 1923. He received his BA degree from McMaster University and a Master's degree from University of Toronto (both in political economy) and a Master's in economics and PhD in sociology from Princeton University.

Upon completion of his studies he returned to Canada as Lecturer at the University of Toronto, and as researcher for the Dominion Bureau of Statistics (now Statistics Canada).

He returned to the U.S. to work with P. K. Whelpton at the Scripps Foundation for Research in Population Problems. He then moved to University of Wisconsin, where he established the Center for Demography and Ecology. While there he began his long and fruitful collaboration with Charles F. Westoff on a series of National Fertility Surveys. He joined the Princeton faculty in 1971 and remained there until his retirement in 1989. Shortly after, he returned to Canada, taking up a chair in sociology at the University of Toronto, and serving on the advisory panel on Demographic Statistics and Studies, Statistics Canada.

Ryder was editor of the *American Sociological Review* from 1965 to 1969 and was elected president of the Population Association of America for 1972-73. He was recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the IUSSP Laureate (awarded at the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population General Conference in Montreal, 1993), a Distinguished Alumni Award from McMaster, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Montreal.

I never had the privilege of studying with Norman Ryder or having him as a faculty colleague. But I got to know him at innumerable conferences and meetings over the years. And if the expression "gentleman and

scholar" did not exist, it would have to be invented to describe him. He was a consummate scientist, passionate in the search for understanding of population dynamics and social change. He expressed his ideas with unusual clarity and force – many of his papers could pass muster in an English essay contest. But he was always respectful of others. I cannot recall him being angry or aggressive in scientific debate. His scientific integrity required that he mention out-and-out errors, when they occurred. But even then he did so with tact, generosity and good humor.

Norman Ryder made major contributions to demography and to sociology. A *leitmotiv* of his work, beginning with his doctoral dissertation in 1951, was the concept of *cohort.* His 1965 paper on "The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change" (published in the *American Sociological Review*) had enormous influence, well beyond demography.

With a focus on cohorts, Ryder was able to untangle the Post World War II Baby Boom, then and now widely misunderstood as a demographic phenomenon. P. K. Whelpton had already showed that something was wrong with the conventional interpretation of traditional demographic measurements when he computed net reproduction rates by birth order and discovered that, given then current fertility rates, a cohort of 1,000 women would give birth to close to 1200 first births, a logical impossibility. When he and Ryder looked more closely at the cohort data, it became clear that much of the Baby Boom was a matter of timing, of "cohort bunching." Following World War II, older women were having postponed births, some women were having births more or less on time, and some women were marrying and having births earlier due to a combination of cultural change and economic prosperity.

Ryder later went on to show that the Baby Boom was less about "women having more children," and more about "more women marrying and having children" – economy and society were making it possible for more women to achieve the then normative path of marriage and childbearing. In particular, he showed that the Baby Boom did not involve a return to earlier birth rates at higher parities.

In addition to his work on cohort fertility, Ryder made substantial contributions to household and family demography, and, with Westoff, perfected the modern fertility survey, shedding new light on U.S. marriage and family formation, sexual behavior, contraception, and sterilization.

Ryder thought of himself primarily as an empirical demographer, collecting and marshalling hard data to understand population dynamics, rather than as a theorist. I once challenged him to write a theoretical treatise summarizing what he had learned about fertility behavior in all his research. He countered: "How can I theorize about something I can barely begin to measure correctly?" Ironically, by a modern view of scientific theory, he ended up making major contributions to the theory of both population dynamics and social change.

Isaac Newton famously said: "If I have seen a little further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." For 20th century demography, Norman Ryder was one of the giants.

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