

Population and Society: An Introduction to Demography

By Dudley L. Poston, Jr., and Leon F. Bouvier
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This review (one of several reviews of the book) was undertaken at an opportune time, when I needed to assign a demography textbook to public health students for an introductory course in demography. Before undertaking the review, I had already prescribed this book (based on a cursory look at it and brief descriptions of it). With a few months still remaining before the start of the course, one of my driving aims for reviewing the book was to verify my earlier position regarding the book. At the end of the review, I plan to give my decision on the matter.

The second edition is largely a single-authored rewrite of the previous double-authored version (first edition) and bears the personal style of Professor Dudley Poston, a septuagenarian with decades of demographic teaching experience, active research (as recent as 2015), and scores of students supervised. He uses the active instead of the passive voice, and makes it user-friendly by interlacing the book with his “personal demography.” The reader gets to know innumerable details about the professor, his date of birth, his hometown, his sister’s name, his wife’s name, when they got married and their ages when they got married, the years of death of his parents, the shows he watched when he was a child, etc. He gives many examples (US and international), drawing upon his published works and those of his former students. On topics that are debatable, the author tries to give the arguments for and against the position, and gives his own position, directly or indirectly.

The book has sixteen chapters, including standard demographic topics like fertility, mortality, and migration and non-standard topics like contraception and birth control and “The Earth in the Twenty-first and Twenty-second Centuries.” It includes useful glossary, name index, and subject index, in addition to an exhaustive 44-page list of references. The book is very well edited, almost free of grammatical flaws. The only editorial slip I could detect was the mention that ICD-10 was adapted in 1992 (instead of adopted).

The merits of the book are many. Primarily, it makes a good balance between substantive demography and technical demography. It covers the theories very well, while providing only the minimum technical details needed to understand a topic, using consistent mathematical formulas and symbols. For fertility, it includes interesting discussions on childlessness, proximate determinants, how the family has changed in the US, etc. The mortality section is also well done. It includes interesting discussions on race differential in mortality, racial mortality crossover, famines and epidemics, etc. The book sheds light on some paradoxes (the Hispanic epidemiological paradox, the Taeuber paradox), describing them and summarizing the debates around them. The migra-

tion section is also well written, giving a good, clear introduction to the concepts found in both internal and international migration. It gives a clear description of the immigration dynamics in the Arabian Gulf countries and the uniqueness of the Vatican City State vis-à-vis migration. Regarding the controversies around international migration, the author comes out with a very clear message that research findings refute the notion that immigrants are criminals. The book gives a balanced summary of views pro and against immigration. Overall, the book takes a pro-migration stance, based on the balance of evidence. Similarly, the book summarizes the debates on population growth and, based on the author's prior research, argues against the proponents of negative population growth. The chapter on "Theoretical and Substantive Issues of Age and Sex" is very well written, making a good balance between the substantive and technical. The chapter gives a very interesting non-mathematical explanation of *ergodicity* (without even mentioning the term).

The book discusses race and ethnicity at depth. Using US examples, the book clarifies the complexities around race and ethnicity, addressing questions on the identity of the Hispanics and how the US is struggling with its own cultural adaptation, the progress it is making, and the different positions being taken. Overall, the book takes a middle position between cultural assimilation and cultural separatism. The book goes further to propose some ideals about the desired American society of the future. On population policy, the book makes an interesting statement that "doing nothing" is itself a policy. It also discusses the politics of world population conferences and the behind-the-scenes role of the US in lowering population growth in the developing countries. The book also gives a good analysis of China's change from a one-child to a two-child policy.

As with other books, this one also has some demerits. The beginning of demography is discussed in a foggy manner. The data sources are brushed through, with no discussion of their advantages and disadvantages. After a quick introduction, the discussion digresses into a detailed evaluation of same-sex marriage data obtained from censuses. No mention is made of the different ways of conducting censuses, nor of register-based census. While some demographic theories are described, there is no critique of them. Discussing fertility before mortality means that life table-related measures that appear in fertility (e.g., net reproduction rate) are discussed when the reader is not yet introduced to life tables. Similarly, the fundamental topic of age and sex composition is only discussed in chapter 10, after some 250 pages of text. While age heaping is discussed, nothing is mentioned about the different ways of smoothing age distribution and redistributing population in the different ages. These are basic tools that should be covered in an introductory demography textbook. In general, some of the chapter sequences are confusing (e.g., from age composition to ethnicity, to world population change). As a topic, cause of death is only introduced on p. 186.

Migration theories are glossed over, and there is hardly much discussion on how mortality, fertility, and migration interact. At different places in the book, ethical issues are mentioned but are left hanging. The reader is not alerted to the fact that there are substantial ethical debates surrounding the topic. In the chapter on contraception and birth control, the book uses graphic descriptions (not found in other demography textbooks); at some point, readers may well wonder if they are still within the topic of demography.

Another serious shortcoming from the point of view of an introductory text is that no introduction is given on rates and their problems. As such, problems are discussed in an ad hoc manner, as they come along. As an example, only direct standardization is discussed, and there is no mention of indirect standardization. Students in introductory courses are often introduced to standard demographic software such as the US Census Bureau's PAS (Population Analysis System) and the United Nations' Mortpak (Mortality Package). This book deviates from that route and instead shows preference for the Stata statistical package for handling standardization.

The discussion on international migration could have been strengthened by some historical and contemporary examples. Topics such as the migrant crisis in Europe are overlooked, as is migration in Southern Africa, which has affected several nations for decades. Instead, the basic perspective is that of America contrasted with some Asian countries, primarily China. Even in the discussion on ethnicity and pluralism, a lot could be learned from Canada but is missing.

There is an abundance of trivia in the book, scattered here and there. For example, the case of Annie Moore (a migrant from Ireland to the US) and songs written about her. Similarly, the author's beliefs (unrelated to demography) are also given here and there. For example, the author denies the conviction held by Muslims, Christians, and Jews that humans descended from Adam and Eve, although a book on demography is not a forum for discussing such differences in belief. Another example is that wiping out Native Americans in the United States is termed as "adaptation"—a perspective that not everyone will agree with. Moreover, on some demographic debates the book does not take a balanced stand. For example, as the author is inclined toward pro-Malthusian views, contrasting viewpoints such as those of Boserup and of Simon are not given a forum and are only mentioned toward the end.

The Poston book is interesting and very well written, making a good balance between substantive and technical demography. However, it is not technical enough for the level I wanted for an introductory course on demography. For this and other reasons, the Poston book will not be the sole or primary textbook for the course. Instead, it will be included among a selected list of textbooks meant to complement each other.