
Encyclopedia of
POPULATION

EDITED BY
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GEOFFREY MCNICOLL

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- RICHARD A. EASTERLIN
- THOMPSON, WARREN S.**
- (1887–1973)
- Warren Simpson Thompson received his Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University in 1915. As a student of the sociologists Alvan A. Tenney and Franklin Giddings, and the statistician Robert E. Chaddock, he developed an early interest in international population trends and in problems associated with rapid population growth. In his dissertation, *Population: A Study in Malthusianism* (1915), he argued that U.S. population growth rates directly responded to changes in the food supply. In the early 1920s, Edward W. Scripps, the newspaper publisher, grew concerned about population and sought out Thompson on the basis of his dissertation. After a tour of Asia aboard Scripps's yacht, Thompson agreed to head the first foundation exclusively focused on the study of population. The Scripps Foundation for Research in Population Problems, located at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, in Scripps's home county of Butler, was established in 1922. Pascal Kidder Whelpton (1893–1964), an agricultural economist from Cornell University, joined Thompson as assistant director in 1924. After Scripps's death in 1926, finances for the foundation were fixed

at a modest level, preventing its further expansion. As director of this foundation, Thompson engaged in studies of both international and domestic demographic trends for 30 years.

In 1929, Thompson published two notable works on international population dynamics: a book, *Danger Spots in World Population* and an article "Population" in the *American Journal of Sociology*. In the latter, Thompson elaborated an early version of demographic transition theory. He placed all countries into three groups based on trends in their rates of natural increase. He assumed that countries would progress from Group C (high birth and death rates) to Group B (high birthrates but declining death rates) to Group A (low birth and death rates) as they became increasingly industrialized. In *Danger Spots in World Population*, Thompson used this framework to identify regions experiencing population problems and to derive policy recommendations. In a controversial analysis, he concluded that Japan, then in a period of rapid population expansion, had only one policy alternative: "to expand by the acquisition of more territory" (Thompson, p. 43). This theory that seemed to support Japanese imperialism generated little interest among Western policymakers during the interwar period.

Thompson's *Population Problems*, first published in 1930, was the major textbook in population studies until the 1960s. *Population Trends in the United States* (1933), written with Whelpton, established him as a leading forecaster of U.S. population trends. (His and Whelpton's set of projections for the United States, published in 1943, gave 2000 totals under variant assumptions ranging from 129 million to 198 million.) In 1944, Thompson again turned his attention to international population trends in *Plenty of People*, which contained an updated version of his 1929 transition framework. In the period from 1944 to 1946, Thompson, sociologist Dudley Kirk (1913–2000), economist Frank Notestein (1902–1983), and sociologist Kingsley Davis (1908–1997) all generalized the Western demographic experience in similar ways. Together, their work constitutes the classic theory of the demographic transition.

In *Population and Peace in the Pacific* (1946), Thompson outlined the major population problem of the post-World War II period: rapid population growth in colonial areas. Internal order, improved transportation systems, and public health innova-

tions were lowering mortality, yet mother countries were not fostering the industrialization and urbanization that would work to lower fertility. Thompson predicted that this "Malthusian dilemma" would bring about the end of colonialism. In the immediate post-World War II period, Thompson went to Japan as an advisor to General Douglas MacArthur leader of the Occupation forces. Japan's birth rate experienced a sharp increase from 1946 through 1949, and Thompson predicted severe overpopulation. He called on the Japanese government to take "positive measures" to reduce the birth rate. Japan did, in fact, make abortion and contraception readily available and its total fertility rate fell by 50 percent over the next decade, a decline that Thompson had thought impossible. In 1953, Thompson stepped down as director of the Scripps Foundation and was succeeded by Whelpton.

See also: *Demography, History of; Demographic Transition; Population Thought, Contemporary; Whelpton, P. K.*

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