

SIMON KUZNETS (1901-1985).

Economist, statistician, demographer, and economic historian. Born in Pinsk, Russia, Kuznets was educated in Kharkov, and headed a section of the bureau of labor statistics there under the Soviet government before emigrating to the United States at the age of twenty-one. He took up studies at Columbia University, receiving his B.A. in 1923, M.A. in 1924, and Ph.D. in 1926. In 1927 he became a member of the research staff of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) where he conducted his seminal work on the estimation of national income. Both at Columbia and the NBER, he was strongly influenced by his mentor, economist Wesley C. Mitchell. Although he remained an active member of the NBER until 1960, from the 1950s onward the primary base for Kuznets' research was the Committee on Economic Growth of the Social Science Research Council, where he spearheaded an international program on the comparative study of economic growth. Kuznets held faculty appointments at the University of Pennsylvania (1930-1954), Johns Hopkins University (1954-1960), and Harvard University (1960-1971). He served the United States government as a consultant on national income estimation, chiefly in the 1930s, and associate director of the Bureau of Planning and Statistics, War Production Board, 1942-44. He was president of the American Economic Association (1954), American Statistical Association (1949), and was the third recipient of the Nobel prize in economics (1971) for his work on the comparative study of economic growth.

Kuznets' best-known contributions to population fall under three main heads: (1) measurement of population change, (2) analysis of interrelations between long swings in population growth and economic activity(Kuznets cycles), and (3) analysis of the long term effect of population growth on economic growth.

Kuznets contributed to the development of new demographic data for the United States. His NBER Occasional Paper with Ernest Rubin gives estimates of net immigration by decade, 1870-1940, and of the foreign born white population by sex, annually, 1870-1939 (Kuznets and Rubin, 1954). In 1951, Kuznets initiated with demographer and sociologist Dorothy S. Thomas a study of population redistribution and economic growth (Kuznets and Thomas, 1957, 1960b, 1964). Under their joint direction, this work developed benchmark estimates of state internal migration (by Everett S. Lee), labor force (by Ann R. Miller and Carol Brainerd), and state income and manufacturing activity (by Richard A. Easterlin).

This work demonstrated conclusively that between 1870 and 1950 both international and internal migration in the United States fluctuate markedly over roughly twenty year periods. Kuznets had earlier identified similar long swings in economic time series (Kuznets, 1930). In a major paper, Kuznets (1958) brought together these two strands of work pointing out a possible causal mechanism in which a swing in the growth rate of consumer goods output induced a corresponding movement in migration and this, in turn, caused a swing in population-sensitive capital formation (see also Kuznets 1961). An outgrowth of this research on what came to be called Kuznets cycles was an NBER study of long swings in population and economic growth (Abramovitz 1959, 1961, Easterlin 1968, 2000).

Demographers typically stress the adverse effects of population growth on economic growth. Kuznets adopted a more questioning stance. Based on evidence for 63 developed and developing countries from the early 1950s to 1964, he concluded that there was little empirical association between growth rates of population and output per capita, especially within the developing country bloc (Kuznets 1967, 1973). Kuznets saw the basic obstacles

to economic growth as arising from delays in adjusting social and political institutions, and viewed population growth, though an impediment, as of secondary importance (*ibid.*, p. 39). For developed countries he was even more skeptical of the adverse effect of population growth, and argued that more rapid population growth might promote economic development via a positive impact on the state of knowledge, the crucial factor underlying modern economic growth (Kuznets 1960a, pp. 328-30). This, along with Kuznets' empirical results, stimulated Julian Simon's assault on the premise of mainstream demography that population growth inevitably hinders economic development (Simon, 1977, 1996, 2000).

Most comparisons of the economic well-being of rich and poor use the distribution of income among families or households. But rich and poor families differ in size and age composition, and a meaningful comparison of economic welfare needs to allow for such differences. Beyond this, there is the question of how differences in mortality and fertility among income classes affect and are affected by the size distribution of income. These issues became the primary focus of Kuznets' research following his retirement from Harvard in 1971 (Kuznets 1979, 1980, 1989). This strand of Kuznets' work in demography has yet to be fully followed up.

In the discipline of economics, where theory reigns supreme, Kuznets, though himself an original and creative thinker, was notable for his insistence on careful measurement and a respect for facts. In this regard he was, at heart, a demographer.

Richard A. Easterlin

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