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Volume Author/Editor: Richard A. Easterlin

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Chapter Author: Richard A. Easterlin

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6. Finally, there are the characteristics of the baby boom itself. A recent study [16] has shown that a major factor in the boom has been the significant decline since 1940 in age at marriage. From 1890 to 1940, age at marriage drifted irregularly downward, the decline in the median for all females amounting to only one-half year. In the next decade, a period one-fifth as long, the reduction was twice as great [55, Series A-229]. In addition, wives have had children much sooner after marriage. These two factors, earlier marriage and earlier childbearing, rather than mothers having substantially more children, accounted for most of the rise in the fertility rate through 1954 [16, pp. 365-71].<sup>30</sup> The central role of young families in the baby boom is obvious. It would be difficult indeed to account for this unless their income and employment experience had been exceptionally good.

### III. *Conclusions and Possible Implications*

The most striking feature of the baby boom—and thus the one calling most urgently for explanation—is the apparent abrupt break with historical experience. However, reconciliation of present and past becomes easier when one recognizes that even before the 'forties the historical record was characterized by fluctuations of significant magnitude and duration, and that the record for the total white population is a composite of the varying experience of several component groups, subject in part to quite different influences. Major swings in agricultural conditions, on the one hand, and Kuznets cycles in nonagricultural activity with accompanying immigration fluctuations, on the other—each with their peculiar historical timing—gave rise to distinctive fertility responses on the part of the rural white, foreign-born white, and urban native white populations. When one unravels these differing strands of experience and considers their underlying influences, the impression emerges that the recent fertility behavior of the urban native white population, the group of central significance for explanation of the baby boom, is not as inconsistent with its earlier character as was heretofore believed. In the first three decades of the

<sup>30</sup> The draft law policy of deferring fathers doubtless encouraged earlier marriage and childbearing, but without an income situation that favored expansion of the family beyond the first child, it is doubtful that it could have produced a baby boom of the type experienced.

There is now reliable evidence that the average number of children per mother has also risen in the postwar period. This development is of course consistent with the analysis presented here. The longer the exceptional labor market situation prevails, the more likely the fertility response will take this form in addition to earlier marriage and earlier childbearing.

century, the fertility of this group, instead of exhibiting a declining trend, showed reasonable stability. And in the recent period the effect on the labor market of a Kuznets-cycle expansion—an expansion stronger, according to our data, than any preceding ones considered here—was for the first time not accompanied by an offsetting rise in the rate of labor-market entry due to a significant increase in either immigration or the native-born population in young working ages. The unprecedented concurrence of these three circumstances—a Kuznets-cycle expansion in the economy, restricted immigration, and a low rate of labor-force entry from the native population resulting from demographic processes—created an exceptional job market for those in family-building ages and as a result drastically accelerated the founding of families.<sup>31</sup> This process was further abetted by a concurrent boom in agricultural conditions, which evoked a similar fertility response on the part of the rural white population.

In conclusion, some of the implications of the preceding analysis for the past and future may be set forth, as long as it is recognized that these remarks are largely speculative and offered primarily in the hope of stimulating further inquiry.

With regard to the past, it was noted earlier in the discussion that while Kuznets cycles in the rate of population growth are not a new

<sup>31</sup> With regard to the causes of the exceptional labor market for young persons in the 'forties and 'fifties, W. Lee Hansen has brought to the writer's attention that the present paper emphasizes quantitative scarcity to the exclusion of relative quality. The following figures on median school years completed by young and middle-aged males at various dates may partially right the balance:

Age at Specified Date	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970 (projected)
(1) 25-29	8.4	8.7	10.1	12.0	12.3	12.5
(2) 45-54	8.1	8.2	8.4	8.7	10.0	12.0
(3) (1)-(2)	0.3	0.5	1.7	3.3	2.3	0.5

Note the immense gain in the educational advantage of young over middle-aged workers in the 'forties, a change which sharply improved their competitive position at just the time that labor demand was booming. The timing is fortuitous, stemming from the abrupt advance in the diffusion of high-school education that occurred in the 'twenties and especially the 'thirties. (The figures are from [50, pp. 236, 238] and [52, pp. 6-7]. The 1920 and 1930 values were assumed the same as those reported by the corresponding cohorts in 1940, the first time that data on educational attainment were collected.)

The sequence of change in the educational differentials calls to mind the recent pronounced convergence in income distribution by size. One wonders to what extent the change in the size distribution in the past forty years may reflect changing income differentials by age associated with variations in both the relative number and quality of young workers.

phenomenon in our history, the shift in the source of these movements from immigration to fertility raises a question whether the recent cycle bears any logical connection to its predecessors. The implication of the present analysis is that indeed such a connection does exist. As long as we permitted free immigration, the rise and fall of immigration in response to swings in labor demand associated with Kuznets cycles in this country acted as a buffer to moderate the impact on the urban native white population. With the restriction of immigration, however, the urban native white population felt the impact of a Kuznets-cycle swing in labor demand with unprecedented force, and the result was an unparalleled response in fertility and thus again in the rate of population growth.

As for prediction of the shorter-term future, say, the decade of the 'sixties, the principal lesson of the analysis is the need for a detailed comparative study of the recent and prospective labor-market experience of those in family-building ages. The indirect indicators used here for inferring the labor-market conditions encountered by the young urban white population, so far as they are relevant, suggest one striking contrast with the recent past. The change in the rate of entry into the labor market (as gauged by predictions for the total male population aged 20-29), which has held remarkably steady in recent decades, will rise abruptly in a way unfavorable to continuation of the present rate of change of fertility, reflecting of course the upturn in the birth rate some twenty years ago. Indeed the prospective rise is unprecedented in the seven decades of experience covered here. Assuming no significant alteration in the rate of change of the unemployment rate—in other words, continuation of a reasonably high-level employment situation—a relative weakening in the exceptional labor market condition enjoyed by young persons in the recent past is implied, and a consequent adverse response in the fertility rate (though not necessarily in the *number* of births).<sup>32</sup>

The historical analogue which suggests itself is the movement from 1915-19 to 1925-29, when with little change in the percentage unemployed a rise in the rate of labor market entry from around -2 to +8 per cent was accompanied by a fertility decline of 6 per cent (App. Table A-8). In the prospective situation, the rise in the rate of entry will be from around -2 to +20 per cent. However, a potentially significant offsetting compositional change will be the abrupt rise in the proportion of women of reproductive age in the more fertile ages, 20-29. After a fairly steady downward drift over the past half-century,

<sup>32</sup> As the preceding footnote shows, the educational advantage of young over older workers will also change sharply in the 1960's in a direction unfavorable to continuation of the exceptional situation of the young.

this proportion (as projected for all classes of the population) will rise from a low or around 38 per cent in 1960 to about 50 per cent by 1975 [53, No. 187 (Nov. 10, 1958)]. To a significant extent, this change is of course the female counterpart of the rise in the rate of labor-market entry for males.

It is quite possible that our indicators may be inadequate for inferring the prospective labor-market experience of young persons; or conceivably there may be new compensating factors, such as a shift in composition of labor demand especially favorable to the young or a general acceleration in the rate of growth of the economy. Since 1957 there has been a slight decline in the fertility level, but it is as yet uncertain whether this may only be temporary [68, pp. 2-3]. In any event a detailed study of the labor market for young persons, past and prospective, is clearly needed.

The implications of the present analysis for the longer-term future of fertility change are in contrast with that likely to be suggested by the typical demographic discussion of our fertility history. Assuming a possible reduction in fertility in the 'sixties, the customary emphasis of demographers on the long-term secular decline in the past would suggest a view of this as a resumption of the primary trend.<sup>33</sup> The interpretation suggested by the present analysis, however, would be that for the group whose experience is of central significance for the future, the urban native white population, the nature of the primary trend in this century—whether upward or downward—is not readily apparent, and conceivably the recent behavior of this group may be explained at least in part in terms of the Kuznets-cycle conception of time-series change. If this is correct, and assuming continuation into the longer-term future of a reasonably high-level-employment economy, one might imagine a more or less self-generating mechanism, by which in one period a decline in the rate of labor-market entry causes a concurrent rise in the rate of change of fertility, and this in turn leads, with a lag of around two decades, to a rise in the rate of labor-market entry and a consequent decline in the rate of change of fertility. But this is just one hypothetical possibility. The fundamental point is that substantial fertility variation, up or down, may occur over the longer run.

<sup>33</sup> Clearly the present analysis suggests that a re-examination of the primary trend itself in terms of the differing patterns of the groups distinguished here might prove fruitful.