

Book reviews

Human Development Report 1993: *People's Participation*, by United Nations Development Programme. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 230 pages. Pb US\$ 17.95

With a theme of 'People's participation' this is the fourth volume in a series of annual *Human Development Reports* produced by the United Nations Development Programme. Previous volumes have had the themes: 'Concept and measurement of human development' (1990), 'Financing human development' (1991), and 'Global dimensions of human development' (1992). These reports consistently define 'human development' as 'a process of enlarging people's choices'. The target audiences of the reports appears to be national politicians, government officials, academics, and interest groups who can influence the course of economic, political, legal and social changes within nation-states.

The present volume explicitly acknowledges the recent collapse of socialist regimes and the need for building democratic, free enterprise, and civil society institutions – hence the focus on 'people's participation'. It sees dangers (anarchy, ethnic violence, social disintegration) as arising from the clash of the irresistible urge for participation with inflexible systems. The *Report* notes the disturbing recent pattern of jobless economic growth. It argues for new concepts of security that stress the security of people (not only of nations), for humane markets (that serve people instead of people serving markets), and for international cooperation as well as the decentralization of governmental functions from national to local levels. Poverty and marginalized groups (ethnic or otherwise) anywhere are seen as a threat to prosperity everywhere.

Chapter topics follow from these principles. After an overview of cross-national comparative trends in quantitative indices of human development (more about this below) in Chapter 1, the second chapter discusses the participation of people in economic, social, cultural, and political processes that affect their lives – especially excluded groups (the poor, women, minorities and indigenous peoples, rural residents, the disabled, poor nations) and obstacles to participation (legal systems, bureaucratic constraints, social norms, maldistribution of assets). Subsequent chapters then focus on participation in specific institutional contexts: economic markets in Chapter 3, politics and governance in Chapter 4, and civil society (particularly the role of non-governmental organizations) in Chapter 5. A lengthy appendix contains over 50 tables of quantitative 'human development indicators' for each of 173 nations for various recent decennial periods, with subjects ranging from

demographics to economic production and employment to food production and health services.

The substructure for much of the *Report's* narrative is the Human Development Index (HDI), an initial version of which was first published in the 1990 volume in this series. Since that initial publication, the HDI has been subjected to a lot of attention and criticism by academics and the media (print and visual). Partly in response to this, the HDI has been revised – the present *Report* contains a lengthy Technical Note describing the calculation procedures for the HDI and how revisions and further analyses of the Index have responded to previous criticisms.

The HDI is based on the premise that, at all levels of development, the three essential choices that must be available are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Combined with the objective of constructing a quantitative index that can be used to rank all nations with respect to human development, it follows very naturally from this definition that the HDI contains three components: life expectancy in years at birth (the sole unadjusted indicator), a diminishing returns function of income (GDP per capita), and an educational achievement indicator that combines national literacy levels (weighted two-thirds) and mean years of schooling (weighted one-third). These indicators are combined in a formula that ranks countries relative to each other for a recent year (usually 1990) from those with the highest levels (receiving a score near one) to those with the lowest levels (receiving a score greater than zero but often substantially less than one). The *Report* contains many variations on these rankings, including separate rankings for developed and developing countries, gender-disparity-adjusted rankings (to capture differences with respect to treatment of the sexes), income-distribution-adjusted rankings (to take into account great income disparities within countries), and changes in the HDI from 1970 to 1990.

Space limitations prevent extended commentary on the HDI. Suffice it to say first that, despite arguments to the contrary in the *Report* (p. 104), the HDI perhaps is best interpreted as sort of an index of the lifetime utility of consumption for consumers in a literate society. It follows that there are many social conditions in contemporary societies, indeed many aspects of 'human development', for which the HDI is not an adequate measure. Second, much criticism of the HDI fails to recognize that what drives the construction of the Index most strongly is the need to provide comparative ranks of all nations or at least for as many as have the necessary data. Because of this, it will be virtually impossible to adjust *this index* of human development to yield more refined rankings of nations within certain subsets of the overall rankings. For instance, as the *Report* mentions (p. 111), rich societies recently have had to cope with a number of adverse developments such as drug addiction, crime, and family breakdown. Yet, to 'zoom' in for a more refined scaling or differentiation of these countries by modifying the HDI to incorporate measures of these problems would work against the

objective of providing a single universal index of what the *Report* regards as the essential prerequisites to human development. Thus, to produce comparative rankings of nations for other objectives would appear to require different indexes rather than modifications of the HDI.

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America's Children: Resources from Family, Government and the Economy, by Donald J. Hernandez. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1993, 480 pages. HB US\$ 49.95

One of the important innovations associated with the 1930 Census of Population in the United States was the initiation of a series of monographs to document the picture of American life as revealed by the census. This tradition has extended into the present, with an important series of monographs documenting 'The Population of the United States in the 1980s'. *America's Children* is the latest volume in this valuable series.

In documenting the demography of childhood, *America's Children* represents the finest tradition of the census monograph series. Donald Hernandez has utilized the methodological tools of demography and the vast data resources of the United States census to glean important perspectives on American childhood. A central feature of the book is the use of many previous censuses to document ways in which the worlds of American children have changed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While this monograph relies primarily on census data, it also draws upon a wide range of other data and analyses about children and their families.

The central theme of this monograph is social transformation, and the book does a masterful job of documenting some of the fundamental changes that have occurred in the social ecology of childhood. The book documents important changes in the number of siblings, the presence of parents and grandparents in the household, the nature of the family economy, childcare arrangements, education, and the amount and distribution of economic resources. Particularly pleasing to this reviewer are the numerous graphs that powerfully depict and summarize the essence of several fundamental transformations in the essence of American childhood.

By taking a long-range historical perspective *America's Children* is able to include important features of family change that are frequently missed in historical works with shorter time horizons. For example, Hernandez documents two transformations of the family economy in American history. Up through the first half of the nineteenth century the family economy was organized around family farms and businesses where husbands, wives, and children all participated in breadwinning and homemaking activities. Of particular importance was that mothers had dual careers of both homemaking

and breadwinning. This mode of production was transformed by the industrial revolution so fathers became breadwinners outside the home and mothers focused their energies more exclusively on homemaking. Their breadwinner-homemaker division of labor itself has been transformed recently as mothers have in great numbers returned to dual careers by combining homemaking with paid employment outside the home.

Hernandez also documents two child care revolutions. The first transformation of child care occurred with the expansion of educational institutions. Increasingly large numbers of children left the parental home to be supervised, cared for, and taught in educational institutions for substantial fractions of the day. The second child care revolution occurred in the last few decades with the expansion of maternal employment away from the home and the involvement of people outside the family in the care of young children.

Other important transformations in childhood documented by Hernandez include the decline in childbearing, the decline in family dissolution caused by mortality, and the rise in divorce. Also of central importance was the expansion in the absolute standard of living experienced by children. Furthermore, this income growth was accompanied by increases in economic equality during the 1940s and 1950s, whereas economic equality declined during the 1970s and 1980s. Hernandez discusses both the causes and consequences of these changes in American childhood.

By providing this wide-ranging long-term view of childhood in America, Hernandez has contributed a valuable service to everyone interested in the well-being of children. *America's Children* will become a standard reference work concerning the changing environments in which our children live. The book will, thus, help to guide both future scholarly analyses and the continuing debate about how we raise our children.

Arland Thornton
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The Master Trend: How the Baby Boom Generation is Remaking America, by Cheryl Russell. New York: Plenum Press, 1993, 274 pages. HB US\$ 23.95

The author of this volume is heralded on the dust jacket as 'one of the nation's top demographers', but this is not a book for other demographers. Rather, the author notes, it is for parents, workers, employers, reporters, businesses, and politicians. In short, it is intended for a lay audience and should be judged by criteria other than those applied to works intended for the demographic profession.

The 'master trend' referred to in the title is an epidemic of a particularly virulent form of individualism that has transformed baby boomers and their children into FREE AGENTS. Despite the subtitle, the relation of the baby boom to the master trend appears more coincidental than causal.

First diagnosed among professional athletes seeking to negotiate their own contracts, free agentism was quickly identified as a malignant social disease infecting millions of other Americans. No direct measures of the prevalence of the malady are provided, but the author claims that 'most Americans under the age of 50 are free agents negotiating their way through life' (p. 22). The baby boom, we are told 'is the first generation of free agents – the first to see and relate to the world as individuals rather than as family or community members' (p. 33).

Free agents, motivated by self-interest, are responsible for many of the nation's ills, including high divorce and low savings rates, broken and impoverished families headed by single parents, addiction to television, job dissatisfaction, the reemergence of racism, the breakdown of community organization and the election of Clinton – the first free agent President of the United States. Most of the book's numerous but short chapters detail these and other social problems for which free agents are responsible.

The recognition of individualism as an American social trait is not new, of course. Early in the 19th Century it was discussed at some length by Alexis de Toqueville (whom the author cites) in his *Democracy in America* and was promoted by Emerson in his famous essay on self-reliance. What is different here, we are led to believe, is the mutation of individualism into a socially destructive free agent type that has infected baby boomers.

What brought about the transformation of productive 19th Century rugged individuals into the self-indulgent free agents of the baby boom generation? If we are to believe the author, it was *Dr Spock's Baby and Child Care*, which corrupted the parents of the baby boom by emphasizing the raising of children to be independent (p. 34). The attribution of such influence to Dr Spock seems rather odd coming from the author who has earlier asserted (p. 28) that the social norms and values people learn in childhood shape them for life. This principle is invoked to explain how baby boomers have transmitted the free agent disease to their children, but apparently it did not apply to their Spock-seduced parents.

Logical consistency is not one of the book's strong points, and statistics are often selectively presented to bolster the author's arguments. Banalities abound ('the middle aged spend money differently from young adults', p. 68) while other pronouncements are quite startling ('Childbearing is no longer linked to marriage or pregnancy. It is also becoming separate from sex', p. 125). In aggregate, such statements undermine confidence in the author's themes.

One would suppose that after thirty chapters of decrying the social pathology of free agents, the author would call for eradication of the dread disease. But not so. Instead having forgotten about Dr Spock, she declares in the final chapter that it is impossible to stop or even significantly alter the direction of society's revolution (p. 215). Instead, 'the nation's leaders must develop a workable system of rewards and punishments that will harness the self-interests of free agents and move society forward' (p. 228). Before

accepting the gratuitous counsel of the author, herself a baby boomer, though, national leaders might heed her own warning: 'It is fruitless to pretend that free agents are altruistic when they are primarily concerned with their own well-being' (p. 228).

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