

Weeks Population

Dr. John Weeks' official demographic blog - just the latest post!

This blog is intended to go along with [Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues](#), by **John R. Weeks**, published by Cengage Learning. The latest edition is the 12th (it came out in 2015), but this blog is meant to complement any edition of the book by showing the way in which demographic issues are regularly in the news.

If you are a user of my textbook and would like to suggest a blog post idea, please email me at: john.weeks@sdsu.edu

About Me

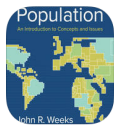


John Weeks

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The app provides learning objectives and main points for each chapter, along with a quick POPquiz to test knowledge about key population information, and there is also a link to the WeeksPopulation blog.

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Wednesday, June 3, 2015

The New York Times Gets it Wrong in a Story About the Population Explosion

A gang email today from John Seager, President of the [Population Connection](#) in Washington, DC, pointed me to a Retro Report that appeared in the New York Times a couple of days ago titled "[The Unrealized Horrors of Population Explosion](#)." The report has a video component (almost 15 minutes) and some accompanying text. The main point of the story is to suggest that Paul Ehrlich was wrong about the population explosion. Famine has not hit and England still exists! Now, keep in mind that that Population Connection is the organization that started out--with encouragement from Paul Ehrlich--as Zero Population Growth, so an attack on Ehrlich is easily seen as being very personal. But, in fact, this was a very one-sided and generally wrong-headed story.

It is true, as the story notes, that Ehrlich came at the population issue as a biologist, not as a social scientist. Indeed, I was in graduate school in the Department of Geography at Berkeley when the Population Bomb came out and Ehrlich was invited over from Stanford to meet with us and give us his perspective. He was then, and still is, a bit more of a sensationalist than the rest of us, but there can be no doubt that he helped to build popular support for many of the efforts already underway at the time to lower fertility, lower mortality, and increase food production. Furthermore, Ehrlich was not in favor of a disastrous future. He was then, and still is, trying to avoid that scenario. To deride a person for calling out a problem that then is attenuated after he called it out is simply not right.

Anyone who reads this blog and/or reads my book knows that in my view we have a whole range of serious demographically related issues that confront the world. The relationship between food and numbers of people that Ehrlich emphasizes (taking a page or two from Malthus) is the most dire concern in the long term, but not necessarily the most important on a day-to-day basis. And I was very pleased to see that the vast majority of comments that I read about this article expressed that same view. Readers seemed to be dismayed that the NYTimes would publish such a decidedly shallow and biased piece of work on such an important issue. It actually seemed to be less a piece of journalism than an opinion article prompted by a disaffected former student of Ehrlich's--Stewart Brand (of Whole Earth Catalog fame)--who no longer seems to share Ehrlich's view of the world. The story is also contaminated by an intimation that Fred Pearce, a British science writer, is suggesting that the world needs a higher birth rate. This latter message seems to be the note on which the video ends, but I don't think that Pearce would necessarily agree, as [I commented about him](#) a few years ago.

In all events, we expect more of the New York Times and I was glad at least that most people commenting on the story called them out on that score.

Posted by [John Weeks](#) at 10:13 PM

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1 comment:



Duane Alexander Miller June 4, 2015 at 6:23 AM

I'm wondering if there is a comparative chart that shows how rapidly countries are aging. Thanks.

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