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W.W. Rostow. *The Great Population Spike and After: Reflections on the 21st Century.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. x + 228 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-511691-5.

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The approaching millennium seems to have reminded academic historians, or at least their publishers, that there is a future. The genre is welcome even if the intellectual content is often low; Barnes and Noble sells far worse than the musings of someone who has thought hard about the past two hundred years and who wants to speculate about the next hundred. This book is an example of such musings. The first part of the title suggests a focus on the single issue of population, but the subtitle is more important. The nine chapters of this book are a set of reflections on three issues that Rostow thinks will be important in the next century. The first is the world-wide slowdown in the rate of population growth. The second is the limited role of the United States in a post-Cold War world. And the third is the state of the inner cities in the U.S. Rostow introduces the volume as "an extended essay on the 21st century" (p. vii). The connection among these three themes appears to be that they will all be important issues in the 21st century. But it might be more accurate to say that Rostow is primarily concerned with the power and influence of the United States in the coming century. The deeper connection among these three themes is the way they bear on that power.

This book has some interesting, if not novel, contributions and a wealth of semi-biographical anecdotes that will make it of some interest to scholars studying the intellectual currents of our time, or perhaps the careers of academics who had the unusual career path of someone like Rostow. Unfortunately, to get at these nuggets the reader must wade through far too much restatement of material that has already appeared elsewhere. Foremost among this unneeded restatement is Rostow's famous (or infamous) stages theory of economic growth. Little here requires the repetition of this argument, but (another) statement of the argument occupies a long section of the book. A brief appendix suggests how seriously Rostow still takes it; he as much as suggests that a correct understanding of the stages model can help us to predict the experience of the period 1997-2025. Slightly less frustrating is Rostow's long digression on the intellectual history of the limits to growth. This is a condensed paraphrase of his *Theorists of Economic Growth* (New York, 1990), and readers who are interested in Rostow's views on Malthus, Keynes, and others would more naturally turn to the book-length discussion.

The actual arguments of the present book are not without interest, even if they are hardly original. On population Rostow presents what must be called a surprisingly balanced, informed view. His title signals that he has grasped a fact that still eludes many alarmists: rapid population growth today is confined to only a few regions of the world. Rather than the global population catastrophe feared three decades ago, we seem headed for a maximum population of about 10 billion people, and in some regions population has already began to decline in size. He also devotes some discussion to the serious problems that population growth may still cause in our world, including environmental degradation and social strains caused by the inability of some societies to provide sufficient economic and social opportunities for their population. Rostow deserves credit for a sensible and balanced approach to this issue. In the world of policy-oriented discussions of population, most writings are little more than dogmatic restatements of the basic positions of either Paul Ehrlich ("the sky is falling") or Julian Simon ("the more people the better").

The stress on population growth here invites comparison to Paul Kennedy's *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 1993) both in its general theme and in its (partial) stress on population and population problems. Rostow and Kennedy both note that population growth rates accelerated sharply in Europe during the eighteenth century, and in much of the non-European world after World War II. The earth now has a population of some six billion people, compared to just one

billion only two centuries ago. Rostow and Kennedy agree that these population developments set the stage for the twenty-first century, and in many ways define or exacerbate the problems human societies will face. But the two authors conceive of population trends in very different ways. Rostow stresses the prediction of stabilization and the hint of decline. His title, with its "spike," suggests that this largest population of ten billion people will be just that–a spike, perhaps with important, long-term consequences, but not the long-term fate of the world in itself. Rostow sees strains in the next few decades, during which population growth will continue in several societies ill-equipped to handle its consequences, but his argument is couched in terms on a passing danger. Kennedy, on the other hand, is more pessimistic in his assessment of both population trends and their impact on future social problems. Part of his pessimism stems from a greater stress on regional problems and the multi-lateral problems posed by huge disparities in wealth. Rostow acknowledges these problems but minimizes them as amenable to wise statesmanship and perhaps a bit of good luck. And part of Kennedy's pessimism doubtless reflects his greater stress on environmental problems, problems which have replaced Malthusian gloom-and-doom accounts among those who point to the negative consequences of population growth.

A second theme in *The Great Population Spike* takes us back to the role for which Rostow is best known, foreign policy. Here he draws a distinction between the U.S. as a "superpower" (which it no longer is, he argues) and the U.S. as the "critical margin." This distinction turns on the observation that the United States no longer has the power to act unilaterally, and so must build coalitions of nations to achieve its goals, and on the related observation that few international efforts in our day can succeed without the active participation of the U.S. What Rostow calls the critical margin is of course not new; to take one relevant example, many observers argue that the Gulf War was a true coalition effort, while the Vietnam War was not, and that it is Gulf Wars the United States will conduct in the post-Cold War world. This discussion is the best example of a habit that is the book's strongest and weakest point: Rostow is very inconsistent about citing other, relevant works on his subject, and often the most recent works cited are several decades old. Consider Chapter Seven, which outlines and elaborates on this idea of "the critical margin." This chapter includes precious few references to the works of international relations theorists and the other academics whose business it is to think about such matters. At the very least, given his career, the reader expects Rostow to contrast his views with those of a Henry Kissinger or someone else who experienced the limitations of super power first-hand. Failure to cite much academic literature from international relations theory might be a good thing, as anyone who has tried to read through that morass of Great Powers, Hegemons, and Spheres of Influence probably knows, but it is difficult for the reader to understand how Rostow's views differ from anyone else's because he does not tell us what others think. Perhaps Rostow deserves some credit for restraint; unlike Kissinger, whose memoirs include a great deal of vicious score-settling, Rostow seems content not to draw sharp contrasts between himself and people who have often been his harsh critics.

The most novel part of the book is also the most puzzling. By his account, Rostow has spent the past decade engaged in a project that studies and advocates preventative measures to deal with the many and considerable problems facing inner cities in the United States. The reasons for this are somewhat unusual (Rostow is concerned that urban problems will distract American interest and resources from its responsibilities as a global power), and even more unusual is someone of Rostow's political and intellectual leanings arguing that inner-city problems are an entirely predictable response to the collapse of economic opportunity for many residents. Consider the following statement, which summarizes Rostow's view of the etiology of inner-city problems:

A powerful converging set of economic and technological forces sharply raised the level of unemployment in the inner city and simultaneously reduced in the minds of young men and women future prospects for good jobs. This perceived narrowing of realistic options led many young people to accept life on the streets. (p. 167)

William Julius Wilson would presumably agree. Rostow, to be sure, later blames the "neocolonial" welfare system for exacerbating these problems, but Wilson would agree with some form of that argument as well. The remainder of this section has most of the virtues and faults of the earlier parts of the book. Rostow clearly cares deeply about this issue, and links it to his overarching theme (which remains the ability of the U.S. to influence events around the world). But very little other work on urban poverty or other urban problems is mentioned, and it is not clear how much Rostow has done to learn from the enormous, relevant literatures in economics, sociology, and other disciplines.

In the end, this book is not the place to go for a mono-

graphic treatment of any of its themes, nor does it provide a useful introduction to current research in any of the areas it covers. Much of it consists of repetitions of material and arguments Rostow has published elsewhere. The book is quirky, uneven and not very scholarly, and its author seems to presume that few other scholars are writing anything worth reading. Yet the book will be of use to some, primarily because of the role its author has played in intellectual and policy circles over the past fifty-plus years. Free-form musings such as those contained here tell usually tell us more about their author than the future, and the author here is of considerable interest.

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