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## Review of A Portrait of America: The Demographic Perspective, by John Iceland.

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restaurateurs, commercial farmers, industrialists, and construction firm owners. To a significant extent, they have displaced the traditional Lebanese, South Asian, and European entrepreneurs who once filled the middle ranks of African commercial enterprise. One of the points of interest is that a disproportionate number of these new migrants—many of whom have no intention of returning to China—belong to the generation that came of age during or in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Many of French's interviewees, even the most successful, started with no education whatsoever. Why have they come to Africa? The common story seems to be the Three C's—congestion, competition, and corruption—that made it hard to get ahead in China. Kinship ties and social networks ensured that what began as a trickle, especially from selected provinces such as Fujian and Henan, became a steady flow.

The vignettes that French presents are depressing. The Chinese, he finds, by and large detest the Africans and exploit them through low pay and unsafe, even abusive, work conditions. National labor standards are flouted. The Africans know they are getting a raw deal and dislike the Chinese in return. But the easy money and abundant opportunities for migrants are gone: the early birds who have become rich say that newcomers do not have a chance.

This book is business-lounge reading, not a piece of serious economic or social analysis. That is no fatal indictment, but the author makes a few regrettable mistakes. First, he does the reader a disservice by referring to continued rapid population growth over the next 40 years as Africa's "demographic dividend." The commercial promise of Africa, he states, is the robust market represented by its burgeoning population. That could be, but many economists and demographers have a very different view of the consequences of African population trends. As uncritically optimistic as he is on African population, he is uncritically pessimistic on natural resources. He is in thrall to proven reserves of non-renewable resources, a scarcity measure treated with the greatest suspicion by resource economists. There is no meaningful discussion of the curse of natural resources: that having them in abundance might be bad for countries in the near term, while gradually running out in an orderly fashion might be good for them in the long run. All in all, the economics in this book are weak.

The book is enjoyable, nonetheless. The reader can take vicarious pleasure from French's lively accounts of his travels. On a more serious note, Ebola and terrorism aside, recent years have been good for Africa, with solid democratic progress and solid economic growth and reform. This is an excellent time for a serious analysis of Africa's demographic and economic future. While this book does not address that need, it provides an entertaining and informative treatment of an interesting aspect of it.—L.MacK.

JOHN ICELAND

*A Portrait of America: The Demographic Perspective*

Oakland: University of California Press, 2014. 296 p. \$32.95 (pbk.).

In the last 60 years American society has undergone major transformations in family life, gender relations, class structure, immigration trends, ethnic and racial relations, regional and neighborhood settlement patterns, and health conditions.

In Chapters 2 through 8 John Iceland, a professor of sociology and demography at Pennsylvania State University, offers concise treatments of each of these areas of change. His analyses are consistently sophisticated, authoritative, and, where a topic is controversial, even-handed. Each chapter begins with a brief overview of historical change from Colonial times to the present, proceeds to a detailed examination of the changes taking place since the mid-twentieth century, and ends with a brief comparison of American trends to those occurring in other developed societies. In Chapter 1, Iceland deals with the growth of the US population, succinctly detailing how mortality, fertility, and immigration trends propelled a population of 3.9 million in 1790 to become one of 309 million in 2010. In his brief conclusion the author largely avoids specific predictions about America's demographic future other than to express optimism that existing racial/ethnic and gender gaps will continue to narrow. He makes extensive use of quotes from journalists, politicians, and others to outline the contrasting sides of contemporary policy debates concerning immigration, racial and ethnic inequities, the widening gap between the rich and poor, and recent family changes. His ability to marshal empirical evidence to address the validity of each side's debating points enhances this volume's pedagogical usefulness. He does, however, avoid some of the most divisive policy debates of the last 50 years, such as those related to unwanted pregnancies, abortion, and sex education.—D.H.

#### INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE

##### *Environmental Decisions in the Face of Uncertainty*

Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2013. 258 p. \$51.00 (pbk.).

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the lead governmental organization responsible for protecting Americans against significant risks to human health originating in the environment. As part of that mission the EPA undertakes extensive studies to estimate environmental hazards, to identify potential measures to reduce these risks, and to support the issuing of appropriate environmental regulations to protect health in accordance with relevant laws. Since its creation in the early 1970s many of the EPA's actions have been controversial even though they are widely considered effective and often essential. One of the main reasons for controversy is that considerable uncertainty surrounds the impact of environmental hazards and the benefits and costs of regulation.

Over the years the EPA has requested a number of reports from the National Academies of Sciences to provide independent science-based advice on critical issues. The present report is one of the latest examples and is prepared by a committee of experts (appointed by the National Academies' Institute of Medicine) in the fields of risk assessment, public health, health economics, decision analysis, public policy, risk communication, and environmental and public health law. The long span between the first committee meeting in 2007 and the 2013 publication of the report reflects the difficulty of reaching a consensus among members with a wide range of perspectives and backgrounds. The report starts by briefly examining how uncertainty has affected past EPA decisions, using several case studies. Next, economic, technological, social, and political factors that play (or should play) a role in the EPA's regulatory decisions are reviewed. Later chapters present a framework for incorporating uncer-