

THOMAS, DOROTHY SWAINE (1899-1977).

Demographer, sociologist. Thomas was born in Baltimore, Maryland and educated at Barnard College (B.A. 1922) and the University of London School of Economics (Ph.D. 1924). Her principal mentors were sociologist William F. Ogburn, economist Wesley C. Mitchell, statistician Arthur L. Bowley, and one of the founders of American sociology, W.I. Thomas, whom she married in 1936. Between 1924 and 1948, she held research or academic appointments at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the Social Science Research Council, Columbia University Teachers College, Yale University, the Social Science Institute at the University of Stockholm, and the University of California at Berkeley. In 1948 she became the first woman professor in the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, where she was research professor of sociology. While there she initiated an interdisciplinary doctoral training program in demography and helped found and direct the Population Studies Center. Following her retirement from Pennsylvania in 1970, she continued teaching at Georgetown University for four years. She served on numerous occasions as technical consultant to the United Nations and United States government agencies. She was the first woman elected president of the American Sociological Association (1952), was president of the Population Association of America (1958-59), and received an honorary doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania in 1970 for her influential work in demography.

Throughout her demographic career, two features are evident in Thomas' work – first, the importance of careful measurement, and, second, sensitivity to the interplay between demographic and economic change. In demography her concern with measurement centered primarily on internal migration, the subject that eventually became

her focus. As chair of the Social Science Research Council's Committee on Migration Differentials, she authored a study that set the research agenda of the field for the next several decades (Thomas 1938). Subsequently she co-directed with economist Simon Kuznets the University of Pennsylvania project on population redistribution and economic growth (Thomas, 1957, 1960, 1964). Among other things, this project produced definitive estimates of internal migration in the United States by sex, age, race, nativity, and state of origin and destination, by decade 1870-1950, authored by Everett S. Lee. As chair of the Committee on Internal Migration of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population she collaborated in producing United Nations Manual VI, Methods of Measuring Internal Migration (United Nations, 1970).

Thomas' attention to economic-demographic relationships dates from her doctoral dissertation, Social Aspects of the Business Cycle (Thomas, 1925), which documented statistically the relation of vital rates and other social phenomena to short term business cycles. In her 1941 study, Social and Economic Aspects of Swedish Population Movements, the focus shifted to economic-demographic relations over the long term, again with statistical time series as the basis of analysis (Thomas 1941). Her collaborative project on United States population redistribution and economic growth demonstrated that decade-to-decade swings in United States internal migration were linked to the level of economic activity (Thomas 1964).

Thomas' most famous work, not often cited by demographers, is her co-authored two volume study of the forced evacuation, detention, and resettlement of West Coast Japanese Americans during World War II (Thomas 1946, 1952). Pieced together under difficult circumstances with the aid of graduate student assistants, this work's scientific

objectivity “was vindicated when the Supreme Court accepted her books as unbiased evidence of our crimes against our fellow Americans” (as quoted in Roscoe, 1991, p. 406).

Dorothy Thomas was a remarkably gifted person, capable of making fundamental contributions to whatever subject in demography or sociology that she set her mind to. At a time that professional careers in academia were virtually closed to women, she made a lasting mark, and can justifiably be considered one of the founders of American demography.

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