

algorithms and mathematical formulae, the good boys — the individualistic, irrepressible ciphers and computer nerds — won out over the government snoopers.

Crypto reads like a novel and is a real page-turner, even for someone who doesn't know the first thing about math, algorithms, bits, or bytes.

— Bettina Bien Greaves

An Anti-Malthusian Life —

Julian Simon, who died in 1998, was a remarkably productive and independent-minded economist. He is best known for his brilliant though controversial research in population economics, upon which subject he published several scholarly books, but he also wrote at length on mail-order business, advertising, statistics, and the treatment of depression, among other topics. His work was enlightening, intellectually honest, and (in part the result of that honesty) very politically incorrect.

His work on the effects of population growth, most popularized in his book *The Ultimate Resource*, argued for the view that the planet's resources are not threatened by population growth, indeed, that every aspect of human material wealth will continue to improve indefinitely. This made him an enemy of the environmentalist Left. (Simon's work provoked Bjørn

Lomborg, a Green-oriented statistician, to set out to debunk him — but as Lomborg documents in his book *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, he found Simon's work basically sound.) Simon's work on the economic effects of immigration, which argued for the view that immigration greatly benefits the economy in the long term (however disruptive in the short run), made him an enemy of the anti-immigration Right. And his willingness to investigate issues that went beyond his academic specialty made him an enemy of pedants of all stripes.

In *A Life Against the Grain: The Autobiography of an Unconventional Economist* (Transaction Publishers, 2002, 359 pages), Simon's account of his life is characteristically honest and frank. He grew up in a lower middle-class family in and around Newark, N.J. He was bright at school, though he showed no signs of exceptional genius. He attended Harvard, again doing well but by no means outstandingly, and served in the Navy. After his naval service, he worked his way into advertising. While working in a New York ad agency, he won a fellowship to attend the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, where he earned his Ph.D. After starting and briefly running a small mail-order business, he took a

teaching position at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He started out in the Department of Advertising, but migrated to the College of Commerce. It was there that he first started doing research in demographic economics.

Simon initially supported the dominant Malthusian view that overpopulation is a threat to the world. He wanted to use his skills in marketing to help halt population growth by selling birth control to Third World countries. But his views started to change in 1969 as he studied the data, and by 1972 he held the contrary view: that population growth is beneficial and self-correcting. He published a technical treatise (*The Economics of Population Growth*) refuting alarmist Malthusianism in 1977, and his aforementioned popular treatment in 1981. At that time, he started to examine the issue of whether immigration is an economic threat, which led to the publication in 1989 of his book *The Economic Consequences of Immigration*.

He tells his life story openly, discussing not just his academic and intellectual history, but also his personal life (perhaps a bit too frankly!), including his long battle with depression. This makes for a delightful read, as well as for a good primer on the thinking of a most iconoclastic economist.

— Gary Jason