

Book Review

Immigration Reform and America's Unchosen Future,

By Otis Graham, Jr.

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Reviewed for NPG by:

David Simcox

Dr. Otis Graham, a venerable public historian with an impressive body of work on the eras of the progressive movement and The New Deal, ranks as the nation's premier historian of America's faltering efforts since World War II to rationalize its immigration policy.

Graham has a unique perspective. He has observed, recorded and analyzed the nation's myth-plagued, profit-driven, and often mindless management of mass immigration. He has also been a founder and leader of now formidable citizens' movements to reduce immigration to numbers and content consistent with the overriding national interest in population stability, environmental sanity, and social cohesion. Graham has been a founder and board member of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), the Center for Immigration Studies and Californians for Population Stabilization.

The author traces the origins of the modern immigration reduction movement to the rising concerns in the early 60s over the population growth stemming from the baby boom. As the baby boom ebbed in the early 60s and population stability seemed imminent, Graham was among the first environmentalists to grasp the extent to which rising immigration was replacing natural increase as the new accelerator of U.S. population growth. For him, America's immigration policy, a captive of special interests, was more than offsetting the falling fertility of Americans, in effect moving back the goal post of population stability.

The numbers were clear to Graham and a relative handful of others. But the prevailing response among most populationists was reluctance to deal with immigration or even acknowledge it as a population force. Serious thinkers and policymakers on population, such as William Draper, Stewart Udall, and Paul Ehrlich, won public attention for the global population dilemma, but said little about immigration's potential to defeat population stability in the U.S. Graham cites for courage and foresight environmentalist and NPG activist Anthony Wayne Smith for warning as early as the 1960s in Congressional hearings and elsewhere that swelling immigration would drive U.S. population to unsustainable levels.

The Rockefeller Commission on Population Growth and America's Future received projections that immigration was already providing 25 percent of population growth in the 1970s (it now approaches 70 percent), but showed near paralysis in addressing the implications and the longer-term prospects. The Commission ended deeply split on immigration. The best it could do was a tepid warning about illegal entry and a recommendation of no further increases in legal immigration – then approaching 400 thousand a year, or about one-third of its present level.

The author movingly describes how elation among populationists over the Rockefeller Commission recommendation of no further U.S. growth gave way to near despair over immigration's population potential. Echoing the "unchosen future" of the book's title, Graham writes.

...an essential goal pursued by the environmental movement – population stabilization – had been endorsed after extensive study by a distinguished national panel, and indeed seemed within our grasp by the early 1970s.

Then we discovered that the federal government's immigration policies were moving the goal out of reach, though no branch of or part of the government had debated or authorized it.

Graham was among the first of many environmentalists and populationists who have despaired over the U.S. environmental movement's refusal to address immigration as an ever-larger factor in our unsustainable population growth. Even groups with the purest population/environment pedigrees, such as Zero Population Growth (ZPG) succumbed early to political correctness.

Founded by Paul Ehrlich in 1968, ZPG demonstrated early on ambivalence among its staff and donors about the population-immigration connection. ZPG, renamed in 2002 as the less provocative, less revealing "Population Connection," proclaims the need for population stability, but regards the immigration factor as a global phenomenon ultimately to be eased by slower world population growth and improving conditions in major sending countries. How Americans deal with U.S. population growth while they await this uncertain millennial resolution is left unexplained.

The author traces how ZPG's diffidence on immigration induced leaders such as environmentalist John Tanton to mobilize like-minded activists and thinkers, including Graham himself, to launch the Federation of American Immigration Reform (FAIR), which celebrated its third decade in 2009.

Graham chronicles the rising national profile of immigration reform since the late 1970s, with the growth of new specialized organizations for research, public consciousness-raising, congressional relations, and citizen activism at national and state levels. But Graham is no triumphalist. A consistent theme of

this work is the daunting strength and pervasiveness of the creed of mass immigration, and the skill and immense clout of entrenched political and economic elites to promote and expand it. He learns early on that high immigration has powerful friends; Big Immigration is also armed with a powerful ideology drawing on or misusing the values of unending growth, inclusiveness and multiculturalism.

As a historian, Graham is particularly troubled by the ease with which “open borders” revisionists have falsely portrayed America’s progressive-era immigration restrictions as the work of bigots, nativists and haters, a portrayal now as useful as ever to smear and silence backers of immigration sanity.

Against these odds, the full blown immigration reform movement in three decades of activism has gained a near-veto over further mass increases in immigration, but still lacks the traction to bring about serious reductions in existing flow. Graham’s term for it is “stalemate.” But sadly the stalemate has occurred at a tightly-ratcheted high level of immigration in a system armed with built-in growth features, such as unlimited entries of immediate family and long-term “temporary” admissions that will guarantee higher future numbers even without new laws. A 2007 projection by the Center for Immigration Studies reckons that current immigration with its expected increases will push the U.S. population to 460 million by 2060. Some 105 million of that 155 million increase will stem from immigration and births to immigrants.

A sizable portion of his book discusses the early setbacks of the movement and the inability to transform supportive public opinion into congressional clout. Like a lot of us, the author ponders the paradox of public opinion polls. Over decades polls consistently show a clear public distaste for immigration increases (and an absolute abhorrence for illegal immigration). Even so Congress repeatedly, and with no apparent political costs, votes for further expansion of immigration, while rejecting or diluting practical measures to enforce laws on the books to deter illegal immigration.

Graham admits that immigration reformers needed time to learn that amorphous public support for your aims impresses the polls little without mobilization. The author also admits the neophytes of reform needed time to learn the legislative sleight of hand surrounding immigration and become full Washington players. He reflects somewhat morosely on the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), the first major legislative testing of FAIR. At first it seemed to immigration reformers like a major breakthrough on enforcement with its sanctions on employers of illegal immigrants. But in the inevitable compromises the enforcement provisions were reduced to impotence by absence of any reliable system for verifying eligibility to work in the U.S. Meanwhile, the unwanted amnesty provisions in this grand bargain, with the help of massive fraud and official rubber stamping, sailed through, giving green cards to nearly 3 million formerly illegal aliens.

In 1990, immigration reformers were confounded again when Congressional open-borders advocates successfully argued that the ineffectual closing of the “back door” of illegal immigration in the 1986 act somehow justified opening the “front door” to higher legal immigration, including more *de facto* permanent admissions under a misnamed “temporary protected status” provision, and increased “temporary” worker admissions.

But Graham’s book finds hope in the reversal of fortune for immigration reform beginning in the early 90’s, a sea change produced by rising citizen anger and events, such as 9/11, brought new focus to citizen mobilization. Citizen disgust with unchecked illegal immigration in California was resoundingly expressed in the ballot box in 1992 in heavy support of Proposition 87 – a referendum for restrictions on illegal aliens’ access to state and local social services. The victorious proposition was later neutered by the federal courts, but sparked some enforcement action in Washington and animated other states and localities to pass their own controls.

The accession of a Republican congress in 1994 also improved the political environment for reform. And in 1996 Congress enacted new restrictions on illegal immigration and document fraud and better identification and enforcement measures, most of them weakened by the customary loopholes and poor follow-up. Then came 9/11. Immigration reform organizations were well positioned to shape the frenzy in congress to crack-down on the chaotic visa and identification processes that had allowed terrorists to enter, remain, and operate freely within the U.S.

As the pain and shame of 9/11 recedes into history, however, many of those changes of organization and attitude have eroded under constant pressure of budget woes, an understaffed and complaisant enforcement bureaucracy, and the incessant bluster of Big Immigration’s warriors. Even so, the spirit of reform and involved and aroused citizenry has not gone away. For Graham and for many, citizen power showed its staying power during the 109th Congress (2005-2007) in defeating the best efforts of the alliance of liberal democrats and cheap-labor Republicans to push through “Comprehensive” Immigration reform.

Considering the odds, Graham’s account makes even “stalemate” seem like a major victory for immigration reform. Can the stalemate hold? Graham’s book appears at a time when a triumphant Democratic administration and congress is considering how and whether to redeem its generous campaign promises of an immigration amnesty, expansion of guest worker intake, and faster reunification of families divided by the waiting periods mandated in current law. One troubling indicator is the persistence of the mass immigration mystique in congress even during a major recession. Congress refuses to ease explosive unemployment and underemployment by lowering or suspending intake of temporary workers and refugees or to back more rigorous controls on illegal

aliens' access to jobs. Indeed, a new industry of immigration apologists has emerged to argue that *higher* immigration now is the remedy for current economic stagnation and rising unemployment.

Otis Graham's book gives us a rich and detailed backdrop for citizen engagement in the impending struggle of "Big Immigration" to legislate more of the same for an era in which's America's economy, labor force, resource base and environment ARE undergoing deep and still incompletely understood change. It is the consummate text book for those of us who need to understand where we have come from on immigration policy to see clearly and with determination how far we have to go.

NPG also published a chapter from Graham's book as an NPG Forum paper.