



FOOTNOTES

The Caribbean Immigration Centrifuge: A Portent of Continued Immigration Growth

By David Simcox

Washington's agreement with Castro last fall to increase Cuban immigration to at least 20,000 a year once again sacrifices much needed immigration restraint for foreign policy quick fixes. The administration's bending of the immigration law's eligibility rules is a reckless precedent that will encourage future circumventions.

Moreover, Washington's policies toward both Cuba and Haiti betray its tendency to see only the short-term political and economic factors in the outflow of Caribbean peoples, ignoring the long-term social and demographic forces driving mass migration from the Caribbean's 22 island nations, whether rich or poor, democratic or dictatorial.

In the past decade, Caribbean island nations, with a population of 35 million, have sent more than one million legal and illegal immigrants to the United States — one-sixth of the region's population increase over the decade.

Country	Population 1992 (Millions)	Annual Population Growth %	Immigrants to U.S. Yearly 1983-92 (Avg.)	Immigrants as % of Population Increase
Cuba	10.8	1.1	16,230	13.7
Barbados	0.3	0.07	1,570	74.7
Dominican Republic	7.5	2.3	29,950	17.4
Haiti	6.4	2.9	18,320	9.9
Jamaica	2.5	2.0	21,430	42.9
Trinidad & Tobago	1.3	1.4	4,680	25.7
Caribbean All)	35.0	1.8	98,960	15.7

The islands, with a population density five times that of the United States, now grow by 1.8 percent yearly and have a total fertility rate of 3.1 children per woman. Population density in Barbados, Jamaica, Haiti and smaller islands matches or exceeds India's. Since 1983, the region's ratio of north-bound migrants to population has been 35 percent higher than in Mexico, the world's single largest exporter of migrants to the United States. The table above shows nearly one-sixth of the region's annual population growth moves to the United States each year, and about one-third of the annual growth of the Caribbean labor force. Nearly ten percent of all yearly immigration to the United States thus comes from a region containing six-one thousandths of Earth's population. These figures would be even higher in the absence of tight travel controls of the Cuban government and the U.S. interdiction at sea of Haitian illegal migrants.

What must be confronted is that immigration from the Caribbean is likely to continue growing whatever the outcomes of local political and economic conflicts. The islands' population is projected to increase by 50 million by 2025, while the labor force of that region grows by 300,000 restless, would-be workers each year.

Years of heavy migration from the islands and a pervasive U.S. cultural presence in the region have created both wide-spread expectations of settlement in the U.S. and the extensive kinship, ethnic and employer networks needed to make it happen. For millions, the United States is now an alternate homeland and a virtual entitlement.

High emigration dependency on the United States has had a serious brain-draining effect on the islands' thin professional ranks. Haiti, which lost much of its small educated elite during decades of instability and economic stagnation, has more than 12,000 of its professionals residing in the United States. Most prone to migrate are the professionals of English-speaking states, such as Jamaica, Trinidad, and Tobago. With populations totaling only 3.8 million, those two countries now have 38,000 of their professionals here. A comparable migration from the United States would mean outflow of 2.6 million professionals. Inexplicably, in awarding 55,000 extra "diversity" visas this year to states presumably lacking opportunities to send people here, the U.S. government gave extra slots to all but two Caribbean states, despite their ownership of the highest per capita immigration rates in the world. The "diversity visa" program will open new immigration channels to other heavily populated third world nations, who have until now lacked the number of "anchor" immigrants here to start prolific migration chains.

Improved political conditions will not make a decisive difference in migration from the Caribbean. The democratization of Cuba, by ending current travel controls, will open the valves for release of intense pent-up emigration demand. Immigration into the U.S. from the Dominican Republic, now the region's largest single immigrant-sender, has grown relentlessly since constitutional government replaced decades of dictatorship in 1966. Jamaica, with a consistently admirable record of democracy and human rights since independence, now sends 43 percent of its annual population growth to the United States.

Neither does economic progress necessarily dampen immigration demand. Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, among the third world's richest nations, together send a third of their annual population growth to the United States. Economic growth in Haiti would further increase outmigration by giving tens of thousands the means to pay travel and resettlement costs.

The emigration culture that has mushroomed in the Caribbean is a warning. It shows how years of generous family reunification and refugee policies and tolerance of illegal immigration can acquire the momentum of a mass population transfer. Similar migration momentum is growing in the Andean nations of South America and the Philippines, and is looming in China and India, a troubling portent for U.S. population growth. Migration from China at just one-third the Caribbean rate of 15.7 percent of population growth would bring 750,000 immigrants yearly.

If the United States is to bring its own population into balance with its resources and environmental limits, immigration must be neutralized as a population accelerant. The route to environmentally permissible immigration numbers is through elimination of all illegal immigration and an airtight ceiling of not more than 300,000 yearly on legal migrants and refugees.

It cannot be in the country's interest to admit the nearly four million relatives of U.S. residents now on waiting lists abroad. The extravagant and unrealistic family reunification features of current immigration law that create such overblown expectations for millions and that feed Caribbean-type mass population transfers must end. Finally, Washington policymakers must recognize immigration control as a major national interest in itself, not a bargaining counter for ephemeral diplomatic advantages.

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