



## NEGATIVE POPULATION GROWTH

# THE NPG FORUM

## “NIMBYs” AND THE FENCE

by Lindsey Grant

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INS (the Immigration and Naturalization Service) plans to build a four mile ditch from the Mexican border at Tijuana to the sea, to channel the sewage-laden Tijuana River (which flows North across the border) and to interrupt the present traffic of vehicles which simply race across the desert border carrying illegal immigrants or drugs.

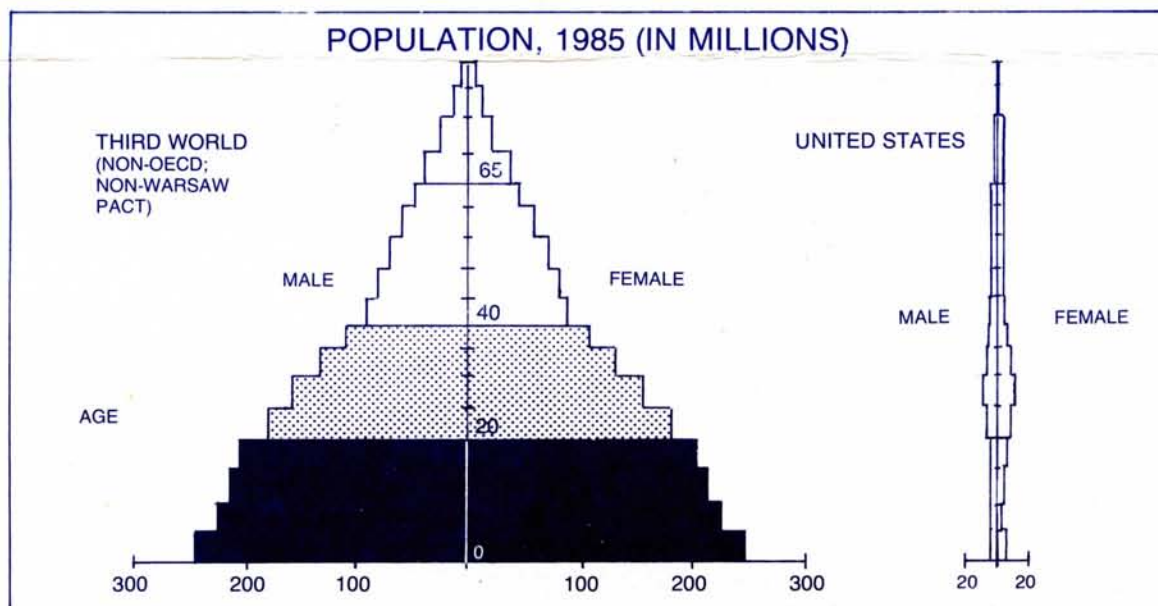
In January a private citizens' group named FAIR (Federation for American Immigration Reform) proposed that, as part of a ten-point proposal to help the Border Patrol enforce the immigration law, a substantial fence be built along the most vulnerable sections of our southern border.<sup>1</sup>

Both proposals seem eminently practical and sane. There are some fences already, but they are in shreds and ineffective. The Border Patrol, because of some curious ambivalence that extends into the U.S. Government, is told to make bricks without straw — to prevent illegal movements but without being given the most elementary of tools.

The FAIR proposal received considerable favorable publicity, including editorials in **The Washington Post** and in two newspapers close to the action, **The San Diego Union** and **The Dallas Morning News**. It also received some bitter criticism. The Government, one hopes, will be considering the suggestion, but the fear of controversy could dissuade it. As for the INS plan to build the ditch, it has been put on hold as of this writing.

One can understand the criticism driven by self interest, from commercial farmers, Los Angeles sweatshop operators, people needing household help, all of whom seek cheap labor. From politicians who gain by confounding border control with racism. Even perhaps from some clerics of the “sanctuary movement” who have promoted a one-dimensional view of justice into a universal right.

**But every country asserts the right to control its borders, including Mexico. We have an immigration law. Why don't we try to enforce it? Why do opponents of effective border control in the United States carry such weight?**



THE SHADED AREA REPRESENTS THE POPULATION PRESENTLY 20 TO 40 YEARS OLD—THE MOST LIKELY MIGRANTS. THOSE IN THE DARK AREA WILL REACH THOSE AGES THROUGH 2005.

SOURCES: Population Reference Bureau; **Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1987.**

## The Misdirected "NIMBY"

Readers may have noticed that a new word has entered the American vocabulary: "NIMBY". It is usually capitalized, as if in anger or frustration, and it means "not in MY back yard!"

The exclamation is a natural reaction to a world of sudden and mysterious new threats, of increased crowding and violence, a world changing in directions that most people do not like.

It is usually aimed at a chemical factory, a nuclear dump, a new prison or low-income housing project, a new superhighway or a sewage disposal plant, or simply (as in the movements in California and Seattle) at state or local growth.

The anger is understandable, but usually misdirected. It erupts when people learn of a local threat, and subsides if that particular threat disappears.

We cannot just pull up the ladder and save our own back yards. Today's problems do not respect property or county lines. The "NIMBYs" cannot just deal with the problem in California or Seattle. They must address the causes, and that requires a national perspective.

## Immigration and Population

Immigration is a major element in U.S. population change. **If migration were in balance (emigration = immigration), and if the fertility of American women stayed about where it is (slightly below replacement level), our population would peak somewhere around 2020 at about 270 million, and then slowly drift downward to 220 million — the 1977 size — in 2080.** Nobody really knows how much immigration there is, because illegal immigration is by its nature hard to measure, and because the nation does not try to keep track of emigration. **If annual net immigration is 800,000 a year, then the population will be 333 million in 2080 (half again as large as with zero net migration). Double that rate, and you have a population passing 400 million.**<sup>2</sup>

Let us turn to another phrase that is entering the language: **sustainability**. Most simply, it means running one's country — or the world, for that matter — in a way that will not degrade its capacity to support future generations. In a way, it harks back to Pericles' injunction to "leave Athens a better place than you found it."

By that standard, **the United States is overpopulated**. As a general proposition, resource and environmental problems are proportional to the population being served. Not necessarily a direct correlation; there are thresholds and non-linearities and system collapses; and there are other variables such as consumption levels and technical fixes. But it is a good rule of thumb.

We have more timber resources than we did in 1950, but fewer per capita because the U.S. population has grown by two-thirds. We have about as much prime farmland, but 40% less per capita, and we have kept up by using more fertilizer and more pesticides, by drawing down water tables, poisoning aquifers and wetlands, affecting not only fishery production and wildlife stocks, but our own health. In Iowa, farmers are drinking bottled water from out of state because they have poisoned their own wells.<sup>3</sup> As the Chairman of the National Research Council's Board on Agriculture and Chancellor of the University of California at Davis said: "We know that we just can't keep applying chemicals and pesticides to the soil the way we have."

We can conserve. We can find more benign productive processes. But at any given level of conservation or technology, the problem is proportional to the population of consumers.

Let me tick off some other issues familiar to most readers:

- urban air pollution at levels far above health standards;
- acid precipitation, with forest damage, widening acidification of the soil, some indication of direct health effects, and potentially a threat to soil micro-organisms and the terrestrial carbon cycle;
- the related problems of ozone creation at nose level and depletion in the stratosphere, with important effects on health, climate warming and potentially the entire aquatic food chain;
- the greenhouse effect, global warming and rising sea levels;
- the need to detoxify nuclear and toxic wastes already generated, and the mounting problems of disposing of toxic and urban wastes;
- the proliferation of man-made chemicals in the environment. Of the chemicals in commerce very few have been tested for direct health effects and none have been tested for secondary effects as they move through the environment and are transformed and re-combined. These things are not happening somewhere else; the chemicals are literally part of us; they are in our bodies. We are in for many unpleasant surprises like DDT, dioxin, PCBs and CFCs.

This list of problems is awesome. It is not necessarily overwhelming. We have identified other problems and solved them. Nationally, emissions of airborne particulates have declined 61% since 1970, carbon monoxide 29%, and lead 80%.<sup>4</sup> We can solve these other problems and live again within our resources.

We can move toward conservation, fuel cells, renewable energy sources. We can restructure our cities and our transportation systems. We can enforce controls on pumping aquifers, and change policies so as to discourage the kind of intensive monocultures that are poisoning the water. We can require thorough environmental impact studies on chemicals before they are introduced. If we cannot solve problems like the greenhouse effect, because of their momentum, we can find ways to accommodate them. We can build dikes and/or move coastal cities away from the lowest areas . . .

We could, but we have not been. From 1981 until President Bush's June 12th proposal to address air pollution, the Federal Government showed little inclination to begin the process.

The expense will be staggering. The Government has put a \$66-100 billion tag on cleaning up the existing pollution from nuclear weapons, and another \$23-100 billion to clean up just the worst of the known toxic waste sites. The President put a price tag of \$14-\$19 billion per year on his clean air proposals. The Government has not yet even begun to look at the total costs of redressing the problems I have described.

The National Academy of Engineering has already recommended that a stop be put to locating major facilities in low coastal areas, because the greenhouse effect cannot simply be stopped tomorrow, and sea levels are rising.<sup>5</sup> I know of no project within the Government to consider that recommendation and decide what needs to be done. Meanwhile, relentlessly, our national population is concentrating near the coasts. Most of Florida lies within a few feet of sea level; the population of Florida has risen 82% since 1970 and 347% since 1950.

Astonishingly, **neither the Government nor the experts take population into account when they look at such problems.**<sup>6</sup> Take the energy example. It is a prime source of atmospheric pollution, acid precipitation and the greenhouse effect. People are worried, and there is an endless debate as to whether to control the problems through conservation, or solar and renewable energy, or nuclear power. We may need all three, and relief from population growth as well. Reduce the projected population and you reduce the demand for energy.

Such thinking would require **foresight** — the recognition that problems cross departmental lines, and so do solutions — and neither the Government nor academe have learned to practice that sort of thinking.

Let us take Los Angeles as one specific case. Los Angeles suffers the worst air pollution of any city in the country. The local Air Quality Management District has proposed a plan to clean up Los Angeles' air through a 70%-80% reduction in sulfur and nitrogen oxide emissions. It would involve everything from new transit systems to bans on single-occupancy automobiles and on backyard barbecues. The cost has been estimated at \$4 billion now, and \$12 billion by 2000, **per year**.<sup>7</sup>

There are more than 13 million people in the Los Angeles metropolitan area (CMSA). In 1950, there were fewer than five million. Los Angeles could probably meet the Federal air standards now, except for the growth in population. The population is still growing, in large part because of illegal immigration. Yet there is no sign that anybody addressing air quality thought of including, among those numerous recommendations, an endorsement of the proposal for better fences along the nearby Mexican border. It is not their department.

### Immigration, Labor and Equity

If you are interested in domestic tranquility in your home town, perhaps you have a personal stake in national immigration policy, as well as a moral one.

The argument is made that immigrants work hard for little money, and they do not cause trouble. Very well for the employer, but is it good for the country?

This country and the "American dream" were built on a degree of labor scarcity, which meant that a worker could expect a decent wage for his work. The scarcity encouraged experiments with labor saving approaches and technologies, which in turn led to higher productivity, high wages, and a mass market that is still the center of world trade.

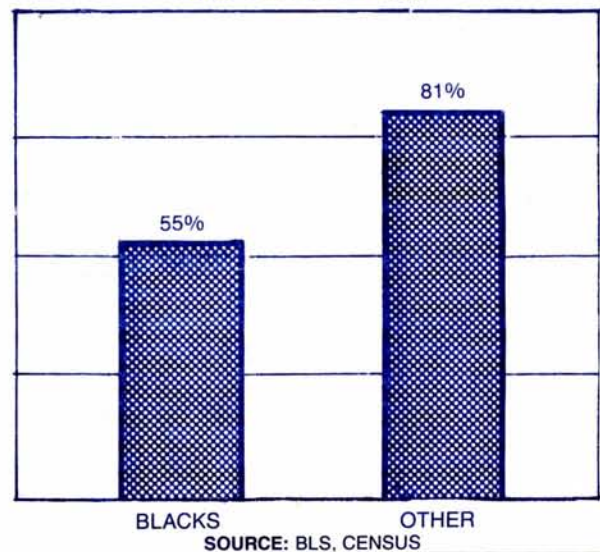
We could allow wages to be driven down to subsistence levels, because the potential labor supply is, for practical purposes, inexhaustible (see Graph on page one), and the U.S. is a powerful magnet. This would change the economic profile of the United State to that of a third world country, with perhaps half its people at the ragged edge of survival. Is that what we want?

There is a conflict of moral issues here. **We are right to feel sympathy for the world's poor, but our first obligation is to our own society.** As that graph makes clear, we cannot solve even the existing population problem in the third world (to say nothing of future population growth) by absorbing it, and no other nation except Australia and Canada has shown any inclination to try. We should, I believe, be putting more of our foreign assistance into the fundamental issue of population.<sup>8</sup> But we have more immediate responsibilities at home.

The nation a generation ago, in rare unity, launched perhaps its greatest moral crusade: to eliminate racism and to bring blacks into the economic mainstream. Since then, by winking at the failure to enforce our immigration laws, we have inadvertently done the one thing that could most effectively sabotage that crusade. We have allowed the almost unfettered entry of competition for entry level jobs, at which the blacks should be starting their entry into the economy. For the consequences, see the graph on this page. It is not enough to argue that the immigrant — hungry and fearful of deportation — will work harder. One must also answer the question: The blacks are Americans; how do we bring the increasingly alienated, restless and isolated ghetto blacks into the system?

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was (except for an enormous loophole created to placate commer-

PROPORTION EMPLOYED: 1988  
AGES 20-29 U.S.



cial agriculture) an effort to address that competition by limiting the job market to Americans and legally admitted aliens. One must wait to see whether it will be effectively enforced and whether the means will be found to identify who in fact is entitled to work. It was not meant, however, to stand alone, its success rests upon keeping the numbers controllable by having the means to enforce the law at the border.

### Back to the Fence

The remarkable thing about the inattention to population is that, **compared with extraordinarily costly repair bills such as I have mentioned, our population future can be shaped at relatively little cost.**

Immigration should be the easiest component of population growth to address. We even have the law. We simply need to enforce it. An obvious starting point would be to make it easier for the Border Patrol to patrol the border. Begin with that **fence**. Add certain **technical improvements** (see the FAIR proposals, footnote 1). Proceed with the other measures such as the recent decision, spurred by Congress, to **deploy the National Guard** to help control the border.<sup>9</sup> Develop better ways of **identifying** who in the United States is entitled to be here.<sup>10</sup> The rewards are not simply demographic; they include better control of drug smuggling and crime.

Population growth must eventually stop, at some level. The control of illegal immigration would give us as a nation the opportunity to decide when and at what level. With such a consensus in view, we can adjust legal immigration levels. Then we should consider going where other nations have gone before us, but we have feared to tread: toward a national view as to what fertility levels are desirable to **achieve the demographic future we want**. It may be that a sustainable system, passing our environment and resources intact to our children, will require a smaller population than we have yet considered.

It should be popular to address illegal immigration. Polls regularly indicate that, at the mass level, Americans want better control over illegal immigration, by wide majorities. Even among Hispanic Americans, four polls showed substantial majorities who viewed illegal immigration as a serious problem. A recent Tarrance poll in California showed that 81% of the respondents believed border security should be improved, and 67% supported rebuilding and strengthening the fence south of San Diego.<sup>11</sup>

Apparently, it is not so simple. Among our opinion forming elite, there is a curious reluctance. Our sympathy for the world's poor, our self-image as a nation of immigrants, the Statue

of Liberty and Emma Lazarus' poem all somehow come together to create a very guilty feeling about any proposal to strengthen immigration control.

I don't believe the guilt is justified or even necessarily moral, and I have made the arguments elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it seems to be a continuing fact of life and an impediment to reasoned policy.

### **NIMBYs, Unite . . . !**

Had enough? Very well. My point is that NIMBY is no answer, nor is flight. We are all in this together. The problems of environmental deterioration are national, not local, and so is the population growth that contributes to them. **Our political leadership seems incapable of looking beyond current crises**

#### **Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> "Ten Steps to Securing America's Borders", January 26, 1989. FAIR, 1666 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 400, Washington DC 20009. 202/328-7004.

<sup>2</sup> For U.S. population projections under different assumptions, see "Projections of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex and Race: 1988 to 2080", by Gregory Spencer. (Washington, Bureau of the Census, Series P-25, No. 1018, January 1989) and "The Future Racial Composition of the United States" by Leon F. Bouvier and Cary B. Davis (Demographic Information Services Center of the Population Reference Bureau, 777 14th Street NW - Suite 800, Washington DC 20005, 202/639/8040, August 1982).

<sup>3</sup> **New York Times**, November 22, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> **World Resources 1987**, IIED & The World Resources Institute. (New York: Basic Books, 1987.) p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> **Implications of Changes in Relative Mean Sea Level**, Commission on Engineering and Technical Assistance, National Research Council. (Washington: National Academy Press, 1987.)

<sup>6</sup> Both the **Global 2000 report to the President** (Washington: GPO, 1980) and the 1972 report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, chaired by John D. Rockefeller III, considered demographic change and its relevance to U.S. national interests. The "Rockefeller Commission" report concluded that no national purposes would be served by further population growth. That was 17 years and 40 million people ago. The Global 2000 Report made

toward a larger view of the future. It will begin to wrestle seriously with the issues of sustainability only when there is a political base. The local NIMBYs are focused on real problems, but they seek, in the Chinese phrase, to "treat the branches, not the roots." NIMBYs are needed on the national scene. The Government will hear only the special interest groups unless it hears from the people . . .

To a nation bred on the dream of the frontier and of open spaces, it is hard to put a fence up against the Statue of Liberty as a symbol. Perhaps that is just as well. Let the unequal contest stand as a test of whether we respond to symbols or to argument, whether we are led by myth or reason.

The fence is a practical idea, stalled by a myth. And it is just a beginning.

no recommendations, but a follow up report (**Global Future; Time to Act**. Council on Environmental Quality and U.S. Department of State. GPO; January 1981) called for a national population policy and suggested a policy of stabilization be considered. Subsequently, there have been no comparable studies or followup.

<sup>7</sup> **Science**, 5 May 1989, p. 5517.

<sup>8</sup> See NPG FORUM paper "A Population Focus for U.S. Aid," Negative Population Growth, Inc., June 1987.

<sup>9</sup> **Christian Science Monitor 3-29-89**, p. 7. **New York Times 5-21-89**, p. 29. This is a test program, authorized at \$300 million, aimed at drug control, but it should help to apprehend illegal entrants at the border, and it may provide experience and a precedent for more extensive use of the National Guard in what is, after all, a primary traditional function of armies: to protect the borders.

<sup>10</sup> See NPG FORUM paper "Secure Identification: the Weak Link in Immigration Control", by David Simcox. (NPG, Inc., May 1989).

<sup>11</sup> For the Tarrance poll and a summary of other polls, see FAIR's **Information Exchange**, May 9, 1989 (address as above.)

<sup>12</sup> "Immigration and the American Conscience", by Lindsey Grant and John H. Tanton, in **Progress as if Survival Mattered** (San Francisco: Friends of the Earth, 1981. Reprints available from Population Environment Balance, 1325 G Street NW - Suite 1003, Washington DC 20005. 202/879-3000.)

## **Comments by Donald Mann, President, NPG, Inc.**

The United States can never hope to prevent millions of illegal aliens from entering the country across its southern border unless it builds an impenetrable fence to keep them out. Our present policy, if it can be called that, borders on the insane.

It consists of allowing upwards of a million illegal aliens each year to cross our southern border virtually unimpeded, then seeking to apprehend them at great expense, then expelling the ones (perhaps one in four) that we apprehend. They are then free to try again to cross our border illegally as many times as they wish, often the same night. Could anything more ridiculous possibly be imagined?

The technology is available to build an impassable fence on portions of our southern border. Since mountains and desert make up most of our border with Mexico, such a fence would only be necessary along some 200 miles of the border, where 90 percent of all illegal crossings occur.

We must face up to the fact that explosive population growth in the countries of the Caribbean basin, within easy reach of our southern border, will inevitably lead to massive unemployment, economic chaos, and social and political turmoil. During the decade of the 1990's it is virtually certain that tens of millions of poor and desperate people from this group of countries (their numbers swelled by political, economic and environmental refugees from most other third world countries) will seek to cross our southern border illegally, in search of jobs and a better life, and perhaps for mere survival.

They will succeed in doing so unless we build an impenetrable fence on portions of that border. It may be difficult for the American public to accept, but it is an undeniable fact: no matter how much we may sympathize with their plight, the United States simply does not have the means nor the resources to save other sovereign nations from the tragic consequences of their failure to stabilize their populations at a sustainable level.

## **Negative Population Growth, Inc.**

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