NEGATIVE POPULATION GROWTH

THE NPG FORUM

Sustainable Immigration:
Learning To Say No

by David E. Simcox

This is the fifth of a series of NPG FORUM papers exploring the idea of optimum population. As the United States' population continues to grow, NPG believes it essential to the national well-being that debate be initiated on the question: What is the optimum population, and how can it be achieved? This paper addresses one aspect of that second question, immigration.

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February 1990 was a dismayingly typical month in the uncertain course of American immigration policymaking, demonstrating the varied and intense pressures that are steadily working to drive up overall immigration. Here are just a few:

• Early in February Immigration Commissioner Gene McNary announced he was using his executive authority to grant what amounts to limited permanent resident status to illegal aliens who are spouses and minor children of legalized aliens, but who arrived too late to qualify for the 1986 amnesty. By the stroke of the pen, McNary added an estimated 800,000 to 1.5 million persons to the permanent legally resident population.

• Congressman Bruce Morrison, Chairman of the House of Representatives Immigration Subcommittee in February introduced his legal immigration reform bill that would boost the flow of newcomers in the 1990's to about 1.5 million a year—almost twice the current number. Morrison's bill also provides for the admission of some 250,000 temporary resident workers and their families, most of whom would ultimately become permanent residents.

• Under pressure from Congress, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) further liberalized the criteria for Soviet and Eastern European minorities to claim refugee status in the United States. Since the current authorized ceiling on refugees of 125,000 does not cover all the demand, many excess refugees join the 25,000 or so now entering the U.S. as "parolees", with the prospect of permanent resident status in a few years.

• Border Patrolmen were regrouping in south Texas to cope with a new surge of young Central American illegal migrants in flight from that region's demographic eruption and widespread joblessness. But pro-immigrant forces in the Congress were predicting success in their six-year battle for a blanket admission of migrating Central Americans under the new concept of "temporary protected status". This measure would give quasi-permanent residence to half a million Central American settlers, and could attract more illegal immigration in the future.

• In this month, like all others, businessmen and hospital administrators continued to press Congress for the admission of more foreign clerks, orderlies and nurses, the universities for more foreign students and researchers, the churches for more refugees and church workers, the fruit and vegetable growers for more farmworkers, the Asian-Americans for more Asians, and the Irish-Americans more Irishmen.

Unlimited Immigration Demand

Underlying the *ad hoc* concessions and steady upcreep is a profound imbalance between the numbers abroad who want to live in the United States and the limits and conditions imposed on their coming by U.S. law. As world population has swelled by more than 80 million yearly, proliferating family migration chains have lengthened the waiting list for U.S. visas from 1.0 million in 1980 to 2.4 million in 1990.

Congress responds distractedly to these pressures with special exceptions for relief measures to alleviate perceived refugee and asylee emergencies, putative labor shortages, or the clamor of powerful special ethnic interests. Cumulative concessions have pushed total immigration to nearly 900,000 a year in 1990. But regularly missing from this ongoing legislative bazaar is concern for the long range population effects of so many newcomers.

Even allowing for emigration, immigration under current law and practice directly accounts for 32 percent of national population growth, and the proportion is rising. The 1990 census is expected to show that the foreign born population has grown from 4.7 percent in 1970 to 8.5 percent in 1990. Fears of labor shortages—although the U.S. unemployment rate of 5.2 percent is twice that of Japan's—has warmed Congress to the idea of further expansions of immigration. If the House of Representatives' current version of legal immigration reform wins out, annual legal immigration would climb to about 1.4 million by 1995, or nearly 55 percent of population growth. Two to three million aliens amnestied under the 1986 law will convert to permanent status in the early 90's, further swelling the permanent population as they bring their families to this country.

Census data and immigration statistics understate the degree of population growth due to entries from abroad. The census count disregards such categories as foreign students, long staying temporary workers, and most illegal and commuter aliens—categories that add another million to the U.S. population on any given day. Many of these immigrants have children, and their children have children, swelling the population base.

Census Bureau projections of future population growth use 800,000 as the "high" assumption of net yearly immigration.[1] Demographer Leon Bouvier notes that Census' "high" assumption is now more reasonable as a medium projection. Bouvier warns that if American fertility rose only to the 2.2 replacement level, net immigration of 800,000 per year would push the U.S. population to 394 million in 2050 and 471 million by 2080. Even applying current fertility and medium mortality rates (TFR of 1.8 and life expectancy rising slowly to 81.2 years), immigration of 800,000, according to the Census Bureau, will lift the U.S. population to the 300 million mark by the year 2015, and to 333 million by 2080.[2]

Positing a "low" net annual immigration of 300,000, Census projects the U.S. population would peak in 2030 at 288 million and then gradually decline to 265 million in 2080. Clearly, if the United States is to begin to reverse its population growth, net immigration of 300,000 or less is imperative. But as annual entries have crept up since the 1960's, we have come to see a net inflow of newcomers of at least twice that number as the norm.

The Psychic Function of Generous Immigration

Indeed, many Americans regard the accomodation of hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees as a peculiarly American mission in the world, one that is deeply intermingled with the nation's sense of self-worth and high moral values. For many others, immigration yields only positive benefits by reuniting families, bringing in needed labor or investors, or aiding our foreign policy. Underlying all these particular interests is the pervasive sense that our generous immigration policies are an ennobling American statement to the world. Thus basic immigration policy, as the Senate debates of immigration reform in the summer of 1989 demonstrated, is most often legislated on the basis of anecdotes, slogans and impressions, vague notions about the nation's immigrant past, and a desire to use immigration law to affirm standards of charity and generosity. These sentiments becloud the national interest, edging out practical concerns for the nation's population future.

Commonly, long term population concerns are dismissed with the argument that the ratio of immigrants to the general population is far lower now than in 1910. The implication is that as the U.S. population grows it should take in steadily more newcomers to maintain a historically ordained ratio.

Immigration Austerity: Curbing Illegal Settlement

Given the diversity and intensity of the current demands on our national immigration system and the powerful sentiments involved, which of the many claimants would receive priority if the nation were to decide to reduce immigration to a more sustainable 300,000 yearly or less? How could a democratic system fairly allocate the pain that would accompany a two-thirds reduction in immigration?

The first and most politically defensible step toward far lower immigration would be deep cuts in illegal immigration, now estimated by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to add some 200,000 a year to the settled population, though unofficial estimates go as high as 300,000. Firm commitment to enforcement of the immigration laws—so far never conscientiously attempted in the United States—could soon reduce this number by two-thirds. The task would demand a doubling of the money and manpower of the 13 thousand-member, billion dollar a year INS. But much of the added cost could be recovered by vigorous application of fines, service fees and tax penalties on illegal aliens and their employers and sponsors in the United States.

But even an expanded INS could not successfully combat such a pervasive national problem unaided. The Federal Government must mobilize other agencies having regular contact with illegal immigrants and their employers, such as Internal Revenue, the Department of Labor, the Social Security Administration, the department of Housing and Urban Development, and national law enforcement agencies. Federal funding and federal leadership would be essential to animate state and local labor, revenue, welfare, and police agencies to act against illegal alien emloyment and settlement.

Two new weapons against illegal immigration emerged in the 1980's. Penalties or "sanctions" against employers of illegal aliens are intended to turn off the magnet of jobs. "Entitlements verification" known by the acronym "SAVE", uses computer matching and identity checks to deny welfare and public assistance to illegal aliens.

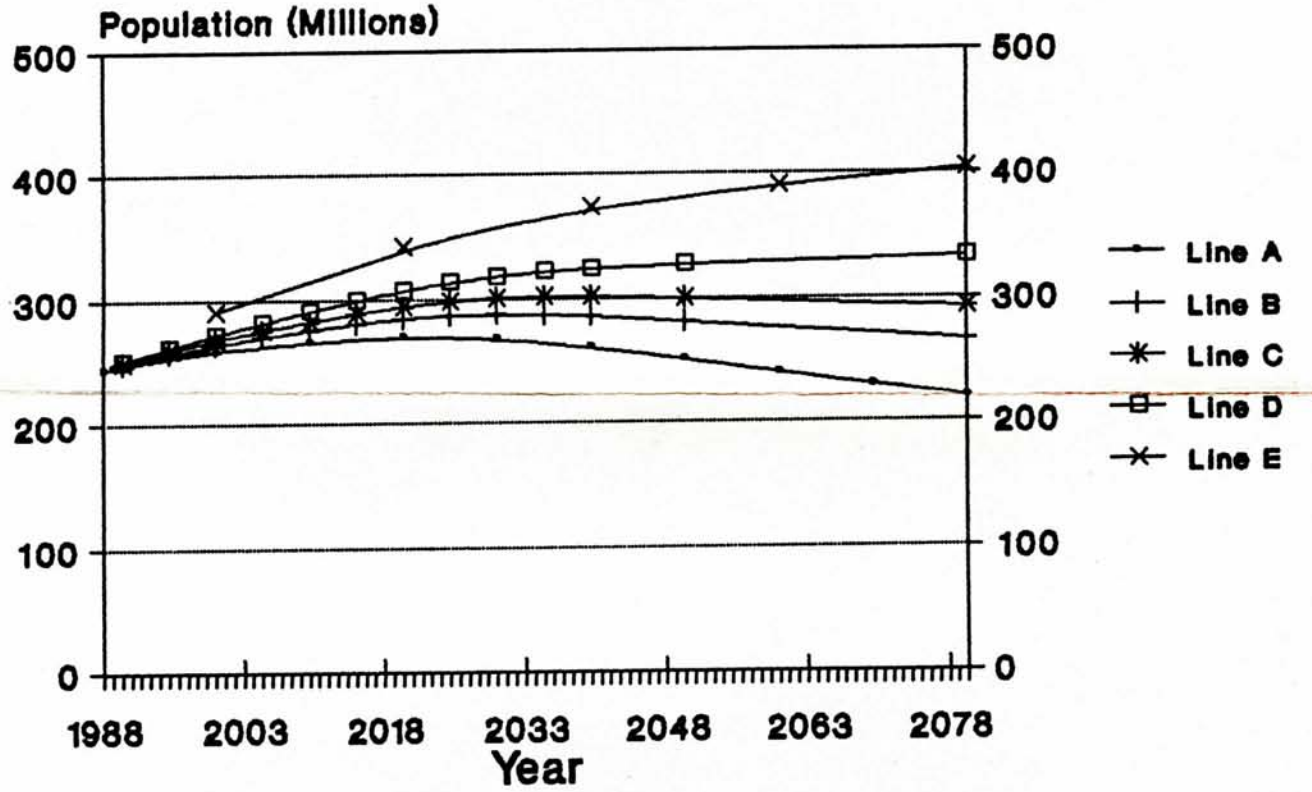
Not surprisingly, both devices are under fierce attack from immigrant advocacies and civil rights groups. But they need to be strengthened and additional deterrents brought to bear. Among those worth considering are:

- Proof of legal status or citizenship as a condition for:

  a. entering into real estate contracts, such as home purchases or leases.

Projected U.S. Population Growth

1988-2080



See below for explanations.

Line A: with immigration equal to emigration, the population of the United States would peak at 270 million in 2020, and would decline gradually to 220 million in 2080.

Line B: with a net annual immigration of 300,000, the population would be 288 million in 2030 and 266 million in 2080.

Line C: with a net annual immigration of 500,000, the population would peak at 302 million in 2040 and would decline slightly to 292 million by 2080.

Line D: with a net annual immigration of 800,000, the population would pass 333 million in 2080 and would still be rising. This line represents a reasonable, conservative estimate of today's net immigration levels.

Line E: a net annual immigration of 1.5 million—which could result from current proposals—would lead to a population passing 403 million in 2080.

Sources: Lines A through D: Gregory Spencer, *Projections of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex and Race: 1988 to 2080* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Series P-25, No. 1018, January 1989). Line E: Leon F. Bouvier and Cary B. Davis, *The Future Racial Composition of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Population Reference Bureau, August 1982). The assumptions in the two studies are comparable, though not identical. The latter study assumes a total fertility rate 0.092 lower than the Census study and life expectancies converging in 2080 at a figure 0.5 years lower. Both assume fertility very slightly below current levels.

b. obtaining drivers' licenses, motor vehicles registration or liability insurance.

c. qualifying for professional and occupational licensing.

d. enrolling in state or federally assisted colleges and universities.

e. securing business and alcoholic beverages licenses.

• Internal Revenue Service audits of employers found hiring illegal aliens and disqualification of wages paid to unauthorized aliens as deductible business expenses.

• Such internal controls to be matched by increased numbers of border patrolmen backed up by more expeditious procedures for deportation and summary exclusion of aliens entering illegally.

• Tightened strictures against illegal immigration, utilizing a tamper-proof system of identification and more rigorous controls over birth, death and other vital statistics documents.[3]

Living With Lower Legal Immigration

While working to reduce illegal immigration to zero, federal policymakers would also need to reorder current priorities to reduce legal immigration and refugee flows from their present 600,000 to 700,000 a year to 300,000 a year. A sustainable annual immigration level of 300,000 could continue to be organized around the three general streams that now dominate the current immigration system: refugees, family reunification and independent immigrants. A reasonable and politically acceptable allocation among the three might be as follows:

1) *Refugees and asylees*, now entering at the rate of 125,000 yearly, could be reduced to 50,000 a year—the figure determined by Congress to be "normal flow" in the 1980 Refugee Act. The privilege of refuge would be awarded by rigorous case-by-case examination of applicants of special concern to the United States and given only to those who demonstrate the clear probability of life-threatening harm. Unsuccessful applicants would have the option of competing as candidates for independent immigration.

2) *Family reunification* in 1988 brought in 220,000 quota-free immediate relatives of U.S. citizens and nearly 200,000 other immigrants claiming family relationships to citizens or legal resident aliens. Immigration austerity would require limits on the privilege of U.S. citizens to bring in immediate family members, reducing the inflow in this category (now 220,000 yearly and growing) to 100,000 a year. Preferential immigration of spouses and minor children would be limited to those whose marriages were contracted before the immigration of the petitioning U.S. citizen occurred. Parents of U.S. citizens, children over eighteen and married children of any age would no longer qualify for family reunification visas but could compete as independent immigrants. Neither native born nor foreign born U.S. citizens would be entitled to bring in newly acquired spouses for residence under this category, though they could seek independent immigrant visas for them.

3) A pool of 150,000 numbers annually for *independent immigrants* would serve the nation's most pressing needs for the importation of highly skilled workers and professionals, family members of U.S. citizens and residents not otherwise covered, and persons of special foreign policy interest. Visas would be awarded through a point system which would assign variable values for criteria such as skills, investment potential, adaptability, family connections, hardship, importance to foreign policy, and number of children (with smaller families receiving extra points).

Since refugee emergencies could not be ruled out, unforeseen urgent, presidentially-certified refugee demands would be met by pre-empting numbers, first in the independent category, and then in the family category until both were exhausted. For such emergencies, the President could also borrow up to two-thirds of the succeeding year's immigration numbers, but never for more than two consecutive years. (The outcry from those Americans with an interest in the regular flow of immigrants would probably assure that no President would use this authority except in the most unusual circumstances.)

Heads of families authorized for independent immigration would receive the numbers needed to bring their spouse and minor children with them, thus avoiding the need for subsequent special arrangements for reunification.

ALLOCATION OF IMMIGRATION SPACES

Category	Current Law-1988	Proposed Austerity Allocations
Family Immigration	430,000	100,000
Refugees & Asylees	111,000	50,00
Independent Immigrants (Professionals & Skilled Workers, Special Immigrants)	102,000	150,000
TOTALS	643,000	300,000

Reduction of the supply of visas would have to be accompanied by measures to dampen demand. Applications of non-refugee aliens should carry a sizable fee. Those successful in winning a visa should pay a front-end service charge of up to $5000 per family unit. Employers sponsoring aliens for jobs should pay a surtax of 15 percent on the alien's earnings during their first five years here.

The Tough Scenario

If population pressures were determined to be unusually severe, could the United States manage even lower migration? Cutting inflow to 150,000 a year or less, thus offsetting or falling below emigration, would significantly hasten population reduction if fertility stays low. But it would leave national policymakers with excruciating choices. At such a low volume of immigration, three distinct categories would have little purpose. More appropriate would be a single comprehensive point system with all types of applicants competing together for a single pool of visas.

Congress could periodically review and if necessary adjust the weightings given different migration criteria, such as persecution or political hardship, family connections, skills or investment potential.

The nation's economic and cultural interaction with the world will continue to demand a sizable flow of foreign sojourners. The current immigration laws provide a range of specialized temporary or "non-immigrant" visa categories to meet this need. But these provisions are frequently abused to arrange *de facto* permanent residence for many who are ineligible or unwilling to compete for regular immigration slots.

A More Careful Count of Inflow

The Immigration Service logged 377 million entries into the United States in 1988, including returning American citizens and repeat visits by aliens with border-crossing cards, aircraft crews and the like. Sixty per cent—225 million—were non-citizens. 14.6 million of those persons entered the United States with non-immigrant visas. Of that number, the Immigration Service estimates that 255,000 stayed beyond the period allowed by the terms of their admission.

If population benefits are to be gained, overall cuts in legal and illegal immigration would have to be matched by more comprehensive methods of counting the total permanent alien population in the United States and keeping it within an overall ceiling. Policymakers must make less of the fictional legal distinctions between "permanent resident aliens" and nominally "temporary" longstayers who can easily remain in the United States indefinitely. Notwithstanding the disparity of labels, the aggregate pressure of the foreign source population on the environment, demand for services, infrastructure, and consumption of resources is the same. Population planners should consider anyone who comes with the reasonable expectation of staying a year or more an addition to the population count, regardless of his personal intentions or temporary category.

Worth exploring is the concept of "full-time equivalence" as a measure of the total foreign impact on population and resources. The full-time equivalence system would, for example, be a convenient way of measuring the presence of the transient and sojourner portions of the population in person-years. Two hundred thousand persons in the United States for six months yields 100,000 person-years. This type of measurement provides a far more revealing assessment of the effects of foreign born persons on population and environment. The 1990 census is expected to show 21 million of the nation's 250 million as foreign born. Under a full-time equivalence count, 21 million alien person-years would increase substantially with the addition of person-years for nearly one million foreign students, temporary workers and specialists, seasonal agricultural workers and some 2 to 3 million longstaying tourists.

The Public and Immigration Levels: Wanting It Both Ways

Obviously, such a disciplined approach to the management of immigration will not come easily for a beleaguered Congress. National polls in the past two decades have consistently shown that a heavy majority of Americans support freezing immigration levels or rolling them back. A 1965 Gallup Poll, for example, at a time when legal immigration was less than 300,000, showed 72 percent favored allowing it to go no higher. Almost half of those favored reductions. In 1985, when legal immigration had risen to 570,000, 77 percent of respondents to a Roper Poll favored curbs.

Congress's mild response to what seems like clear public opinion on the issue suggests a greater public ambivalence. The electorate's strong but unfocussed demand for lower immigration repeatedly yields to the highly focussed demands of segments of the public for ad hoc responses to the short term perceived needs for refugee admissions, farm workers, separated family members and the like. Often wanting to respond compassionately to urgent needs, the general public—and its congressional representatives—take the view that "a few more can't hurt". Overlooked in the process are the higher future immigration demands that often result because of new precedents, additional family reunification chains, or the opening of new migration streams through "one-time" refugee relief measures.

The public needs to become aware of the sizable long range, cumulative population consequences of isolated short-term concessions. Only the discipline of a tight, all inclusive immigration "budget" or ceiling can regularly force the trade-offs and tough choices that true immigration austerity will demand.

LONGSTAYING TEMPORARY WORKERS
(Not Counted as Immigrants)

Category and Visa Symbol	1984	1986	1988	Period of Admission
Treaty Trader or Investor (E-1, E-2)	22,419	30,424	31,920	Indefinite
Student (F-1, M-1)	136,129	137,573	159,406	4 Year +
Temporary Worker of Distinguished Merit & Ability (H-1)	25,903	31,052	41,202	2-6 Years
Other Temporary Workers (H-2)	5,828	8,725	6,656	Up to 1 Year
Industrial Trainees (H-3)	2,115	1,915	1,600	Up to 1 Year
Exchange Visitor (J-1, J-2)	97,652	129,563	157,994	2-4 Years
Fiance or fiancee of U.S. Citizen (K-1, K-2)	7,645	8,291	7,082	Permanent
Multinational Companies (L-1)	13,621	14,174	12,707	Indefinite
TOTAL VISAS ISSUED	311,312	361,717	418,587	

Source: Report of the Visa Office 1988, Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1989.

FOOTNOTES:

1. U.S. Bureau of Census, Current Population Reports, Series P25, No. 1018, **Projections of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex and Race: 1988 to 2080**, by Gregory Spencer, Washington: USGPO, 1989.
2. Leon Bouvier: "How to Get There from Here: the Demographic Route to Optimal Population Size," **the NPG Forum**, Fall 1989.
3. David Simcox: **Secure Identification: A National Need—A Must for Immigration Control**, Center for Immigration Studies, Washington, DC, 1989.

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