



Negative Population Growth

— Position Paper —

The Case for Reducing Immigration From Over One Million to 100,000 a Year

By Donald Mann, President
Negative Population Growth, Inc.

The evidence is overwhelming that with its present population of over 260 million, the U.S. is already vastly overpopulated in terms of the long range carrying capacity of its resources and environment. Yet we continue to grow rapidly, by 25 to 30 million each decade.

Contrary to our own national interest, we now permit over a million immigrants to settle here each year. Because it contributes to the growth of our population, immigration is basically, and most importantly, an environmental issue. Indeed it is the driving force behind the population growth that is propelling our nation rapidly down the road to environmental ruin. Projections show that if present trends continue, 89 percent of our population growth in the next century will come from post-2000 immigrants and their descendants.

If we are to have any hope of achieving a smaller, more sustainable population size, we must halt illegal immigration and sharply reduce legal immigration.

The Implications of Current Trends

If our fertility remains at its present rate of 2.0 (an average of two children per woman) and if immigration at the present level continues, we will grow to nearly 500 million before the end of the next century, almost twice our present size.

It could be even worse. According to demographers Dennis A. Ahlburg and James W. Vaupel we could easily have a population of 811 million (near the present population of India) by 2080. They write:

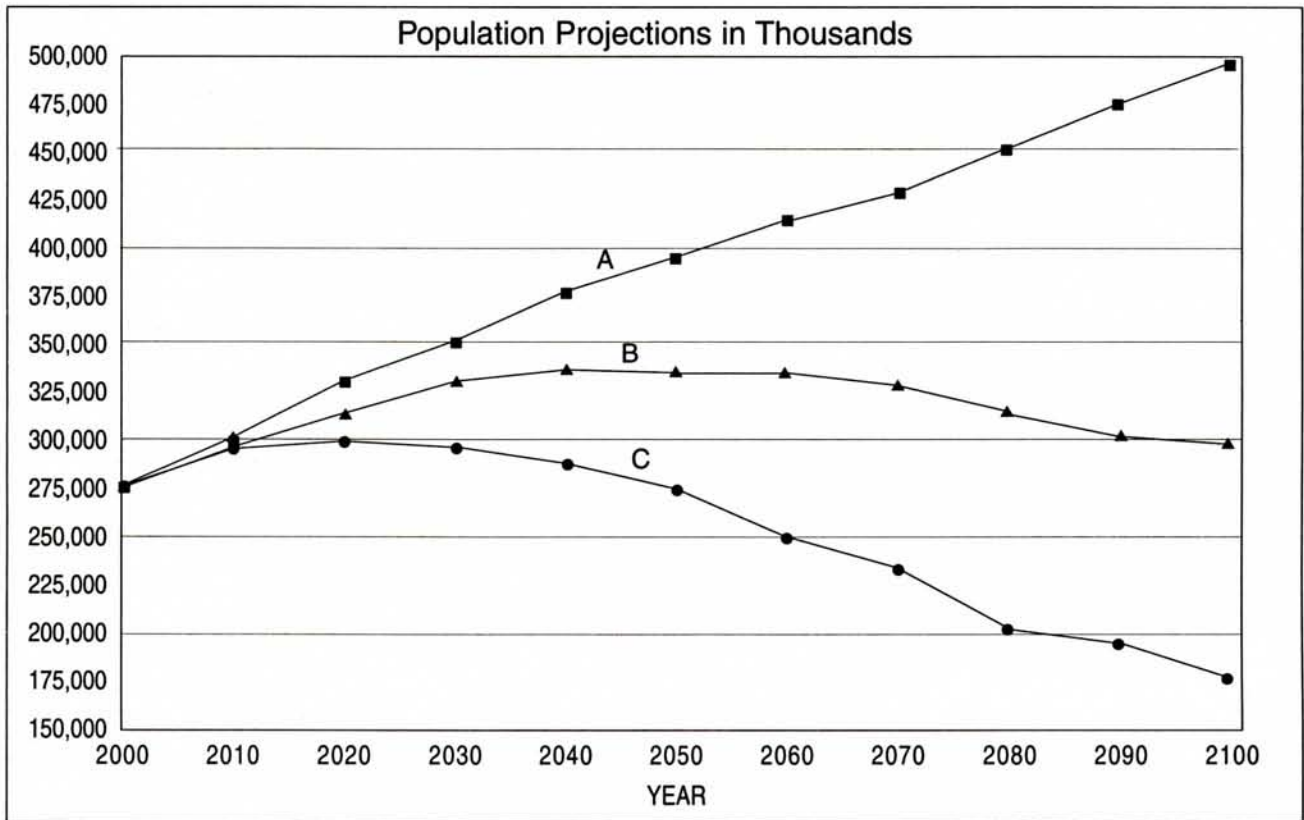
A U.S. population of 800 million may seem incredible, but the annual average growth rate that produces it runs at only 1.3 percent per year. This is the same as the average annual growth rate that has prevailed in the United States over the last half-century, and not too much above the one percent average growth rate of the last decade.

And even worse scenarios are possible. Demographer Leon Bouvier has asked the question: But what if American women had an "extra" child from now on (that is, three births as advocated by some) and what if immigration doubled to two million (as advocated by some)? What would that mean demographically?

Dr. Bouvier's answer: By 2050, the U.S. population would surpass 677 million; by 2075 it would have reached one billion and still be growing rapidly!

We simply cannot allow any of those scenarios to happen. Such growth would destroy our environment, our standard of living and the quality of our lives. **We at NPG believe that our goal must be to stabilize our population at not more than 150 million, our nation's size in 1950.** We consider that to be the optimum size for sustainable use of our resources.

There is no need, however, for agreement now on the exact size of the smaller population we need. Even a small reduction in today's numbers, as we shall see, will at best take many decades to achieve. For now we need only agree on the urgent need to halt, and then reverse, U.S. population growth.



Projected Population of the United States: 2000-2100

**Steps to Put the United States on the Path
Toward a Smaller Population**

To halt as quickly as possible, and then reverse, the disastrous growth of our population, we need to do three things:

1) **We need to reduce legal immigration from the present level of 900,000 a year to a maximum of 100,000 a year**, which would include all relatives, refugees, asylees, and skilled workers.

2) **We need to halt illegal immigration.** Over 300,000 illegal immigrants now settle here each year, joining the estimated four to five million illegal aliens already residing here permanently. Those numbers must be reduced to near zero.

3) **We need to make every effort to reduce our fertility from the present 2.0 to 1.5**, a goal NPG has long recommended. If most women had no more than two children, our fertility would fall to 1.5 because many women choose to have no children, or only one.

The first goal would be the easiest to achieve. It would only require Federal legislation. The second and third goals would be more difficult, but, given the political will, can be achieved.

Three Scenarios

The graph above projects three different paths that our population growth might follow, depending on different levels of fertility and immigration.

For all three of these projections it is assumed that both illegal immigration (entering) and emigration of citizens (leaving) are gradually reduced to roughly the same very low level so that their net effect on population is neutral.

The particular assumptions for each projection are as follows:

Line A - That present rates of fertility (2.0) and net immigration (legal and illegal) of one million a year will continue.

Line B - That our fertility rate, now 2.0, is gradually reduced to 1.5 by the year 2050, while net immigration remains at its present level of one million a year.

Line C - That our fertility rate, now 2.0, is gradually reduced to 1.5 by the year 2050 (the same as Line B), and that, starting in 1996, legal immigration is capped at 100,000 per year, including all relatives, refugees, asylees, and skilled workers, and remains at that level thereafter.

Analysis of the Three Projections

Projection A - The only comment possible is a simple one: this line leads straight to disaster.

Projection B - Under these assumptions (reduced fertility, but immigration at the current level) our population would continue to grow for another 55 years, not peaking until 2050 at 337 million, **some 75 million greater than our population today.**

U.S. population would then begin a slow decline, reaching 298 million by the end of the next century. Population then would still be some 36 million larger than our present 262 million, **and 121 million greater than in Projection C (low fertility and low immigration).**

The conclusion to be drawn is obvious: **If massive immigration is allowed to continue, it will be well over a century before our population gets back to its present unsustainable level,** even if fertility is drastically reduced.

Projection C - This scenario (lower fertility and drastically reduced immigration) demonstrates the gravity of our predicament. Even with drastic reductions in both fertility and immigration our population **would still grow for 25 more years.** It would not peak until 2020 at 300 million, and then begin a very slow and gradual decline.

It would then take another 35 years after 2020 for our population to return to its present size of around 260 million. Under the best case scenario, therefore, with low fertility and with immigration reduced to 100,000 a year, **it would still take at least 60 years for our population to get back to its present size.** That is an astonishing, and even frightening, fact that says much about the awesome momentum of population growth.

Reducing our population to a smaller, sustainable level would, of course, take much longer. Only by the end of the next century would our population decline to around 180 million, still a considerable distance from the optimum of 150 million, but far less burdensome to the environment than our present numbers.

In a few more years, however, our population would decline to the level we consider optimum -- 150 million - and could then be stabilized at that level, even allowing a slight increase in fertility and/or immigration.

The Problem With Counting on Declines in Fertility

The projections represented by Lines B and C were based on the assumption that our fertility rate would gradually decline from its present 2.0 to 1.5 by 2050.

Is that being overly optimistic? Probably it is. Dr. Bouvier has pointed out that no country has ever exhibited for so long a time the low rate of fertility that we have assumed for Projections B and C.

Fertility rates are unpredictable: even with tax and other incentives to encourage lower fertility (long recommended by NPG) there is no guarantee that fertility rates will not increase rather than decrease. Over the last 19 years, for example, the trend has been upward, from a low of 1.7 in 1976 to 2.0 in the last few years.

And, in any case, lowering our fertility to the rate assumed for Projections B and C would be virtually impossible if high immigration continued (as in Projection B) since the fertility of most current immigrants typically remains high in the early generations.

That is all the more reason why we must reduce immigration to a level consistent with our long-term national interest. Reducing immigration is a much faster and more certain way to get results than counting on fertility decline.

Apportioning the 100,000 Slots for Legal Immigration

If legal immigration were capped at 100,000 per year as we propose, how might those numbers best be allocated to meet the country's essential needs? Recognizing that the political process must decide, NPG believes that the following allocation would be reasonable:

75,000	- Spouses and minor children of American citizens.
5,000	- Persons with extraordinary skills.
20,000	- Refugees and asylees.
<hr/>	
100,000	

Immediate relatives of citizens now enter without limit, outside of quota. The 75,000 yearly quota on this category of immigrants would include only spouses and unmarried children under 18, and not parents, as is now the case.

For the first few years, the number of immediate relatives seeking to immigrate might exceed the yearly quota; some waiting might therefore be required. After an initial period, however, a quota of 75,000 for immediate relatives should be adequate.

To discourage chain migration, immigrants entering under the "skilled" and "refugee" categories would only be allowed to immigrate as family units, with spouses and any minor, unmarried children charged against the ceiling at that time.

The Attorney General should have the authority to shift numbers among the categories according to need, **but under no circumstances should the total number exceed 100,000 per year.**

Can Illegal Immigration Be Stopped?

Yes, it can and must be stopped. Any reduction in legal immigration would be futile if illegal immigration were allowed to continue. If legal immigration were reduced, continuing our present lax controls at the border and ports of entry would invite even higher illegal entries.

What can be done? The means for stopping illegal immigration and reducing to near zero the number of illegal immigrants living here permanently will be the subject of an NPG Policy Paper to be published soon. We will include here only a brief summary.

1. First and foremost we must have a secure national system of identification. This is a fundamental requirement without which there is simply no hope of controlling illegal immigration.

A secure system of identification must include an upgraded, tamper-proof Social Security card with personal identifiers such as a photograph and fingerprints. Manufacture or possession of false identification documents should be made a felony punishable by long prison terms, and, in the case of aliens, deportation.

Closely linked to the secure ID system should be a national computer registry, as proposed by Barbara Jordan, Chair of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform. A centralized registry would permit telephone verification by employers that a job applicant was either a citizen or a legal resident, and therefore eligible to work.

A registry would also allow local officials to easily determine the eligibility of applicants for a driver's license, school enrollment, or public assistance. The telephone verification procedure would place verification responsibility where it should be, and should always have been, on the shoulders of Federal authorities.

2. We must stop rewarding illegal aliens with jobs and benefits and start penalizing them severely for breaking U.S. laws. Illegal aliens who have been deported once should forfeit forever their right to seek legal entry. If they return here, they should be penalized by a mandatory prison term, and a fine or confiscation of property.

3. We must reduce to near zero the population of illegal aliens now living here, now estimated at four to five million. Their presence is a magnet for millions of others who perceive, correctly, that there is little risk in entering our country illegally, and, once here, remaining indefinitely.

Congress must increase the budget for the Immigration and Naturalization Service so that it can identify and deport large numbers of illegal aliens. The INS should set as its goal at least 400,000 deportations a year, but it does not now have the resources for such a program. In 1992 it deported only 38,000 illegal aliens.

Congress must also simplify the rules on deportation, and Federal, state and local investigative agencies must be required to cooperate fully with Federal immigration officials.

Some of our proposals may seem harsh, especially when compared with our Federal government's present ineffective measures. We must bear in mind, however, that as poverty and social unrest increase in most third world countries (the direct result of overpopulation and continued population growth) the number of poor and desperate people seeking to enter our country illegally is bound to increase greatly.

Strong measures to halt illegal immigration are the only realistic response to the fact that tens of millions of people are absolutely determined to flout our laws by entering our country illegally.

Reasons for Not Halting Legal Immigration Completely

An NPG member wrote me recently and asked, "Since our country is already overpopulated, and needs above all to halt and then reverse its population growth, why does NPG advocate any legal immigration at all, since immigration adds to our population growth?"

That is a difficult question. In an already seriously overpopulated country such as the United States how can any immigration be justified?

Demographically speaking, there is no question that our nation would be far better off with zero immigration. But given our history and long traditions, it would be virtually impossible to stop all immigration, and NPG does not advocate doing so.

The United States cannot, and should not, turn its back on all legitimate refugees, even though we can only hope to take in a tiny fraction of all the hundreds of millions who have a well-founded fear of persecution, or who live under oppressive regimes, or who suffer from economic or environmental distress.

In addition, our country will benefit from admitting a small number of scientists and other exceptionally skilled persons. A limit of 5,000 a year, including spouses and minor children, should not cause a serious brain-drain from other nations.

Finally, it would be difficult indeed to sustain an immigration policy that denied American citizens the right to bring their spouses and minor children here.

A maximum immigration ceiling of 100,000 yearly would allow us to meet our core domestic and international obligations. However, if illegal immigration is not halted within the next few years, then ALL legal immigration should be suspended until illegal immigration has been stopped.

Is NPG Anti-Immigrant?

No, it is not. We believe that those who have already settled here legally deserve our respect and the full protection of our laws. Nor does it follow that we harbor negative feelings toward would-be immigrants because we advocate restricting immigration to a level consistent with our own national interest.

Is NPG anti-mass immigration? Yes, unequivocally, for all the reasons we have discussed.

Could our recommendations be accurately and fairly characterized as being xenophobic, nativist, racist, isolationist or any other label that proponents of massive immigration commonly apply to those who advocate reasonable levels of immigration?

Certainly not. Immigration of 100,000 a year is, by world standards, a generous number. It appears small only in comparison with today's astronomical numbers. Curiously, well-intentioned advocates of massive immigration never reckon with the likely impact of their recommendations on our population and environment.

Our Responsibility to the World Community

Our primary responsibility is to present and future generations of Americans, not to the entire world. As responsible stewards we have, first and foremost, a moral obligation to preserve for future generations of Americans the magnificent land we have inherited.

We cannot fulfill that obligation unless we succeed in stabilizing our population at a lower, more sustainable level. If we fail to do that, we will be unable to maintain a viable society and economy, and will become powerless to help either our own people or the community of nations.

At the same time we sympathize with the plight of less fortunate people in other countries who want to come here. We should do all we can to help their nations improve their standards of living in a sustainable way. That would mean, above all, helping them (if, of course, they want our help) to halt and then reverse their catastrophic population growth.

But while overpopulation is a global problem, in a world of sovereign nations the solutions must ultimately be worked out at the local level, that is, by each nation. The problems of already overpopulated, and still rapidly growing, developing countries are beyond solution by emigration: the numbers are too vast.

The population of the developing countries is growing by some 80 million a year. Their population increase over the next 15 years or so will by itself exceed the present population of all the developed countries, roughly 1.2 billion.

Developing countries can never relieve their poverty and permanently improve their standard of living until they stabilize their numbers at a sustainable level. In most cases that level is only a small fraction of their present numbers. The time required to achieve this goal will have to be measured in centuries.

Perhaps the greatest contribution our country could make toward eliminating world poverty would be to serve as an example of a nation that is committed to working toward a population size that is in balance with its resources and environment, and sustainable indefinitely.

Summing Up

Because we have allowed our nation to become seriously overpopulated, we are in deep trouble. A quick and painless solution does not exist.

As the projections have shown, it will be virtually impossible for the United States to achieve a sustainable level of population in less than a century. We must waste no more time in taking the actions that will get us on the path toward that goal.

Changes in fertility rates are difficult, slow, and unpredictable. We must, therefore, quickly reduce immigration to a level consistent with our long-term national interest. **Reducing immigration, while at the same time trying to lower fertility, offers the best hope of getting results.**

Our critical task at NPG is to persuade our government to act decisively **NOW** to halt illegal immigration and reduce legal immigration from 900,000 to 100,000 a year. If we succeed, our nation will have taken the first vital step on the path toward a smaller, more sustainable population.

What Others Are Saying About Immigration

- *“Furthermore, for some of the developing countries, emigration is a stopgap which allows postponement of internal economic and demographic changes that would make emigration unnecessary.”*
—Dr. Leon F. Bouvier, Adjunct Professor of Demography at Tulane University.
- *“As the underdeveloped countries become still more crowded there will be increasing pressure for greater admission to developed countries on humanitarian grounds if for no other reason. By and large, however, the problems of underdeveloped countries are beyond solution by emigration.”*
—Professor Kingsley Davis, noted demographer.
- *“In the long run, the impact on population growth will be the most lasting legacy of our current immigration policies.”* —Lindsey Grant, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Environment and Population.
- *“The first task of our immigration policy must be its effective and equitable implementation. The second task is to reassess and then institute optimum levels of immigration based on such long-range factors as demographic projections, environmental factors, quality of life and the preservation of our national heritage.”*
—Ambassador Marshall Green.
- *“Bluntly put, at the present advanced state of national development, the ideal rate of immigration would be very close to zero per year.”*
—Professor Garrett Hardin, noted ecologist.
- *“We have to get our hearts in line with our heads and our myths in line with reality. We know we cannot accept all the people who want to come to the United States. We know our immigration policy has to be designed in the interest of the United States.”*
—Richard D. Lamm, former Governor of Colorado.
- *“The fundamental limits to immigration are environmental. The United States must adopt an immigration policy that does not contribute to skyrocketing population growth if we are to ensure the survival of our ecosystem.”*
—Mark W. Nowak, Executive Director, Population-Environment-Balance.
- *“After a 20-year fling with high fertility, the American people opted in the late 60’s to return to the two-child family. At the same time, immigration policy makers set in motion a three-decade-long mass population intake that has added 30 million people and more than negated the population restraint that Americans chose.”*
—David Simcox, former Director of the Center for Immigration Studies.
- *“In 1992, we reached the 5.5 billion mark, and the UN estimates that we will exceed 10 billion in the next century before population growth levels off. This demographic force will generate an unprecedented wave of human migration in the 21st Century as tens of millions seek economic opportunity, escape from environmental disaster, civil strife and repression.”*
—Daniel Stein, Executive Director,
Federation for American Immigration Reform.

Negative Population Growth, Inc.

210 The Plaza, P.O. Box 1206 • Teaneck, N.J. 07666-1206 • Telephone: (201) 837-3555

NPG, Inc., is a nonprofit organization founded in 1972. Annual dues are \$30, and are tax deductible to the extent the law allows. NPG is the only population/environmental organization that calls for a smaller U.S. and world population, and for specific, realistic measures to achieve those goals.

NPG papers are \$1.00 each, including postage and handling. Copies of each paper are sent to members and are free to the media upon request. For orders totalling ten or more, the price is 25¢ each. Single copies of papers are free to libraries if orders are accompanied by one self-addressed stamped envelope for each paper ordered. Papers longer than four pages require a 9" x 12" envelope with a 55¢ stamp.