

NEGATIVE POPULATION GROWTH

Press Release

For immediate release

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New NPG Forum Paper Examines the Connection Between Affluence, Consumerism, and the Environment

Will the Environment Continue to Degrade as the Affluent Continue to Consume?

Alexandria, VA, (January 5, 2021): “If 2020 teaches us anything, it's that the next crisis is likely right around the corner, and could be prevented, or at least contained, if we act swiftly. A pandemic that scientists long warned was likely to occur, occurred, and has already killed well over 240,000 people in the U.S. Dozens of large wildfires – the latest evidence of the climate emergency – are torching the American West, their smoke more damaging to health than almost any fire season on record.” These words, written by Edwin S. Rubenstein, mark the start of his new work titled [Will Affluence Ruin the Environment?](#) Published by Negative Population Growth, Inc., the paper seeks to flush out the role of the globally affluent for their part in the degradation of the environment while paying close attention to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rubenstein initiates his discourse by referencing a recent study in the academic journal Nature Communications, noting their warning that “despite all the buzz about green technology mitigating man-made environmental problems, the only way for human consumption to become sustainable is to rein in wealthy consumers.” In other words, those affluent enough to regularly consume resources will need to disengage their dependencies to counteract the detrimental effects of consumerism on the environment. Rubenstein comments further on affluence, explaining: “Most people living in developed countries fit into this category, meaning you don't have to consider yourself rich in order to be globally affluent. Even poor people in the U.S. and other wealthy countries have a disproportionately large and unsustainable resource footprint compared to the global average.” Add to the mix the unavoidable reality that “super affluent powerful business owners have a vested interest in promoting a high consumption, high population growth, economy...” and what's left is a system focused on consumerism without regard to long-term sustainability.

After establishing who is considered affluent and the harm caused by consumerism, Rubenstein relates how policies enacted in direct response to the COVID-19 crisis have affected the environment, saying: “Government policies during the COVID pandemic drastically altered patterns of energy demand around the world. International borders were closed and populations were confined to their homes, which reduced transport and changed energy consumption patterns...researchers estimate that global fossil fuel emissions for all of 2020 will be 4% to 7% lower than 2019. If this holds, it will be several times larger than the decline seen in 2009 after the global finance crisis.” While some social scientists have expressed the long-term benefits of the pandemic, Rubenstein cautions: “In a perfect world, mainstream economists would join...in warning policymakers of the dangers of over-stimulating the economy. Unfortunately, conventional economists measure economic progress

with data biased toward growth...Mainstream economists reject the very notion of limits to growth. In their view, all shortages are temporary, and can be eliminated by allowing prices to rise. Technological progress, according to the mainstreamers, is capable of overcoming any scarcity faced on earth.”

Rubenstein concludes his work, reviewing the effects of affluence on the environment and what needs to happen to move forward sustainably into the future, stating: “For more than a century growth in affluence, and in the number of people living in affluent circumstances, increased resource use and greenhouse gas emissions faster than technological progress reduced them. A meaningful transition to sustainability will require far-reaching lifestyle changes as well as continued technological progress...A few months of world-wide economic lockdown did more for the environment than decades of technological progress. But this is a Band-Aid. The global economy must re-open soon. A balanced strategy of economic moderation plus global population reduction is needed for long term stability.”

Founded in 1972, NPG is a national nonprofit membership organization dedicated to educating the American public and political leaders regarding the damaging effects of population growth. We believe that our nation is already vastly overpopulated in terms of the long-range carrying capacity of its resources and environment. NPG advocates the adoption of its [Proposed National Population Policy](#), with the goal of eventually stabilizing U.S. population at a sustainable level – far lower than today’s. We do not simply identify the problems – we propose solutions. For more information, visit our website at NPG.org, follow us on Facebook [@NegativePopulationGrowth](#) or follow us on Twitter [@npg_org](#).