

KILLING OUR LAND WITH KINDNESS: WHY WE MUST CONSIDER THE NEXT SEVEN GENERATIONS BY MAKING BETTER DECISIONS ABOUT OUR POPULATION SIZE

**An NPG Forum Paper
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ABSTRACT

Most of the religions practiced in the US have a golden rule towards the duty to welcome the stranger, especially the downtrodden stranger. We are going to have to alter those narratives a bit so that we don't become even more overpopulated and put additional pressure on our remaining wild spaces, national parks, and lands sacred within Indian country. We must look to other ways that we can help the stranger than admitting them entry to our already overpopulated country or assume the responsibility that we are killing our landscapes, and each other with kindness.

I owe this paper's theme to a conversation I had with Chris Tall Bear, a full-blooded member of the Southern Cheyenne of Oklahoma and a public health professional. I started out with the premise that those in Indian country would be likely to get behind the idea that mass immigration is not good for their communities or their interests. While I believe there is evidence that the land surrounding reservations and even within them is being negatively impacted by population growth, Chris enlightened me that it goes against their tradition to turn away the stranger. It is culturally abhorrent to his people not to give food to the hungry and shelter to those in need. He told a story of a captured Ute who was treated so well he didn't want to leave the Cheyenne. Chris opened my eyes to the

cultural stories of how we need to treat strangers that run deep in all our traditions, but that need to be challenged in light of our vastly increased human numbers.

Our conversation also inspired me to look deeper into our current interface with Indian Country especially after he told me that 65% of Native Americans voted for Donald Trump and his promises to "drill baby drill" on their land, which has the potential to offer them dividends. The record high amount of money offered to tribes from the oil and gas leasing Indigenous lands, reached \$41,000,000 in 1956, which primarily went to 10 tribal groups. While many tribal leaders have rejected money as a substitute for land sovereignty and pollution over the years, as more have moved

to urban areas the promise of dividends has become more attractive.

“In 2012 alone, most recent ONRR, the Offices of Natural Resource Revenue, data concludes that energy and mineral resources generated over \$701 million in royalty revenue paid to Indian mineral owners. Income from energy and minerals is by far the largest source of revenue generated from Trust lands.” The way the rules work is that enrolled members can get upfront money. “In the last three years, DEMD working with BIA realty staff has assisted Tribes in the negotiation of 48 IMDA leases for oil and gas, totaling approximately 2,750,000 acres and about \$45 million in bonuses (upfront payments). These leases have the potential to additionally produce over \$20 billion in revenue to the Indian mineral owner over the life of the lease through royalties and working interests.”¹

The land set aside for Indian reservations totals 56,200,000 acres. Much of this land can only be occupied by those who have tribal ancestry by varying degrees of bloodlines. Population growth due to mass immigration therefore is not felt on these reservations, totaling an area the size of Idaho. It would be hard to convince those living on particularly desolate reservations that there is no more room for mass immigration. To add to the complexity, there is also evidence that one tribe in particular, the Cherokee, are benefiting from mass immigration due to their role in processing new immigrants.²

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF

The US is a country where approximately 188 million out of 341 million identify with one of the following faith communities: 173 million practice Christianity, 7.5 million practice Judaism, 3.54 million practice Islam, and 1.5 million practice Hinduism. Others

include various Indigenous tribes, and minor faiths including Mormons, Amish and Mennonites. Each has some edict of treating the stranger in your midst with respect and care.³

These religions originated when the world was a far less populated place (as will be noted after each religion’s reference). Meaning it was necessary for societies to welcome strangers in order to facilitate trade routes and for the necessary alliances to be made. As the world has added billions of people to our various lands, human activity has changed the way we interact with each other and it demands that we alter our relationship with the concept of loving thy neighbor.

Here are the references to how religious and culturally traditional people are supposed to address strangers from the oldest to the newest religions.

Indigenous Native American Tribes can claim to be the longest-lived group compared to these other listed monotheistic groups. Though they vary greatly in their specific traditions, origin stories, and ceremonies, they lived in mostly hunter-gatherer societies, communally, and traded far and wide thousands of years before the world’s monotheistic religions came to dominate the continent. Treating a stranger well was a part of their collective traditions, as indicated by Chris Tall Bear. Many trace their beginnings to origins right in the Americas. Archeological evidence pinpoints their beginnings in the Americas to at least 13,000 years ago, when the world’s population was hard to estimate but probably somewhere between 1 and 10 million.⁴

Before Europeans journeyed to the ‘New’ world, the estimated population of people native to North, Central, and South America was 100 million, 80 million of whom would

succumb to European diseases soon after.⁵

Hindu writings instruct, “This is the sum of duty; do naught onto others what you would not have them do unto you.” (Mahabharata 5,1517) Note that the global population in 8,000 BCE was estimated to be 5 million people.⁶

In Judaism, the Torah commands, “Love your neighbor as yourself – I am God.” (Leviticus 19:18) and “Heed the stranger’s treatment because “you know the feelings of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 23:9)⁷

The population of the world was estimated to be 30 million in 1800 BCE when Judaism began.⁸

Christian scripture speaks often about love of a neighbor: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12, 30-31) Christianity began over 2000 years ago when the world had 170 million people.⁹

The Qur’an directs its followers to, “Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good- to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet)...” (Qur’an 4:36) Islam is a relatively new religion dating back to 1400 years ago when the global population was estimated to be 207 million people.¹⁰

“Love thy stranger as thyself” essentially means to treat others as you wish to be treated. This ethical edict was born of a different time, and practiced long before it was written into scripture when the world was exponentially less populated.

“Until the 1800s, population growth was incredibly slow on a global level. The global population was estimated to have been around 188 million people in the year 1CE, and did not reach one billion until around 1803. However, since the 1800s, a phenomenon known as the demographic transition has seen population growth skyrocket, reaching eight billion people in 2023.”¹¹

It is far more difficult to follow the rule to love thy neighbor in the demographic transition world as we experience it today.

Even those unaffiliated with a specific church, synagogue, mosque or tribe often subscribe to this ethic. With such deep roots attached to treating strangers well, it is easy to see why the difficulties with mass immigration at the border have become one of the leading domestic problems in the US. This is where the rubber meets the overcrowded road. We are bound to help the needy stranger by our ethics and meanwhile the ecological story is telling us that limits have been reached.

In order to reconcile the difference between our ethic-bound intention and our responsibility to preserve and conserve our environment, we must begin the journey towards ethical solutions. We must fully recognize that our stories of helping strangers run deep but no longer serve us when they turn a collective blind eye to our nation’s ecological and resource limits. Caring for the stranger must be done in the context of also trying to preserve the integrity of our local ecosystems from being overrun by us, a top predator, needing to use the land for our basic needs.

OUR CONFLICTED COUNTRY

When it comes to kindness, we are a conflicted country. If the US were a person, we would likely be diagnosed with multiple personality disorder. We live in a world of

opposing values and Americans are not legally bound to agree with anyone, even our neighbors. On the one hand we have all of these religions preaching love of the stranger and on the other hand in the US, we cannot seem to find a way to help the growing numbers of homeless in our cities.

The US has over 2 million non-profit non-governmental organizations dedicated to advance charitable missions ranging from helping with drug abuse to poverty, from child advocacy to sex trafficking.¹² Still this is the country that enlisted the Iroquois nation to help fight in the Revolutionary war and then stole their land. We are one of the many nations who abducted free men, women and children from their homelands, who were then inhumanely trafficked to this country, stripped of their human rights, and sold as enslaved labor for the picking of crops and doing domestic work as slaves. We carried on the institution of slavery for over 250 years. We made treaties with many Indian nations after reducing their numbers with disease and warfare and then broke those same treaties when opportunities to profit arose with the discovery of gold and other precious minerals on the land promised to them.

Yet, over 20 NGO's work to help migrants navigate paperwork and generally support their needs.¹³ We promote kindness so much that there is even a newly created summit in New York which is actually called—the Kindness Summit.¹⁴

The government, depending on who is in office, has been all over the map on how they deal with the overwhelming numbers of people wanting to make the US their home: from talk of mass deportation and building walls, to kidnapping the strangers who make it across our southern border to our land and busing them to sanctuary cities. We clearly need a

more humane discourse established in order to address our ultimate responsibility to caring for strangers in the context of ignoring the needs of those already here.

We operate out of guilt in many situations which rarely helps those in need in the long run. We are told to give gift bags from the dollar store to those who panhandle instead of figuring out what is happening to have so many in dire straits. We are told to let in the many migrants who have come to our doors often in desperate situations, not considering the desperate situation that it creates in already overcrowded cities.

PROOF THAT OUR LAND IS FULL

Earth Day Founder Gaylord Nelson said it best, “[I]t’s phony to say ‘I’m for the environment but not for limiting immigration’...” U.S. population will increase from 203 million in 1970 to 439 million in 2050, according to the Census Bureau. Eighty-two percent of all U.S. population growth today is due to arriving immigrants and their children.¹⁵

All of those migrants will need fresh water, housing, jobs, transportation and energy. They will be the impetus for development and the scarring of the landscape which cannot easily regenerate independently or return to its natural beauty.

It has already been observed that “mass unchecked immigration exacerbates the problems of traffic congestion, increased energy and fuel consumption, as well as rising rents and housing prices (for a discussion of immigration and rising real estate prices see David Ley, *Millionaire Migrants*, 2010). It also further strains our already decaying transportation infrastructure.”¹⁶

But it isn't just human infrastructure that is suffering, the land designated as wilderness (or sacred) and park land is affected, as well. We are witnessing a biological and ecological 'meltdown' fueled by increases in human numbers.

"Many people don't realize that the destruction of biodiversity isn't just about the loss of species and distinct subspecies. Species extinction is the ultimate manifestation of population growth and associated forms of habitat destruction. Yet when any natural habitat is logged, mined, drilled, fenced, roaded, over-grazed, border-walled, or converted into strip malls, subdivisions, or cultivated farms, local populations of plant and animal species bite the dust. As local populations disappear, with them go genetic traits that might otherwise have proven beneficial, leading to new or better-adapted forms of life. In other words, even if a species is elsewhere secure, the broad-scale loss of local populations due to expansion of the human enterprise knee-caps the very process of evolution, the driving force behind life on Earth. This is a rarely discussed and tragic aspect of the biological meltdown."¹⁷

Sprawl studies¹⁸ are showing that there is a rapid creep of growth into open lands and wilderness areas. When commercial, recreational, and transportation inspired infrastructure moves into an area, the fast-paced concentrated development negatively impacts water absorption, cropland, and wildlife—at times even impinging on sacred lands. There is only so much water to go around. Choices have to be made whether growing populations want water to be diverted from croplands into developments. Idaho's population has doubled since 1990, many from California and from immigration. Three of the state's aquifers provide potable water to residents. There are no alternatives if the water

is over-pumped or contaminated. These aquifers have not doubled to meet the demand. This is the stress that too many people put on a resource.

MOVE, ADAPT, OR DIE: A SURVIVAL STRATEGY

When I was a naturalist, I taught that wild animals had a three-word strategy of survival: Move, Adapt, or Die. If trouble came in the form of severe weather, predators, or general habitat upheaval, they could move to another place, adapt to the situation by living up in trees, or grow more fur, or die off. We as *Homo sapiens*, are no different. We can move to another place if life gets too hard, we can adapt to less-than-ideal situations or we can die off. The first impulse to move has become problematic in our overpopulated world. When people argue that the US is "a land of immigrants", the response should be: "That was then; this is now." Moving to another place is no longer possible without displacement and degradation of current conditions. It is estimated that upwards of 166 million people would love to immigrate to the US. Where would we put them?

KINDNESS FOR WHOM AND WHEN?

The environment requires us to think of the future. The environment is a physical reality, where we all live in connection with the land, the air, the soil, the animals. It supports us and was given to us, according to Indigenous perspectives, by the Creator to use, protect and benefit from in gratitude for its gift of life. Many people have heard of 7th Generation as the Vermont-based ecological friendly soap company now owned by the multi-million-dollar Unilever company. But the concept of the seventh generation needs to be embraced by anyone concerned about sustainability.

“The Seventh Generation Principle is based on an ancient Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) philosophy that the decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future.”¹⁹

Is it really kind to future generations for us to ignore the numbers of people allowed to come into the US and demand access to our limited resources? This is a question with which we must wrestle, for kindness today could turn into an ugly future of great struggle and less promise.

So what are the solutions to the entrenched problem of ignoring the elephant in the room? I am often asked what would be a desired scenario if I were in charge of the crippling overpopulation as manifested in our current crisis of mass immigration given all I know.

One of the first things I would love to see happen is a complete permeation of public discourse – from the news media, to social media, to our education systems, and political world – regarding the serious threat overpopulation poses on human existence. We cannot solve our problems by repurposing bags or recycling our peanut butter jars. We cannot expect technology to solve the problems generated by overpopulation. To jumpstart this change in narrative to one less anthropocentric and more eco-centric, would be to call for a worldwide summit on overpopulation which would not succumb to the downstream takeover like what happened in Cairo in 1994. This conference would educate the world about the dangers of overpopulation. It would emphasize that there are two ways to become overpopulated: births over deaths and immigration. It would not include any other issues such as reproductive or women’s rights.²⁰

Furthermore, as a society we need to insist that the news media use the word

‘overpopulation’ in their stories to explain how it has rendered the first strategy of Move, Adapt, or Die irrelevant. We cannot use “move” as a way to alleviate pain, it just causes more pain.

The boards of directors and leaders of all NGOs associated with wildland protection would have a joint meeting with the boards and leaders of population NGOs to come up with joint messaging for how wildlife is protected when population is included as an issue.

We must make studying ecology and doing ecological internships in biologically sensitive areas mandatory for graduation in every public school and private school system.

We need to adequately fund the US State Department with money usually given the Pentagon and develop a team of expert advisors who would work on stabilizing countries through diplomatic channels. Their purpose would be to help create a better life for their citizens by encouraging them to have small families and subsidized sustainable industries. This would help national security and save so much money in the long run.

The State Department would model the strategies of Population Media Center²¹, and expand their efforts to alleviate the poverty caused by child marriages and large families using multi-media culturally respectful videos and radio programs.

The United Nations Family Planning program would become incredibly well-funded and give weekly news reports on their progress.²²

Since we are growing mostly by immigration in the US, we need to create a culture of care around limiting both legal and illegal immigration which require two very different strategies. US policies on immigration must be based on carrying

capacity as a first priority and include an ethic of safety and protection of worker's rights, as well as putting corporations on the hot seat for hiring undocumented workers. Enforcing laws that already exist must be done under the banner, the US IS FULL.

We would create a revolving door policy for those wanting to be educated in the US and monitor their limited visas closely so that they do indeed return to their home country at the end of their legally dictated limit. That way their country of origin will be able to benefit from their education.

The labor market, when flooded with new immigrants creates lower overall wages. We need to enforce E-Verify making sure that employers are no longer inspiring illegal immigration. Building the middle-class back is nearly impossible without immigration reform.

The last thing I would do would be by far the most difficult. We need to take the oxygen out of the strictly religious narratives of monotheism. The monotheistic faiths have a connection to the afterlife but not to this world, not to Mother Earth. Those narratives which have no connection to ecology cannot fathom the deliberate choice to have smaller families.

Religious groups that still preach large families and the End-of-Days, in which followers believe that the destruction of the earth is just a part of their deity's plan—stand in the way of reaching an optimal population which the planet's resources can support. I would start by having another summit where the world's religious leaders come together and listen to the wisdom of those who wish to avoid the pain and misery of overpopulation. The conference would be opened with this quote from Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama: "One of the great challenges today is the population explosion. Unless we are able to tackle this issue effectively, we will be

confronted with the problem of the natural resources being inadequate for all human beings on this Earth."²³

In conclusion, because so many Americans are in need of our care, welcoming millions more is not an act of kindness to those already in line. There are a half million homeless people within our borders who need our help first. There are Black Americans who are still waiting their turn for great job opportunities and who have been hurt every time there has been a wave of mass immigration. Indians experience the highest rates of poverty due to their isolation within mostly non-arable, desolate lands (i.e. reservations) and lack of economic growth opportunities perpetuated by long-entrenched colonial regulations. (The Navaho [Dene] nation was just voted out of having water rights by the Supreme court.) These long-term Americans need to be the first in line to get government help, not the last. A new narrative about kindness needs to be introduced. May I suggest: "Be kind to strangers but not at the expense of those already in need in your neighborhood."

NOTES:

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