



FOOTNOTES

THE L.A. RIOTS AND U.S. POPULATION NONPOLICY

The riots in Los Angeles have generated a new wave of self examination in the White establishment. It should perhaps be tempered with realism as to the underlying forces involved, if not the triggering incident itself. The effort to bring minorities (and particularly Blacks) into unfettered participation in U.S. society takes good will on all sides and a sustained effort by the minority poor to master the economic skills of modern society. It cannot simply be done for them.

However, even if the country's leadership cannot undertake to guarantee everybody the job of their choice, it should try to create an environment in which those who are willing and able to work can find work to do. In this respect, over the past three decades, the nation could not have botched the job more thoroughly if it had deliberately set out to start riots. Unemployment, the sense of frustration and hopelessness, and the competition for jobs from people coming from desperate lives in other countries — these were the tinder on which the LA riots fed.

The History

In the 'fifties and 'sixties, the nation set out on perhaps its greatest moral crusade: to bring Blacks into the economic and social main stream. There were problems to begin with, and we made them worse.

- The crusade began at a tough time, when the country faced the prospect of finding jobs for particularly large cohorts of young people, as a result of the baby boom.
- Jobs had to be created, initially at the unskilled level, just as the technological revolution — which continues today — was drying up the demand for unskilled labor.
- The social revolution that has led most young women into the paid labor force had been unleashed by World War II and was gathering momentum. It increased the competition for jobs.

How did the nation respond?

• Just as the crusade began, the country embarked upon an immense engineering project: the Interstate highway program. One result was to facilitate White flight (and bourgeois flight generally) to the suburbs as poor Blacks continued their historic migration from farms to the cities. The cities were effectively resegregated, the poor Blacks were isolated, the cities' tax base eroded, and there went both the social contact and the financial resources to help educate poor young Blacks to join the rest of the society. "Busing" was hardly a solution when the middle class lived in different educational jurisdictions and was fighting to preserve its own schools.

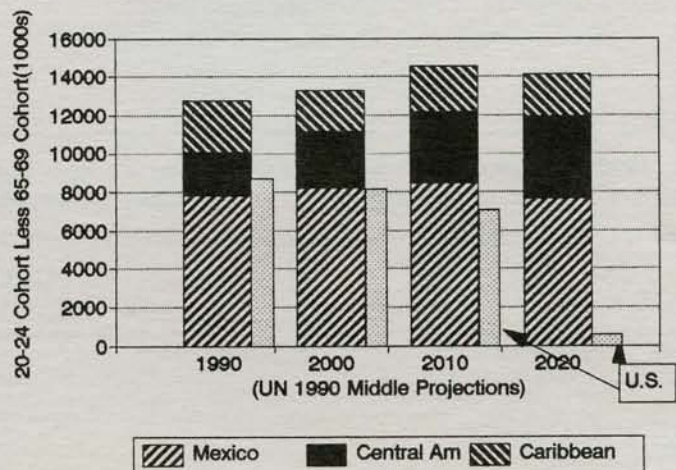
• Even more important, we increased the competition for unskilled jobs, rather than trying to limit it.

— **Immigration.** Every immigration "reform" of the past two decades has increased legal immigration, and our policies have encouraged the immigration of the unskilled, to compete with our own minorities and with earlier immigrants. Because of some employers' demands for cheap labor, we have failed to enforce the immigration laws we have, and this has encouraged illegal immigration. The *New York Times* called it the "policy of the wink." The Census Bureau counts a net movement of 2.3 million foreign immigrants into California in the 'eighties, and this does not include the illegal immigrants who chose not to be counted. They intensified the already intense competition for jobs and housing.

— **Fertility.** Public and private efforts to provide help in reducing unwanted pregnancies among the poor have been undermined by the abortion debate and the attacks on family planning centers which Presidents Reagan and Bush have at least tacitly supported. The higher pregnancy rate among the poor (of all races; this is not a racial issue) has multiplied the size of the national problem of nurturing and educating poor children to escape the cycle of poverty.

In pursuit of an ideological debate about Chinese population policy, the President cut off U.S. support for the U.N. Population Fund and the International Planned Parenthood Foundation. We thus did what we could to postpone third world efforts to address the population problems they themselves recognize, and to assure that third world population pressures — and the pressures to migrate to the U.S. — will continue to rise, offering the prospect of more and bigger "LA riots".

GROWTH OF WORKING AGE POPULATION
Entrants Less Departures. 5 Year Totals



The Prospect

This is not something that has happened. It is happening, and it will get worse. At the risk of repetition, let us reprint a key graph from a recent NPG FORUM (*Free Trade and Cheap Labor: the President's Dilemma*. 1991).

This is not just a guess. The young adults of twenty years hence are already born. The countries of meso-America, already bedeviled by high unemployment rates, will have to absorb an expansion of the working age population comparable to ours during the 'seventies and 'eighties when we absorbed the baby boomers —and those economies in total are 1/17th as large as ours. In this country, during that process, the poor got poorer and the rich got richer. The problems just south of us are likely to be infinitely more intense.

If one looks beyond, to South America and the rest of the world, the numbers are of course enormously larger.

The problem is not going away. It is growing, and it will intensify the competition for jobs and housing among our own young and unskilled.

... And Some Thoughts About Policy

Issues like this won't be solved by a Presidential commission looking at the L.A. Police Department. They require that — for the first time — our government begin to make the connections between huge forces such as population change and urban unrest.

For starters:

- Reject Congressional proposals (S1734 and HR3366) to undo the 1986 law that imposed penalties on employers who hire illegal aliens. That provision was the one bright spot in recent legislation on immigration, and it was passed at the cost of a

compromise that legalized over 3 million illegal immigrants (including hundreds of thousands of fraudulent "farm workers".) We don't need more competition for jobs. S1734 is cosponsored by Senators Kennedy, Hatch, Specter, DeConcini. HR3366 is sponsored by Representatives Richardson and Roybal. They should all be told that the nation needs a tougher "employer sanctions" law, not an emasculated one that benefits some employers but harms poor Americans.

- Revise the Immigration Act of 1990 so as to protect vulnerable Americans rather than simply facilitating the immigration of favored ethnic groups. Begin a serious effort to stop illegal immigration.

- Watch the government's negotiations for a free trade agreement with Mexico and, later, the rest of the hemisphere. We should not be exporting more unskilled jobs or importing more unskilled labor.

- Presently, about 2 percent of our foreign aid goes to population assistance. Most of the rest goes to special interests and the pursuit of foreign policy objectives that are rendered obsolete by the end of the Cold War. Population growth is the single overwhelming issue that spreads across the third world, and we have our aid priorities precisely wrong. A reversal of priorities would help them to manage a problem that is both theirs and ours.

- Put aside the ideological battles and restore family planning services to young women who want and need them. Get on with the job, and encourage them to limit their fertility. Help them to understand that limiting the numbers means that their own children will have a better shot at the help they need. Offer them hope. Fewer young people offers each of them a better chance. Is that a bad idea?

— Lindsey Grant

NPG FOOTNOTES are short editorial comments on current issues, written by officers of NPG or those with a particularly relevant point of view to bring to bear on the connections between population and other issues.

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