



## NEGATIVE POPULATION GROWTH

# THE NPG FORUM

## The Timid Crusade

by Lindsey Grant

*The nation was far more forthright in addressing the issue of population growth a generation ago than it is now. Meanwhile, we have grown by 56 million people, with apparent complacency. The big environmental organizations see the dangers and say they believe population growth should stop, but they are reticent as to how that goal might be pursued. To answer the question "why so cautious?", one can offer only speculation, but the population question is fundamentally important, generalizations without specific proposals are an invitation to more growth, and the taboo against discussing specific measures must be broken.*

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U.S. population, at present rates, will approach 400 million, and perhaps even pass 500 million, by 2050.<sup>1</sup> The only two variables available to influence that growth are fertility and migration. That proposition seems self-evident, but it poses an apparently insuperable stumbling block to the big environmental organizations that advocate an end to U.S. population growth.

### The Heroic Age

In 1969, President Nixon raised the issue of U.S. population growth. Let me quote him at some length, even though readers may have seen this quotation before. His was a prophetic vision from, perhaps, a surprising source.

*"In 1917 the total number of Americans passed 100 million, after three full centuries of steady growth. In 1967 — just half a century later — the 200 million mark was passed. If the present rate of growth continues, the third hundred million persons will be added in roughly a thirty-year period. This means that by the year 2000, or shortly thereafter, there will be more than 300 million Americans.*

*"The growth will produce serious challenges for our society. I believe that many of our present social problems may be related to the fact that we have had only fifty years in which to accommodate the second hundred million Americans. ...*

*"Where, for example, will the next hundred million Americans live? ...*

*"Other questions confront us. How, for example, will we house the next hundred million Americans? ...*

*"How will we educate and employ such a large number of people? Will our transportation systems move them about as quickly and economically as necessary? How will we provide adequate health care when our population reaches 300 million? Will our political structures have to be reordered, too, when our society grows to such proportions? ...*

*"... we should establish as a national goal the provision of adequate family planning services within the next five years to all those who want them but cannot afford them."<sup>2</sup>*

President Clinton might well be urged to repeat that final recommendation, as the first plank in any program to address welfare reform and the exploding problem of pregnancy among unmarried teenage girls.

The President proposed and Congress later created a distinguished National Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, chaired by John D. Rockefeller, 3rd. In 1972, the Commission concluded that the country would benefit if population growth stopped. It made many explicit recommendations. Among them:

- that the government establish a permanent long term strategic planning capability to monitor demographic, resource and environmental trends, to serve as a "lobby for the future" and recommend policies to deal with looming problems.
- that preparations be made to deal with the anticipated growth of metropolitan areas by reforming governmental arrangements it characterized as "archaic".



- that there be a national, publicly funded “voluntary program to reduce unwanted fertility, to improve the outcome of pregnancy, and to improve the health of children.” This was to include education, contraceptive information and — delicate as the subject was even then — abortion.
- that immigration levels not be increased, that those levels be periodically reviewed to see if they are too high, that there be civil and criminal penalties for employers of illegal aliens, and that the enforcement program be strengthened.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Rockefeller Commission recommendations were quickly swept under the rug — they were controversial and it was an election year — the Commission took on the issues squarely. The recommendations would be a good starting place even now for organizations seeking to make realistic proposals as to how to address U.S. population policy.

Eight years later, the “Global 2000 Report” to President Carter described some of the connections between U.S. population growth and resource and environmental problems. It offered no recommendations, but it was followed up by a booklet of action proposals from the U.S. Department of State and the Council on Environmental Quality which included eight broad recommendations concerning U.S. population growth. *“The United States should develop a national population policy which addresses the issues of:*

- *Population stabilization*
- *Availability of family planning programs*
- *Rural and urban migration issues*
- *Public education on population concerns*
- *Just, consistent, and workable immigration laws*
- *The role of the private sector — nonprofit, academic and business*
- *Improved information needs and capacity to analyze impacts of population growth within the United States*
- *Institutional arrangements to ensure continued federal attention to domestic population issues.”*<sup>4</sup>

These proposals were less specific than those of 1972, but they offered the basis on which to begin to think about population.

## **The Environmentalists’ Slow Start**

Initiatives on U.S. population growth during the ’70s came principally from government, with the distinguished exception of the role of the Rockefellers. The Sierra Club recognized the population-environment connection very early and created its Population Committee in 1968, but most private environmental organizations stayed away from the U.S. population issue out of concern that it would be controversial and lose support for their programs.

There was a widespread tendency — it was still the age of affluence and unlimited expectations — to regard population growth as a third world problem. The population groups

of the period such as the Population Crisis Committee (now Population Action International) and the Population Institute helped to mobilize public and Congressional support for population aid abroad, but did not (and still do not) lobby on U.S. population growth. The Environmental Fund (now Population Environment Balance), NPG (Negative Population Growth, Inc.), and ZPG (Zero Population Growth, Inc.) pretty much had that field to themselves, and ZPG has always found it difficult to address immigration.

## **To Introduce the Crusaders...**

In the late ’70s and ’80s the big environmental groups came slowly to realize that one cannot address U.S. environmental issues without addressing population growth. During the 1988 presidential campaign, a coalition of 18 environmental organizations prepared an environmental “Blueprint for the Environment” for the guidance of the incoming U.S. administration. The Blueprint made the point that “U.S. population pressures threaten the environment all across our nation,” and gave some examples. It said that family planning and the availability of contraceptives must be expanded worldwide (presumably including the U.S.). It recommended “an official population policy for the United States,...” and said that “We must assure that federal policies and programs promote a balance between population, resources, and environmental quality.”<sup>5</sup>

Among the 18 organizations sponsoring that statement were eight of the major environmental groups: Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of the Earth, the National Audubon Society, the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA), the National Wildlife Federation, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the Sierra Club, and The Wilderness Society; plus a major population group, Zero Population Growth (ZPG, Inc.)

That is about as far as it has gotten. Subsequent statements have been more general. On May 22, 1991 there was a “Priority Statement on Population” signed by just about everybody involved with population and the environment, and some others. It urged simply that “The United States and all nations of the world must make an effective response to the issue of population growth a leading priority for this decade.” Other generalized declarations as to the importance of stopping population growth have emerged from Arden House and Carnegie Endowment deliberations, from the National Academy of Sciences and from an ad hoc coalition of scientists that included most living U.S. Nobel laureates.

## **How Do They Plan To Get There?**

The question of course is “How do you do it?”

The following description applies to the organizations’ views on U.S. population. They generally advocate more U.S. support for other countries’ population efforts.

Five of the eight environmental organizations listed do not address U.S. population beyond signing general statements such as those described. Defenders of Wildlife, the



NRDC and The Wilderness Society, for example, presently have no specific policy concerning U.S. immigration, population or fertility.

Friends of the Earth apparently finds the issue of U.S. population too hot to handle. The staff said that only the president could speak on the record on that topic, and he did not return 'phone calls.

The NPCA believes that active lobbying on population issues does not fall within its mandate. (That argument seems to overlook the fact that NPCA has already recognized that U.S. population change impinges on its mandate. In other situations, organizations have formed coalitions led by the most knowledgeable to address major issues of current concern. The *Blueprint for the Environment* itself was such a coalition effort. With the will, organizations can make themselves heard without diverting resources from their principal mandate.)

The caution is not limited to the *Blueprint* signatories. Greenpeace, which had its origins in a highly activist brand of environmentalism, "recognize(s) it is an issue that must be addressed... (but) has made no public statements on U.S. population, immigration or fertility."<sup>6</sup> The Population Institute, like Friends of the Earth, simply avoids questions on the topic, even though the question apparently has been raised within its Board as to whether it shouldn't begin to look at U.S. population growth. The World Wildlife Fund believes U.S. population lies outside its area of expertise. Its Chairman did, however, testify before Congress in 1993 on U.S. over-consumption and energy use, and one wonders how those issues can be disentangled from population size.<sup>7</sup>

To generalize as to what the others (Audubon, NWF, the Sierra Club) and ZPG advocate concerning U.S. population policy:

They —

- describe the population-environment connections, sometimes very eloquently. Audubon and ZPG have developed extensive materials for school use to teach the connections.
- urge that family planning be made universally available in the United States, subsidized as necessary.
- argue for greater attention to women's rights as a way of influencing fertility.
- continue to call for a national population policy.

None of them —

- advocates deliberate governmental policies to influence fertility through incentives and disincentives.
- makes its views known when national policies are being considered that will influence the direction of U.S. demographic change.
- has a policy on immigration.

ZPG "believes that the United States should adopt an overall goal for immigration as part of its national population policy" but does not suggest a figure or propose how to enforce it.<sup>8</sup>

Positions have not necessarily been constant over the years. There has in fact been something of a pendulum effect, with the pendulums oscillating on different schedules. NPCA in the late '70s under the late Anthony Wayne Smith was a pioneer in population policy advocacy; it subsequently pulled back.

The National Wildlife Federation in 1980 said all the right things. In its Resolution No.49 of March 1980, it

*"expresses its policy that world population should be stabilized at replacement levels through national and global programs of family planning and population limitation; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in furtherance of this goal, the U.S. provide tax incentives for family planning of an optimal two in size, make birth control education and resources and sterilization operations widely available at low cost, accelerate medical research into new, safer and more effective contraception and undertake a vigorous effort to stop illegal immigration into this country, while, at the same time, offering necessary help to the countries affected to lessen their population pressures; and*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a full range of alternatives should be pursued to effectuate this policy through administrative, legislative and judicial avenues as well as educational means; and*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that NWF public statements, magazines and educational materials will accurately reflect the policy of this resolution."*

There you have it all. NWF is the largest environmental organization in the country, with a membership of over 5 million. They could have had an enormous impact if they had simply followed that resolution. Instead, NWF has been generally silent on U.S. population and in 1992, without formally revoking Resolution 49, it resiled to a much weaker Resolution 14 on "Population and the Environment" which did not mention U.S. population, called only for the NWF to "proceed with international programs" in the population field, and urged the government to increase and improve its assistance to foreign health programs that include voluntary family planning. The 1980 call to arms is apparently a dead letter.

Defenders of Wildlife has not recently been active on the population issue.

## Signs of Awakening

For several of the organizations, the pendulum may be swinging in the other direction. Audubon — which had a very strong population role years ago under the presidency of Russell Peterson — backed away from it but now seems to be prepared to approach the immigration issue again. In 1992 it was unwilling even to carry an NPG ad in its magazine that said one cannot deal with U.S. population growth without addressing both fertility and immigration. Apparently, it is



beginning to rethink its position. It has yet to state a policy on immigration, but its president in a letter of April 16, 1993 to President Clinton urged a national "conference on population and natural resources", and listed immigration as one of six examples of "critical issues" it should address. Eight months later, the *Audubon Activist* carried a pro and con discussion entitled "Should Environmentalists Adopt an Immigration Policy?", and invited comments.

NRDC has just created a new Population, Consumption and Environment Initiative and may well begin to take a more active population role.

The Wilderness Society is presently developing a "Population Project" linked to the concept of sustainability. A November 1993 brochure says the Society will promote Congressional oversight hearings on the impact of population growth; the rest of the planned program is more generally educational. Ex-Senator Gaylord Nelson is involved, and we may hope that he will help move the Society toward an active role in population. As a starter, the Fall 1993 *Wilderness* magazine gave its members a general introduction to the population question.

ZPG seems to be going through a phase of internal turmoil. When I inquired, they gave a spirited defense of their policy of gradualism. They did not mention an October 16th memorandum from their Board of Directors that called for ZPG to change policy, but I have a copy of such a memorandum. It is a strong document. In language much like the 1980 NWF resolution, it says "The time has come... to focus more energies and attention on domestic concerns. We recommend that ZPG call for and work toward policies aimed at stabilizing U.S. population as soon as feasible.... ZPG policy should call for the United States to address the causes of high fertility and examine immigration laws and policies." It called for advocacy of energy efficiency, conservation of natural resources, sustainable environmental practices, control over illegal immigration, and a revamping of foreign aid to emphasize social programs, education, sustainable development and "the root causes of international migration". It called for the U.S. Government to develop a population policy and instructed the ZPG staff to draft a policy statement based on the memorandum.

Quite a memorandum. The Board was telling the ZPG staff to do what it is supposed to have been doing for a generation.

The new policy statement has not yet materialized but, perhaps as a result of the instruction, ZPG is actively examining its positions. It is considering whether to return to sponsoring population legislation in Congress, as it did a decade ago with a series of bills introduced by Senator Hatfield and Congressmen Ottinger and MacKay. It is also examining the President's health insurance proposal to see whether it is consistent with the goal of universal access to family planning.

The Sierra Club is a special case, and its problems in developing a policy on U.S. population underline the difficul-

ty of the issue. The Club came to the population issue early. It has a small but dedicated professional population staff. Since 1990, international population growth has been one of the Club's seven major issues. Its Population Committee, with multiple regional chapters, is probably the strongest cadre of enthusiastic and well-informed volunteers in the field. The Club still has no policy on immigration, or on fertility, but in December 1992 the Population Committee invited its chapters to begin to develop a Club position on U.S. population issues. The process has been a rocky one. More than most big environmental groups, the Club involves its membership in decisions and attempts to move by consensus. The Club leadership is sensitive to the danger of alienating substantial numbers of the membership or of being considered racist. The Population Committee, in cooperation with other parts of the Club's massive policy-making structure, is still in the process of developing a position which will win the trust of the organization, including its minority members.

That position, it now appears, will state the need to solve the problems of U.S. over-consumption and population growth together, as one part of a unified approach to environmental preservation. One member described it as an emerging "social contract." If the draft language survives in the final compromise, it will call for consumption to be brought down to environmentally sustainable levels, for an effort to bring population down to an optimal size to be determined, and for immigration and fertility levels consistent with those goals. Perhaps in 1994 the Club will find a formula that will enable it to take on those delicate issues and thus become a major activist concerning the country's demographic future.

These are signs of spring, and they are being encouraged by several big foundations that contribute to environmental groups but have made clear they want to see more attention given to U.S. population issues.

The movement needs to get on with those changes. Other organizations such as Worldwatch, the World Resources Institute, the Global Tomorrow Coalition, and the Population Council consider their mission to be educational and do not engage in advocacy on specific issues. Advocacy on the real issues — fertility and migration — has thus been left pretty much to the few organizations listed earlier, to regional groups such as Californians for Population Stabilization (CAPS), and to the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), formed in 1979 for the sole purpose of addressing immigration.

## What Is Missing?

I have said that there are only two variables at hand to influence U.S. demographic change. One of them is fertility. The other is net migration. (I assume that nobody proposes to raise mortality.)

Some of the germinating ideas described above are aimed at generating new studies or Congressional hearings on the impacts of population growth. Such educational efforts are certainly desirable as a way of predisposing public and



Congressional opinion toward effective measures to deal with population. They are not, however, enough. Immigration and fertility policy are made in a series of incremental steps, and not in study committees. One can only influence the direction by weighing in when those decisions are being taken; and that process itself is perhaps the best way to educate the nation about the demographic implications of what it is doing.

The nation presently makes its demographic policies by accident. Welfare, health, or housing policies may make it easier for young women to have children and thereby raise fertility, but those policies are usually framed in terms of *needs* without considering *consequences*. We had better look at the consequences. Do we make it attractive to have fewer children, or more?

Immigration directly determines future population size, both because of the immigration itself, and because the immigrants' descendants add to the total. However, immigration laws are the product not of such demographic thinking but of humanitarian concerns or employers' pressures to get cheap labor, or the desire to please ethnic groups. (The Immigration Act of 1990 was the direct product of Senator Kennedy's wish to please his Irish American constituents, and as Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs, he was in a position to do something about it.)

If advocacy organizations are to do anything about population growth, they must go beyond generalized statements. When the real issues arise that decide our demographic future — things like immigration or refugee or welfare legislation — the environmental movement needs to be heard, pointing out the demographic consequences. Declarations are fine, in principle, but declarations to the ambient air do not have much effect in the real world. Population growth will not stop simply because environmentalists say it should.

**Migration** is theoretically a less important variable than fertility in determining our demographic future. That is to say, a 10 percent change in immigration changes the demographic projections less than a 10 percent change in fertility. But migration is presently the more explosive variable. Post-1900 immigration has contributed 43 percent of U.S. population growth in this century, and it will contribute nearly 90 percent in the next century, if present patterns hold.<sup>9</sup> A position in favor of halting population growth without a policy on immigration is simply a nullity.

The organizations' views on **fertility** contain more that is useful. Certainly we need universal access to family planning. One can hardly argue with the importance of measures that promote education, jobs and self-respect among women. However, the silence on immigration can vitiate the recommendations about fertility. Young American women's access to jobs, for instance, is impeded by immigrant competition.

Above all, the organizations are caught in a monumental non-sequitur. The assertion of women's right to decide the number of their children offers no assurance that population growth will stop, if women want more than two children or if

immigration is left open. The fluctuation of fertility between the great depression, the baby boom and the baby bust is dramatic evidence that women do not automatically seek a fertility level based on societal needs.

In other words, the policies advocated — and the silence on immigration — do not reasonably lead to the results the organizations endorse.

We face the likelihood that two desirable goals are in conflict: freedom of choice, and the nation's demographic destiny. One must, individually, decide which goal is more important. It is self-delusion to try to escape the choice by pretending that they are necessarily compatible.

If one is serious in advocating a halt to population growth, the corollary is that — while preserving intact the principle of voluntarism — it may be necessary to move toward governmental and societal policies that encourage people to choose to have fewer children. In other words: change the context in which that choice is made. For the present, a halt to population growth requires a lower fertility level. How do we achieve it without the trauma of a depression? U.S. experience in this area (as compared with the experience that some third world countries have accumulated) is so limited that one cannot afford to be dogmatic as to what policies, incentives and disincentives would work, but the exploration must begin.<sup>10</sup>

The environmentalists need to lobby on population, if they are serious about it. One thing is clear: the failure to relate immigration policy to its demographic consequences, and the national unwillingness to enforce even the laws we have, helps to insure that population growth will not stop. Add to that the fertility level arising from the present unintended mix of incentives and disincentives, and we have an explosive mixture.

## What They Could Do

The environmental organizations are not shy about lobbying. Watch them lobby for wilderness areas or against the destruction of old forests. They know that their opponents don't sleep, and they are quite willing to take them on. Here are a few examples of situations in which the environmentalists could have weighed in if they were serious about population.

**Immigration.** Where were the big environmental groups in 1986 when the Immigration Control and Reform Act was being gutted with loopholes that led to what the *New York Times* called "fraud on a massive scale"?<sup>11</sup>

Where were they as the Immigration Act of 1990 was being debated? The official estimate is that it raised immigration by 40 percent, and this estimate makes very little allowance for "chain migration". That Act led the Census Bureau to raise its middle projection of U.S. population in 2050 by 100 million. So far as I know, only FAIR and Population Environment Balance testified against it.



These questions could be extended almost indefinitely. Did the environmentalists say anything when President Bush created a presumption of eligibility for all Chinese women who claim asylum because they oppose their government's policy on abortions? There are over 300 million Chinese women in their child-bearing years. Plus their husbands, and their children... Have the organizations looked at the needs of the Border Patrol? Have they made any proposals as to how immigration might better be enforced? Have they looked at the issue of identification? (It is not all that contentious; even President Clinton agrees that better identification is needed.) The answer of course is that they have simply not entered this whole area.

**As to Fertility...** Where were those environmental organizations during the 1992 presidential campaign, when most of the principal aspirants made proposals for liberalized allowances or deductions for children, thus sending a clear pro-natalist signal? Even Senator Gore, who knows better.

Where are they now, for that matter, when a health reform is being debated that will probably influence U.S. demographic patterns for generations?<sup>12</sup>

Where will they be later this year as the nation begins to debate welfare reform?

To avoid those debates is to admit impotency in addressing a problem the organizations themselves profess to recognize. Given their pugnacity in other areas, the silence on real population issues suggests a continuing, or in some cases, rising ambivalence.

## Why the Caution?

It is not easy, particularly for organizations that rely on their membership for their political clout, to take on immigration and fertility. Politically, those are perhaps the toughest questions that one could ask them to address.

For the purposes of this paper, let us accept that population growth hinders the pursuit of environmental goals — the argument is made elsewhere<sup>13</sup> — and that the major environmental organizations know it.

We are here discussing the role of serious environmental organizations, not the attitudes of employers seeking cheap labor, or the Zoe Bairds of the country looking for docile and cheap household help. We assume from their own statements that the organizations recognize that the nation cannot hide behind clichés; we cannot solve the issues facing us simply by changing our national consumption habits, or by technological fixes. We need all three: a population policy, a less consumption-driven society and technical solutions.

If simply proclaiming the population connection has very little effect on population growth, why are the organizations reluctant to take on the real determinants of population growth? I hope I do the organizations no injustice in the following effort to describe their concerns and to sketch out (in italics) the rebuttals that are available if the organizations choose to take on the issues.

**Immigration.** We take seriously our self-image as “a nation of immigrants”, and the sense of obligation to give others the chance our ancestors had is probably strongest among idealists, who are the soul of the environmental movement.

There is a new generation that takes seriously the idea that we live on a shared planet and that we are all brothers (and sisters). To many people under 30, it would seem, an “alien” comes from outer space, not from Mexico. To that generation, and those of their elders who are tuned in, any proposal to limit immigration conjures up images of nativists, racists and skinheads. The debate is thus plunged into a region of moral absolutes, where to compromise is to sin. This is a powerful deterrent to organizations that rely in great degree on the enthusiasm of youth and the righteous.

*There is a critical point to be made here. These are good people, but they must realize that the population issue, like many others, is not a battle of unalloyed good against unalloyed evil. It is a choice forced upon us by the reality that resources and the environment are not infinite. It is, to use the cowboy movie image, a battle between “white hats”. To put it bluntly, the choice is between an obligation to the stranger and the obligation to our own disenfranchised and to the environment our children inherit.*

*Though the choice is between desirable objectives, it is far from symmetrical, a point usually ignored. We cannot save the world. We have a fighting chance of dealing successfully with our own problems.*

A recent piece in the Letters to the Editors of *Sierra* pretty well summarizes the state of mind that gives pause to environmental leaders. The writer argued: “What victimizes black workers today is not the influx of immigrants,... but the flight of industry to other countries where labor is cheaper.... (I) do not suggest support for endless growth in the United States.... (but) to treat the symptoms by closing national borders to keep out ‘the disease’ rather than commit ourselves to eliminating the cause of the illness, is both futile and irresponsible.”<sup>14</sup>

*Those brief sentences are driven more by passion than analysis. They call for an exegesis.*

*1. Both immigration and the departure of capital hurt the American labor competing with immigrant or cheaper foreign labor. Technological change has been drying up entry level jobs in American industry. The letter writer is arguing that increasing the supply of a factor of production (labor) in a situation of glut does not lower the price of the labor. He thus denies the principle of supply and demand. Polemically, of course, the denial makes it possible to blame bad guys (industrialists) and to absolve oneself of any obligation to limit immigration or worry about American labor.<sup>15</sup>*

*2. Projections cited earlier in this paper make it clear that to be for unlimited immigration is in fact to espouse “endless growth in the U.S.”*



3. There is a certain, probably unconscious, arrogance in the assumption that the U.S. can "eliminate the causes of the illness". The illness, presumably, is third world poverty and population growth. The U.S. can and should do what it can to help the afflicted countries. To assume that we can somehow save them requires a remarkably inflated view of our power.

4. The reader is offered an unjustifiable either/or choice. There is no reason to accept the letter writer's assertion that we cannot simultaneously limit immigration and provide support to family planning and self-help efforts in other countries. In fact, we may be better able to help others if we are not overwhelmed by our own labor, urban and environmental problems.

To refuse to address the problems at home in the belief that we should instead solve those in the rest of the world is a very questionable bit of reasoning. One might remind the letter writer of another rule of thumb beloved of environmentalists: "Think globally; act locally."

The writer to Sierra is hardly alone in the thought that "I don't want to focus on numbers and quotas, but to solve the problem at the sources." For another example: in 1991, in answering the question "Is immigration the major cause of U.S. population problems?", an Audubon/Population Crisis Committee booklet suggested that pressures to migrate to the U.S. can be relieved by "investments in economic development and family planning in migrant sending countries..."<sup>16</sup>

Well enough, but they did not calculate how much that might cost or suggest what we should do for the next 20 years; most of those migrants are already born. This is more a crutch than a policy proposal; nobody looks seriously at the question "Is it really possible?" The third world working age population is rising about 61 million per year, and will continue to do so for the indefinite future. For meso-America alone, the increase is 2.7 million, nearly twice the comparable figure for the U.S. this year; they must find the resources to absorb more new working age people than we tried (less than successfully) to do as the baby boomers came on the job market — and they must do it in economies that, in total, are 1/17th as large as ours. A rough calculation suggests that a total annual investment of perhaps \$50-200 billion is needed to provide the additional employment in that one region; even this does not provide for any progress in employing the presently unemployed, and the end result would be to face the same problems in more crowded societies.<sup>17</sup> That investment is a substantial portion of their entire GNP. How much of that capital are we likely to provide, and what happens to our own unemployed as the capital goes abroad to employ foreigners?

The population problem must be addressed where it exists, in the third world and here. We should do what we can for others, both for their own good and our long term benefit. However, that is no answer to our present immigration problem. Immigration and demography are matters of numbers; to take refuge in clichés about solving the problem at its

source — meanwhile refusing to challenge the immigration quotas others propose for the U.S. — is to accept the consequences. Environmentalists are not shy about talking numbers where other environmental concerns are at stake; the timidity about immigration is another sign of ambivalence rather than a principle.

People who are solicitous of the foreigner are strangely impervious to the problems of Americans. It may be easier to sympathize with the stranger, who is an abstraction, than with our own poor, who are a sometimes troublesome presence.

The poor and the urban minorities do not have the luxury of distance. Among those most affected — but who might be expected to welcome more immigration for reasons of ethnic solidarity — are the U.S. Hispanics. An in-depth survey co-sponsored by the Ford Foundation (which itself funds pro-immigration groups) confirmed the results of many other polls and showed majorities of 66 percent (Cuban) to 79 percent (Puerto Rican) among different Hispanic groups favoring reduced immigration.<sup>18</sup> Those who are being hurt have made their choice in the moral dilemma I have posed.

When faced with an unwelcome dilemma, there is a natural human tendency to deny it exists. The argument is regularly heard that immigrants "take jobs Americans won't take."

The rebuttal to that one is pretty straightforward: it is not the jobs; it's the conditions. In 1993, the nation watched the arrival of ships full of Chinese who even Senator Kennedy called "slave labor". This is the labor that, apologists say, fills the "jobs that Americans won't take". Do any environmentalists really believe that Americans should work for as little as 70 cents an hour and be locked up every night in a crowded and windowless room? As with other commerce, the lowest bid tends to set the price of labor, and this indentured labor drives down wages and takes jobs from the other unskilled people in the cities. At a time when only 45 percent of young Blacks and 58 percent of young Hispanics have regular jobs, nationwide,<sup>19</sup> we should begin to think of our own people.

The largest environmental groups also have a practical problem. They look toward cooperation with counterparts in other countries to save the shared planet, and they fear that advocacy of immigration limitations may threaten that cooperation, particularly if their counterparts are wedded to the idea that the U.S. has an obligation to accept those who want to come here.

The fear is misplaced. Other countries (including Mexico) do not propose that their borders be opened. They recognize their limits, if not ours.

**Fertility.** For the largest organizations, with substantial conservative membership, the largest obstacle in the way of addressing fertility is probably the visceral fear of being drawn into the abortion issue. Most of the big organizations, including NWF and Audubon, take no position on abortion.

So far as I know, there are no survey data to guide them



in deciding whether anti-abortionists belong to environmental organizations in any numbers. I rather suspect they do not. There is no necessary connection between abortion and fertility levels. Better family planning should actually help to reduce the number of abortions; it would certainly reduce the number of unwanted children. It is quite possible for an organization to favor policies to discourage fertility without advocating abortion. Abortion does, however, provide an escape for those who didn't think about family planning at the right time.

*This is one of those issues that the organizations will have to face. Is it more important to keep the marginal members, or to address the fertility issue?*

From another quarter, there is the dread charge of "racism", to which environmentalists are particularly sensitive. The movement in fact is very close to being "lily white", and it is trying to reach out to people of color.

*To combat the charge of racism, I would offer this graph.<sup>20</sup>*

Fertility is at least as much a function of education as of race. (A graph of fertility plotted against race and income would show a similar pattern.) The more educated women are about at replacement level fertility, which would eventually stop population growth if there were no immigration, but they are above the fertility level needed if population growth is to be turned around. It is not an insult to the uneducated to urge the adoption throughout the society of an approach to fertility that will improve the condition of all, and perhaps of the uneducated particularly. Nor is it racist; in total numbers, more whites than others would be asked to reduce their fertility.

The environmentalists have different views about population here and abroad. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. U.S. AID for years has had a program (Plato and its successors) to show third world leaders why they must bring population growth down, plus a program to show them how to organize to do it. The environmental movement generally encourages the effort, but it finds itself unwilling to advocate comparable leadership at home.

**Divided Feminists.** Environmental groups face a serious problem within their own ranks. There is an element of the

feminist movement that takes the position that "nobody is going to tell women what they will do with their own bodies." Such feminists, who may be quite willing to espouse governmental intervention in other issues such as pollution, find themselves in this instance lined up with the Libertarians.

This viewpoint reflects a long standing fault line within the family planning movement between those who promote family planning to give women absolute control over themselves, and those who are interested in family planning as a way to bring down fertility.

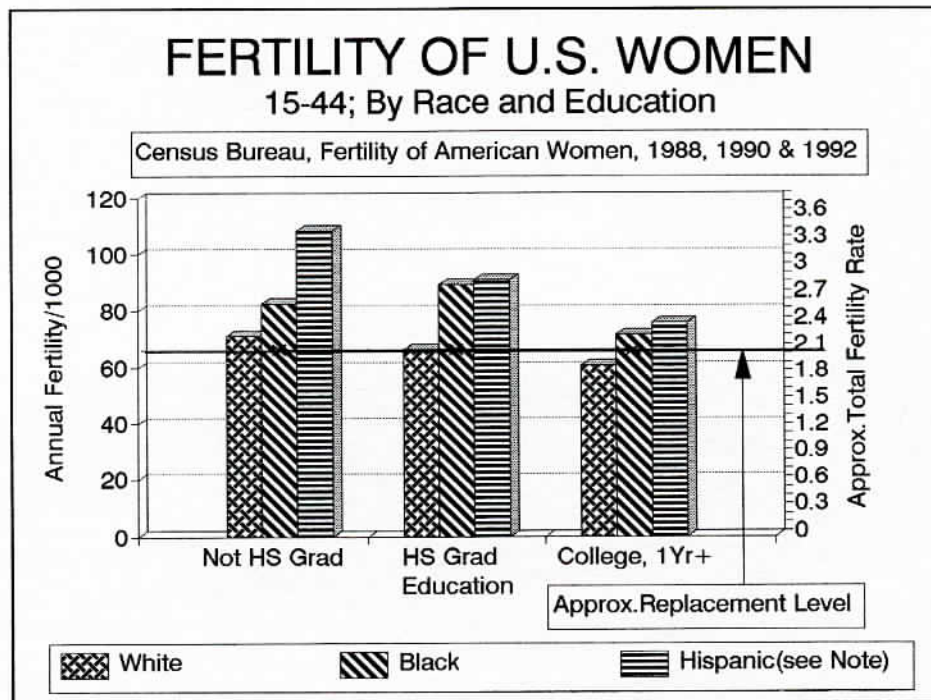
*The resolution of the conflict within feminism, I have suggested, is to preserve the principle of voluntarism but to press political leaders to shape an environment in which people make the decisions that lead to lower fertility. This might not win over the most extreme, but the alternative is to allow the extremists to control the direction of population advocacy.*

Sensitivity to this division has

tended to muzzle the groups actually providing family planning services and guidance in the U.S. The Family Planning Association of America cautiously makes the connection between fertility and population. It advocates education on the connection, but as to society's role in influencing fertility, it copies the guarded Bucharest Convention Formula of 1974 ("...the fundamental right of every individual to decide freely and responsibly when and whether to have a child"—emphasis added). The Alan Guttmacher Institute avoids taking any position on U.S. population size.

The tensions are reflected in a draft document sponsored by NWF and presently being circulated for signatures.<sup>21</sup> It is intended to develop a common ground. The non-governmental organizations' (NGOs) role in the 1992 Rio de Janeiro UNCED conference was marked by factional struggles among feminists.<sup>22</sup> They hope to avoid a repetition in the September 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) at Cairo.

The recommendations start: "Women's empowerment/ability to control their own lives is the foundation for all action linking population, environment and development." They continue with many proposals for improving the status of women, including a call for "increased targeting of devel-





opment projects toward a better quality of life for women and **their** children.” (emphasis added) Other proposals cover international population assistance, family planning, comprehensive health care, honesty in packaging, energy efficiency, overconsumption, poverty, local participation in decision making, CO<sub>2</sub>, greenhouse gases, “fair trade, land redistribution, debt alleviation, equitable tax systems, regulation of transnational corporations, an end to structural adjustment policies” (sic), and much more. There is a recommendation that nations develop the ability to “assess the implications of population growth and distribution”.

Many of the proposals are good. Some are tangential to population. Taken together, they would overwhelm any government; they are a compendium of the authors’ vision of a world made anew. Unwilling to take on the central issue of governmental leadership to lower fertility, they have compiled a wish list of attractive policy directions, some of which would help to lower fertility. What is missing is a clarion call to governments to get on with it — to make population a central issue of government, and to find ways to encourage people to have fewer children — even if they cannot in all other respects promise to bring about Utopia. It can be done. It has been done, in places like Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea.

There are three references to migration in the draft document, of which the most specific is that “All governments, especially in the North, should adopt natural resource and population policies that take into consideration population growth, demographic patterns (such as migration), access to and availability of resources.”

*I am not quite sure what that means, but at least it suggests that the drafters are aware that migration plays a role in demographic change.*

*The paper reflects the non-sequitur I described earlier: the assumption that women’s rights and population objectives are identical. In considerable degree, particularly in countries where women are still legally and socially disadvantaged, they do indeed overlap. Women’s rights and education, a sympathetic understanding of the way they view the world, and the availability of family planning guidance and services are important elements in any population program. By assuming an identity of interests, however, the more extreme feminists are able to coopt the population issue. This can be a disaster. In much of the world, it is apparent that women, by and large, do not want replacement level fertility or less.*

*One can understand why the drafters of a multinational consensus document have taken refuge in generalities on the contentious issues. There is a vast difference, however, between generalization and falling into the error described above. The ICPD will be a frail instrument indeed if it cannot take a stronger position on population than — by present indications — the “official” NGOs will be urging on it.*

When criticized for timidity, the population spokesper-

sons for those NGOs say that the population problem is “complex — more than just a matter of numbers”.

*Indeed, it is complex. It is also urgent, and demography is, finally, a matter of numbers. (One wishes that all environmental advocates were — in Garrett Hardin’s phrase — as “numerate” as they are literate.)*

*Because of population growth, and particularly in light of the power of population momentum, the world and this country are in grave trouble. Population and environmental groups should be telling political leaders that they must lead, and this means supporting those leaders in the effort to find ways to encourage people to seek lower fertility. Pursuit of consensus within the tiny and contentious elites that write the position papers for most NGOs is a sad diversion if it focuses attention away from the big issue.*

*The more extreme feminists, one may surmise, are not themselves likely to be driving birth rates up, but they constitute a considerable element within the environmental movement, and their influence hinders the adoption of platforms favoring more active governmental action to influence population growth. Insofar as the organizations are limited by this influence, they can claim — legitimately — that they are sensitive to the concerns of their constituency. They can claim that they are promoting a moral good. What they cannot claim is that they are doing much about population growth.*

*Women’s rights have very little to do with immigration policy, at least until that most unlikely day when somebody proposes to allow only male immigrants because they can’t have children. In dealing with the immigration variable, organizations need not be constrained by the feminist issue.*

**Alliance Building.** One group’s public affairs officer defended its caution in staking out stronger positions on the grounds that the first priority is to enlist other groups — women’s organizations, labor, ethnic and minority groups — in the population cause. She said those groups are suspicious of a strong position on immigration or fertility.

*The concern is understandable, but her organization may in the process lose its own purpose. A priori, it would seem better advised, not to weaken the message, but to identify the issues that are important to the other groups, and which lead to shared positions on immigration and fertility. With labor or minority organizations, for instance, the “hot button” is likely to be unemployment and urban problems. With some 55 percent of young Black adults neither employed full time nor in school, it is understandable if Black organizations find it hard to identify with environmentalists who talk about trees and sustainability and endangered species those young people have never seen. If the environmental group would call the Black groups’ attention to the impact of immigration on the wasted young, they might find new allies, but I have seen nothing to suggest that the big environmental groups make that connection.*

**In Short...** Courage! friends. If the environmental orga-



nizations come to see that they must take positions on immigration and fertility, and want to convince the doubters, the arguments are there.

## The Demographics of Moderation

The population debate — when people think about population at all — is usually conducted in caricatures. It degenerates into horror stories about abortion and forced sterilization and the “Chinese example.”

The statistics do not support that apocalyptic vision.

Let me draw a happier picture of what is needed. The “two child family” is the goal to which most U.S. women aspire, and by that point about 75 percent of American mothers stop having children. If it could be promoted as a national standard, and if it were combined with an immigration level of 200,000 per year — about the level that prevailed for much of this century — it would lead to the end of U.S. population growth within a generation and to a gradual decline thereafter. By the middle of the 21st century our society would have the luxury of deciding what population size is desirable and encouraging a return to the fertility levels of the ‘80’s or higher, depending on what consensus emerged.

The projections to back up this generalization will be the topic of a forthcoming NPG FORUM article.<sup>23</sup>

## The Vision of a Better Future

If the environmental organizations could bring themselves to lobby for more reasonable levels of immigration and for national policies that encourage lower fertility until population growth is stopped, they would be making a major contribution to addressing the nation’s problems.

Presently, it seems more likely that if the nation indeed faces up to the population issue, the decision will be a product of unemployment and the costs of welfare. If so, it will be addressed in terms of immigration and fertility rather than population per se. The problems of the cities and the desperate situation of the uneducated young, particularly among minorities, are exacerbated by population growth just as are the environmental problems we face. Environmental degradation tends to move at a glacial pace, and our action-oriented society loses interest. The problems of the poor and of the cities are immediate and explosive, and reactions are visceral. From California, Governor Wilson is demanding action on immigration, and the state’s two new Democratic Senators are hurrying to catch up. Those three have probably done more in the past year to focus national attention on that source of population growth than have all of us who toil away at our computers. It is a wonderful thing to see how direct responsibility clarifies the mind: As Senator, Pete Wilson was a sponsor of the principal loophole in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, and he supported the 1990 legislation increasing immigration.

Health reform is already on the table. Welfare reform is

on President Clinton’s 1994 list of issues to address. Immigration and fertility are intimately connected with both those issues. The President has said that we cannot provide health services for illegal aliens and that we must consider a national system of identification to find who is entitled.<sup>24</sup> It is the beginning of wisdom.

The people who respond to opinion polls see the connections between population growth and their well-being. The politicians on the front line in California, Florida and New York, and even the administration in Washington are coming to see it. The environmental organizations have a perspective that should be heard. It is the perspective of hope rather than the politics of fear, the vision of a society living on a sustainable basis with its environment rather than the specter of exploding cities. They can help to formulate a national change of direction that, while recognizing that we live on a spatially limited Earth, points us to a better future. They have a lot to contribute.

Population growth must stop. I know it, and so do the environmental organizations. The only real question is when — before or after we have destroyed the things we seek to protect. The environmental movement should not be bringing up the tail on an issue that is so important to it.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of the Census *Population Projections of the United States, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1993 to 2050*, Current Population Report P25-1104, 9-29-93.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. President Richard M. Nixon, “Special Message to the U.S. Congress on Problems of Population Growth, July 18, 1969”, in *Public Papers of Presidents of the United States* (Washington: Office of the Federal Register, 1969, p.521.) This passage was quoted in NPG FOOTNOTE A *Congenial Job for the Vice President* (NPG, Inc., March 1993).

<sup>3</sup> *Population and the American Future. The Report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future* Summary volume. (New York: Signet Books, 1972), pp. 76, 184-190 and 204-206. For a summary of the recommendations and a follow-up report on what has happened, see David Simcox “The Commission on Population Growth and the American Future. 20 Years Later: A Lost Opportunity” (*The Social Contract*, Summer 1992, pp.197-202.)

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Council on Environmental Quality and Department of state, *Global Future: Time to Act* (USGPO, January 1981), p.11.

<sup>5</sup> Kennedy P. Maize, Editor, *Blueprint for the Environment* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1989), pp.6, 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> Greenpeace Press Officer Blair Paleze, telephone conversation 6-25-93. The sources for subsequent quotations will not be individually footnoted but are on file.

<sup>7</sup> WWF Chairman Russell Train’s March 3, 1993, testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on world environmental issues. He listed “helping people voluntarily limit



their family size" among four "broad points", but in the context of help to other countries.

<sup>8</sup> ZPG Statement of Policy May 4, 1991, p.5.

<sup>9</sup> Leon Bouvier and Lindsey Grant *How Many Americans?* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, publication scheduled for August 1994), Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.6. The 43 percent estimate is for the period 1900-1990; it includes post-1900 immigrants and their descendants.

<sup>10</sup> For an examination of ways to influence fertility, see John R. Weeks "How to Influence Fertility", Chapter 15 in Lindsey Grant et al *Elephants in the Volkswagen* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1992.)

<sup>11</sup> Some 1.3 million "farm workers" illegally in the U.S., almost all of them Hispanic, applied for permanent residence, and almost all were accepted, at a time when the Bureau of Labor statistics estimated that there were only 234,000 Hispanic farm workers in the U.S., including citizens and legal residents. (*Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 1989*, Table 642.)

<sup>12</sup> See Lindsey Grant *Demography and Health Care Reform*, NPG FORUM series, October 1993.

<sup>13</sup> The connections between environmental/resource issues and population growth are treated at length in Leon Bouvier & Lindsey Grant *How Many Americans?* (op cit), Chapter 1.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Mardon in *Sierra*, January/February 1994, pp.12,14. He was responding to criticisms of his review of a book by Garrett Hardin.

<sup>15</sup> For a refutation of the common argument that "immigrants do not supplant U.S. labor", see Donald L. Huddle, *Immigration, Jobs & Wages: The Misuses of Econometrics* (NPG FORUM, April 1992). For a report of an effort to measure the displacement in one city, see his NPG FORUM paper *Immigration and Jobs: the Process of Displacement* (NPG FORUM, May 1992).

<sup>16</sup> National Audubon Society and Population Crisis Committee *Why Population Matters. A Handbook for the Environmental Activist*, 1991, p.5.

<sup>17</sup> See Lindsey Grant *Free Trade and Cheap Labor: the President's Dilemma* (NPG FORUM paper, October 1991.)

<sup>18</sup> Latino National Political Survey report "Latinos Speaking in Their Own Voices", released 12-15-92, Table 7.24. Multi-university research project jointly funded by the Ford Foundation and a consortium of the Rockefeller, Spencer and Tinker foundations.

<sup>19</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics *Employment and Earnings*, January 1993, p.22. The figures are for the non-institutional (e.g. not in jail) population 20-24 years of age not enrolled in school who have full time employment.

<sup>20</sup> The 1988-92 fertility surveys are averaged, and all women with some college education are grouped together, to provide a meaningful sample size. Hispanics may consider themselves either Black or White, and thus are included in the first two columns and separately reported in the third.

<sup>21</sup> See "Population, Development and Environment. An NGO Position Paper for the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development" being circulated by the NWF. The 10-28-93 draft was co-signed by over 80 environmental, population, family planning and women's groups, worldwide.

<sup>22</sup> For an excellent discussion of relations among the feminist, environmental and population movements, and of the Rio conference in particular, see Susan A. Cohen, "The Road from Rio to Cairo: Toward a Common Agenda" (*International Family Planning Perspectives*, 6-2-93), pp.61-66.

<sup>23</sup> Tentatively to be titled *The Two Child Family*. A set of more gradual — and therefore more likely — but still optimistic projections of how population growth could be turned around is contained in the forthcoming *How Many Americans?*, op cit.

<sup>24</sup> Reuters, Los Angeles, 8-13-93, 14:21.

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