

## TWO WHITE HATS

### An NPG Footnote

By Lindsey Grant

Money talks, very loud, in American politics. I have pointed out before that American immigration policy is largely set by entrepreneurs seeking cheap labor, not because most people want it.<sup>1</sup> In fairness, however, let me say that there is a substantial body of immigration advocates who believe, quite sincerely, that unchecked immigration is the moral way to go. I owe them an examination of that belief.

There has been a debate for years between those who argue that the United States should welcome mass immigration and those who point out that we must limit immigration if we are to protect U.S. job opportunities and, eventually, stop U.S. population growth. The immigration debate is not simply a debate between good and evil. It is in part a conflict between moral but irreconcilable beliefs.

I have used the phrase "two white hats" (from the old cowboy movie imagery) to characterize the debate. It involves passionately held feelings on both sides. Immigration advocates – believing fervently in one world – argue that we should succor the stranger, and that we owe him or her the opportunity we have had. Immigration restrictionists argue that our first obligation is to avoid further impoverishing our own poor and to preserve a viable country for future generations.

Both positions are moral, but they are not symmetrical. The United States cannot rescue the world from over-population by absorbing the excess, and we would wreck our country if we tried. We can play only a limited role in other countries' demographic future, but we have an obligation to pursue sane policies concerning our own population, and some hope of saving the country if we do. Our first obligation is here. The nation is presently unable to employ the people we have. Our population is heading past a half billion in this century, and immigration is the major driver of U.S. population growth.

We can reverse U.S. population growth, and thereby protect our people and our future, without stopping all immigration. Some immigrants bring a welcome flow of ideas to the country. Fortuitously, those people are limited in numbers; they are usually educated and therefore less fertile than the present mix, so they are a less explosive source of population growth.

Perhaps I can claim that my hat is the "whiter" one. Immigration advocates are serving the interests of less altruistic forces such as the multinational corporations (MNCs). Restrictionists (myself included) propose that we stop multiplying the number of job seekers as we try to help the jobless find jobs. We seek an end to immigration levels that drive down the earnings of U.S. labor. That would probably mean higher prices for some goods and services. But the nation is a community, and we destroy that community if we keep widening the growing gulf between the living standards of the rich and the poor.

Moreover, I do not propose that we ignore others' plight. In the U.S. population policy I advocate, we would revise U.S. aid priorities to give top priority to family planning assistance, providing as much help as recipient countries want and can effectively use. Such a policy would be good for them and, over time, for us.

*What Can Be Done? In 1994, I proposed the "two child family" (e.g., stopping at two children in order to stop and reverse U.S. population growth), and those calculations allow net annual immigration of 200,000, which is about the level we admitted annually from the 1920s through the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> That level was large enough to include an immensely valuable flow of scientists and intellectual leaders, and it should be sufficient again.*

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## NOTES

This note is adapted from a short paper I wrote for a pamphlet titled *The Ethics of Immigration Policy* (Petoskey, MI: The Social Contract Press, June 2006.)

1. See my NPG FORUM article “It’s The Numbers, Stupid”, Nov. 2003, for a description of polls sponsored by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations showing – among other things – that most of the general public wants less immigration, but the “elite” want more. There is also a remarkably candid quote from U.S. Senator Tom Davis, who told the Senate that a proposed bill increasing immigration was not popular, but that Silicon Valley executives wanted it, and they are major political contributors. The bill passed 93-1.
2. See my NPG FORUM article “The Two Child Family”, May 1994 and book “The Collapsing Bubble: Growth and Fossil Energy” (Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press, 2005), pp. 65-67.

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