

# DESTINATION AMERICA

## IMMIGRATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND BIG POPULATION NUMBERS

BY JIM MOTAVALLI

PHOTO BY FRANCISCO SANTOS

In 2006, *USA Today* ran a lengthy story entitled “How Will the USA Cope with Unprecedented Growth?” The country’s population had just crossed the 300 million mark, up from 200 million in just 39 years.

Writer Haya El Nasser listed the many environmental problems made worse by rapid population growth, from traffic congestion to dwindling open space. But El Nasser’s story left one question unanswered: Why is the U.S. virtually the only industrialized country with a rapidly growing population? The key word is “immigration,” but El Nasser never uses it.

It’s a pretty big target to miss. More than a million immigrants achieve permanent resident status every year (twice the number of estimated undocumented arrivals). Seven hundred thousand people a year become U.S. citizens, and half a million receive work visas. These immigration numbers are unprecedented in our history: ▶





*On the outside looking in: a border fence separates San Diego from Tijuana, Mexico.*

For most of our nation's more than 200 years, fewer than 500,000 immigrants were admitted annually and usually less than 300,000.

That pattern has been radically altered. A 2008 Pew Research Center report attributes 82 percent of U.S. population growth to immigration, noting that the foreign-born population will pass its historic 19th century peak of 15 percent within two decades. Largely because of immigration, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that from 303 million today we'll grow to 400 million people as early as 2040, and 420 million by 2050. While some parts of the world, including western Europe and Japan, are experiencing "birth dearth" with below replacement-level fertility, the U.S. is growing so fast we now have the third largest population in the world, after only India and China.

According to the Center for Immigration Studies, if we legally admitted just 300,000 people a year, by 2060 the population would be 80 million less than it's likely to be on our current course.

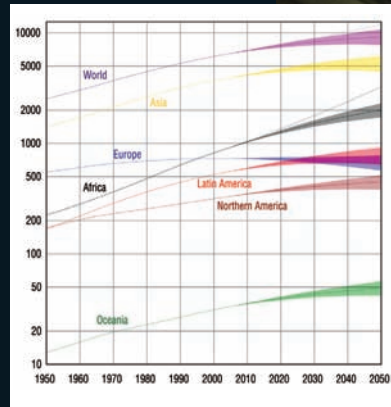
Fifty-three percent of the 100 million people we just added were recent immigrants or their descendants, says the Pew Hispanic Center. According to the authoritative Population Reference Bureau (PRB), at least a third of U.S. population growth between 1990 and 2000 was due to immigrants, and first- and second-generation Americans will constitute a third of our citizenry by 2025—the highest number ever.

Obviously, our numbers are swelling as a result of both legal and illegal immigration. PRB's estimates are probably considerably understated, because of the difficulty of quantifying just how many illegal immigrants are currently in the country. (The most popular number is 12 million, but other estimates are much higher.)

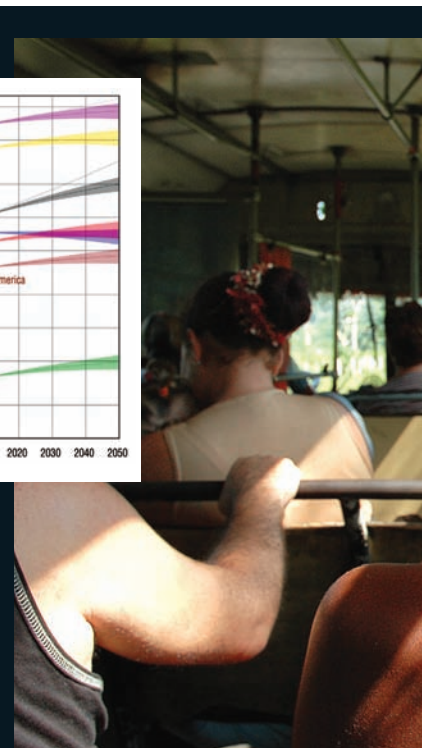
Tom Barry, a senior analyst with the Center for International Policy (CIP), admits that there's "no question that most population growth is from immigrants and the effects of 'chain migration' [the policy of family reunification which gives priorities to extended family members of current residents]." Barry's own proposals for immigration reform include not only a path to legalization but restricting family reunification to "the immigrant's spouse and children," an idea that he admits is controversial.

Indeed it is. The New York Immigration Coalition, for instance, says that any immigration bill that includes cuts in family immigration "is a profound betrayal of the family values and basic fairness that all Americans cherish." Chung-Wha Hong, the group's executive director, calls for "a broad and simple legalization for immigrants; a future worker program with full rights and a clear path to citizenship; family unity; and strong protections for due process and civil rights." Under such a plan, illegal immigrants would have nearly the same rights as legal immigrants.

There are "push" factors that cause people around the world to seek better lives for themselves. And there is an environmental impact to our projected growth—a virtually taboo subject for many of the larger green groups, and for the green media, too. It seems nearly impossible to have a sane and unbiased discussion of this hot-button issue, one that avoids racism and just looks at the numbers.



Record numbers are arriving: a million immigrants get permanent resident status annually.



## THE "I" WORD

There is no more agonizing issue on the American political agenda than immigration. America is, as we're frequently reminded, a nation of immigrants. We absorbed 25 million people between 1860 and 1920, and most observers believe we are a stronger nation because of it.

But America's current circumstances are vastly different than they were at the turn of the century. In 1900, there were 25.6 Americans per square mile in the U.S.; now it is 83 per square mile, a more than 300 percent increase. Further, immigrants are concentrated in certain states, with California being a prime destination. The state has 36 million people today (with a relatively dense 230 people per square mile). The population has doubled since 1960, but it could nearly double again, to an astonishing 60 million, by as early as 2050.

California stands out in the immigration debate. Every hour, it adds 60 people. Between 1990 and 2000, California grew from 29.8 to 34 million people, a four million increase that was greater than the increase in all the northeastern states from Maine to Virginia in the same period. The rapid growth is fueled by the fact that, as the Population Reference Bureau reports, "Foreign-born couples tend to have more children than U.S.-born couples. Foreign-born residents are in their prime childbearing years, and immigrants often come from countries with larger families." Census data shows that Hispanics have an average of 2.9 children per woman, compared to 1.8 for non-Hispanic whites. This is a factor in the recent increase in the U.S. fertility rate to replacement level of 2.1, a 35-year high, higher than that of any industrialized country.



## THE ENVIRONMENTAL ARGUMENT

Why is immigration an environmental concern? The fact is that America's rapid growth makes it nearly impossible to achieve sustainability. According to Population-Environment Balance (PEB), 93 percent of U.S. increases in energy use since 1970 can be attributed to population growth. To house our growing numbers we pave over an area the size of Delaware every year, the group says. Our population growth is a big factor in the endangered or threatened status of as many as 700 species of plants and animals. Another 9,000 species are at

until recently, more than half of those sold were gas-guzzling SUVs and pickup trucks. Between 1975 and 2002, the average American home grew 38 percent, even though household size declined. We have an impact disproportionate to our population, but the growth of that population exacerbates the problem.

"U.S. population growth explains the preponderance of growth in our national energy consumption," says Leon Kolankiewicz in a report for Numbers USA, which advocates lower immigration rates. In 1970, he points out, with U.S. population of just 200 million, a U.S. awash in cheap electricity and driving huge gas-guzzling, inefficient vehicles used 67 quadrillion BTUs (quads) of energy and 14.7 million barrels of oil a day. In 2006, with 300 million people and after many energy-efficiency improvements, we used 100 quads of energy and 20 million barrels of oil a day. And the increase in greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S., which rose 13 percent between 1990 and 2000, closely mirrors the just-over-13-percent population increase.

## PUSH AND PULL

It's hardly surprising that so many people want to come to America from the overpopulated developing world, and the "push factors" that cause them to seek a new life in the U.S. are compelling. Who can blame a family mired in poverty for wanting a better future? According to Population Connection, the swelling numbers abroad create pressures leading to "increased poverty, hunger, land degradation, a lack of health services and limited social and economic mobility. These problems motivate people to leave their homeland in search of greater opportunities." And what better place to go than the affluent, welcoming U.S., destination for 20 percent of the world's international migrants?

How do mainstream groups address these emigration pressures without calling for taboo mandatory caps on U.S. immigration? Population Connection wants to combine action at home (ensuring contraceptive availability, defending reproductive rights) with foreign aid and diplomacy

## THE "PUSH FACTORS" THAT CAUSE PEOPLE IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD TO SEEK A NEW LIFE IN THE U.S. ARE COMPELLING.

risk. And every day we remove 3.2 billion gallons of water from aquifers that are not replenished by natural processes.

Although increased population has many other environmental effects (urban sprawl and the loss of open space, to name two), energy and climate effects are central and little understood. Any efficiency gains we make are being swamped by rapid population increases and their attendant increased energy demand.

The wasteful American lifestyle is one major culprit. With just five percent of the world's population, the U.S. is the top consumer of 11 of the world's top 20 traded commodities. We use a quarter of the world's fossil fuel. We have more private cars than drivers with licenses, and, at least

abroad. "If our neighbors to the South see real hope for better lives at home, they will feel much less pressure to emigrate," the group says.

Such views have many supporters. "What would stop the illegal migration?" asks G. Jefferson Price, III, a former *Baltimore Sun* foreign correspondent, now with Catholic Relief Services. "A reversal in the trends that have devastated the economies of the countries whose people feel they have no alternative but to leave. We are spending a lot of energy and wealth to keep immigrants out of the U.S. If we and the governments of the countries they are coming from were to devote as much to improving their standard of living at home, they might not feel the need to come to America."

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As Price points out, the options for the desperate immigrant are staying home “and nearly starving in appalling economic conditions” or trying to cross into the U.S., where if they can evade the Border Patrol, their prospects will immediately improve. It’s hardly surprising that up to 30 million people have made that trip successfully, and many others have failed and keep on trying.

Betsy Hartmann, director of the population and development program at Hampshire College, says, “If we’re going to have a big population because of immigration, then we should take it as a chance to reduce individual consumption and carbon footprints. Instead of a one-child policy, we should encourage a one-car policy.”

Hartmann claims that sprawl is caused largely by “poor zoning, planning, transport and taxation policies.” She supports a massive U.S. investment in green technology. Hartmann also hopes that India and China—both of which are increasing their per-capita global warming emissions—can leapfrog over the west’s oil obsession and go directly to cleaner energy sources. That’s obviously a worthy goal, but when profit is the key motivation, the investment often goes elsewhere.

The obstacle is to get countries around the world to focus on eradicating hunger, infant mortality and poverty. A major hurdle would be limiting births through universal access to family planning and maternal health programs. In 1994, 179 countries met in Cairo, Egypt for the International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD), with the goal of forging an international commitment. The conference issued a 20-year plan known as the “Cairo Agenda” that included:

- Universal access to reproductive services and family planning programs by 2015;
- Full participation of women in political and public life;
- A consensus target of .7 percent of Gross National Product per donor country for international development assistance.

This agenda has languished. The 1994 call was for \$17 billion annual commitment for population and reproductive health programs by 2000, and \$21 billion by 2015. By



has had a severe impact on organizations that have rejected it. Not only are they no longer able to receive USAID funds, they are unable to receive much-needed USAID donated contraceptives.”

Nevertheless, Thoraya Ahmed, executive director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), says that the

## THERE IS CONFLICTING INFORMATION ABOUT ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS’ BURDEN ON SOCIAL SERVICES.

2004, less than \$10 billion per year was committed, and the Bush Administration—which opposes abortion and, in many cases, family planning—has failed to meet the need. By contrast, the Bush Administration’s Iraq War has already cost American taxpayers more than \$500 billion, and bills are now running \$275 million *per day*. The same funds strategically applied could have gone a long way toward ending world poverty.

According to Zonny Woods, an international consultant on reproductive health issues, “The Bush Administration’s reinstatement of the Global Gag rule [which prohibits U.S. funds from going to groups that in any way aid abortion]

ICPD process offers the best hope for reducing migration pressures. “To address migration, the growing poverty and demographic divide between rich and poor countries must be addressed,” she says.

Echoing this theme is Tom Barry of CIP. “A comprehensive U.S. immigration policy should support job creation and development programs,” he says. “That, unfortunately, is not happening, because the economic policies of countries like Mexico are complicated by economic ‘liberalization’ programs like NAFTA, which support U.S. interests and are not connected to job creation.” The status quo short changes Mexicans looking for work.



*Immigrants—like these migrant strawberry pickers in Ventura County, California—fill jobs many Americans wouldn't want.*

*The red dots on the map show regions where population has "overshot" carrying capacity.*

dren; by 1985, it was 2.4.

A spokesperson for U.S. Aid for International Development, speaking on background, calls Mexico "a graduated country." The agency stopped working there in 1999, after handing its family planning programs over to the Mexican government. "That's one of our success stories," the spokesperson said. "As in Turkey, Indonesia and Morocco, the government became an active partner with us and the result was a significant drop in fertility rates."

The drop in Mexican fertility rates—to just over replacement level—would seem to be an interesting talking point in the current immigration debate, but it is rarely mentioned. One imagines it would turn our elected representatives into enthusiastic supporters of production aid to family planning soap operas, but that hasn't happened.

When PMC launched its Sabido-type soap opera program in Ethiopia, the country had a five-year supply of oral contraceptives gathering dust in a warehouse. Only six percent of the population used any modern method of birth control and the birth rate was 5.4. Now birth control is in demand and, in the most populous Amhara region, fertility has dropped a full child, from 5.4 to 4.3.

A TV soap opera broadcast in India in the early 1980s, *Hum Log*, had very high ratings and a similar success story. A study showed that 71 percent of viewers learned from watching the show that family size should be limited. A second TV soap show, *Humraahi*, became the top-rated program on Indian television, with 230 million viewers. Again, surveys showed changing attitudes on such questions as proper age for marriage and women in the workforce.

The same approach, in cooperation with Save the Children, has also worked well in reducing AIDS incidence among Indian truck drivers. PMC has spread its TV-driven message around the world, and works in 15 countries with offices in Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Niger, Nigeria, the Philippines, Rwanda and Sudan. Government cooperation varies, but the government of Ethiopia has provided funding and Sudan offered free airtime on state-controlled TV.

## REVERSE IMMIGRATION

Other factors not recognized in the heat of an election year are also slowing immigration-related population growth. In Bridgeport, Connecticut, music clubs fill up on weekends with Brazilian customers intent on dancing to the music of one of their favorite bands—Pink Floyd. There were only an estimated 35 Brazilian families in Bridgeport in the early 1980s, but now there are many thousands. Brazilians have opened restaurants, painting businesses and travel agencies, and their arrival has added spice to the city's beat.

But immigration and naturalization officials noticed a significant drop in new Brazilian arrivals after 1992, dovetailing with an economic downturn in the U.S. Now that pattern may be repeating, as Brazilians (especially illegal immigrants) face stronger enforcement and a recession that makes it harder to find work. Some can't renew driver's licenses, making it a challenge to keep a job in a battered economy.

Brazilians in strongholds such as Newark, New Jersey, ▶

## TAUGHT BY TV

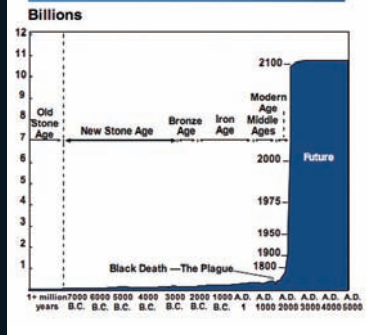
More family planning clinics may not be the answer. Bill Ryerson, president of the Vermont-based Population Media Center (PMC) analyzed 50 demographic and health surveys carried out in the last few decades and found that the predominant reasons women in developing countries give for not using birth control are: 1) fear of side effects; 2) male opposition; 3) religious opposition or the belief that family planning is not morally appropriate; 4) fatalism—it's up to God. "Lack of access to services is cited by less than two percent of respondents, in many countries it is less than one percent," Ryerson says. The evidence suggests that family planning education is as important as opening clinics.

What clearly *does* work is changing hearts and minds about family size and use of birth control, a decidedly grassroots phenomenon. And that's exactly what PMC does by creating popular soap opera-type radio shows. The model is Mexico, where Miguel Sabido, vice president of major TV network Televisa, created a series of telenovelas with family planning themes. From 1977 to 1986, when these programs were on the air, Mexico experienced a 34 percent decline in population growth and, in 1986, won the United Nations Population Prize. In 1975, the average woman had 3.5 chil-

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**World Population Growth**



Despite a “birth dearth” in some industrialized countries, world population continues to rise sharply.

Danbury, Connecticut and Boston, Massachusetts say they’re pulling up stakes and making the reverse trek back to their homeland. The Boston-based Brazilian Immigrant Center estimates that 5,000 returning Brazilians left Massachusetts in 2007.

Arizona (where one in 10 workers is a Hispanic immigrant) passed a tough new law that went into effect January 1, slapping businesses that knowingly employ the undocumented with business license suspensions of up to 10 days. Second-time offenders lose their licenses entirely. The law is considered so draconian by illegal Mexican immigrants in Arizona (some with long-held employment) that many are

would go begging.

“Our immigration system is broken and the government must act in a comprehensive way to fix it,” says Randal Johnson, U.S. Chamber of Commerce vice president for labor, immigration and employee benefits. “Our immigration and visa policy must ensure employers are able to fill jobs critical to our economy when American workers are not available.” Some labor unions have backed this plan, too, making a rather unusual coalition.

And liberals use remarkably similar reasoning in endorsing Bush’s goals for amnesty and guest worker programs. “Comprehensive immigration reform would protect

**WOULD UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO FAMILY PLANNING SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE INTERNATIONAL FERTILITY AND EMIGRATION PRESSURES?**

reportedly “self deporting” back to Mexico.

“The number returning to Mexico is difficult to calculate, but there is no question that many families are leaving, according to Mexican government officials, local community leaders and immigrants themselves,” reports the *Arizona Republic*. In 2007, the Mexican consulate processed 16,500 applications for passports, which nationals will need when they return to Mexico.

**FILLING ECONOMIC GAPS**

But there’s another side to the immigration debate. Supporters of maintaining current high levels say that a constant influx is necessary to keep the U.S. economically competitive. Without immigrants picking onions in California or cleaning gutters in Connecticut, they say, those jobs

our security, allow our economy to grow, protect the wages of U.S. workers, honor our value of rewarding hard work, restore the rule of law, and respect America’s traditional embrace of immigrants,” says the Center for American Progress.

President Bush said his failed plan to create a temporary worker program (admitting 400,000 people annually) would “meet the legitimate needs of American employers.” The Chamber has argued, in Congressional testimony, that because the Bureau of Labor Statistics expects the work force between 25 and 34 to grow by only three million between 2002 and 2012, and says the aging work force will erode American competitiveness. It adds that the U.S. fertility rate will decline to 1.91 between 2015 and 2020, below “replacement level.” Meanwhile, by 2010, 77 million baby boomers will retire. By 2030, one in five Americans is pro-

# GROWING PAINS: *Three Sprawling Cities*

Waving U.S. flags and chanting "We Are America!" between 30,000 and 60,000 immigrants and supporters took to the streets of Atlanta in 2006, calling for amnesty and a clear path to citizenship for millions of undocumented workers.

Immigrants are a growing force in Atlanta. According to the Census Bureau, the city added more people than any other metropolitan area between 2000 and 2005. Only a third of metro Atlanta's growth came from births; most was from people moving to the city, the majority foreign born.

Metro Atlanta now has more than five million people, with its population growing at twice the rate of metro New York, and significantly faster than other contenders Dallas-Fort Worth, Phoenix and Houston.

Similar demonstrations spanned the country—in New York, Los Angeles and Houston, among others, attracting two million participants. The presence of the marchers, most of them Hispanic, drew highly negative reviews from prominent conservatives. Rich Lowry of *National Review* described it as "ominous," and to Brit Hume of Fox News it was a "repellent spectacle." But the rallies were designed to make a simple point: We're here, and we want people to listen to us.

There's no question that immigrants are reshaping American cities. Without them, New York would have lost 600,000 people between 2000 and 2006, and Los Angeles 200,000. But although immigrants are bringing life and economic vitality to urban cores, they're still generating controversy and, sometimes, outright hostility.

**Environmental critics say** the issue is larger than immigration. Jason Mark, editor of *Earth Island Journal*, says it's "a red herring that's been concocted by xenophobes. Global and multinational responses are necessary, and to bring it down to a nation-state issue is close-minded."

But Atlanta's growth has distinct environmental implications. Each week, the Atlanta region loses 500 acres of green space to development, and Atlanta's sprawl has created one of the country's worst air pollution and transportation nightmares. "On average, people in the region drive 34 miles per day [since raised to 36]—more than anyone else on the face of the planet, says the 1999 "Sprawl Atlanta" report.



The legacy of all that bumper-to-bumper driving is serious "non-attainment" of Environmental Protection Agency air-quality goals and catastrophic asthma rates, especially among African-American children in the city. Asthma is the number one reason African-American kids are hospitalized.

Houston, where 50,000 marchers waving American flags and chanting "U.S.A! U.S.A.!" made their way through the city, has its own growth problems. It is second in the nation for urban sprawl, right behind Atlanta. Union officials estimate there are some 300,000 illegal aliens working around the Houston area in the building trades alone. Their presence cuts both ways—undermining union pay scales, but also keeping the low-wage economy humming along. "Somebody has to dig the ditch, somebody has to cut the grass," says a spokesperson for the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The city now has the worst air quality in the nation, gaining that dubious distinction in 1999, when it had 52 days of high-ozone levels—eight more than L.A. The state Texas Commission on Environmental Quality says it won't

meet ozone standards until 2018.

It wasn't immigrants who invented the Hummer or the gated community, and it isn't new immigrants who lead extravagant, resource-heavy lifestyles. "Sprawl culture is probably the most consumptive housing pattern you could come up with," says John Talberth, director of the sustainability indicators program at Redefining Progress. But although new arrivals bring with them the frugality of their homelands, their consumption rates quickly rise.

**Los Angeles held its pro-immigrant rally** a few months after the events in Houston and Atlanta, and it was something of a bust. Only 200 people showed up, and the customers milling around the chicken taco stands and music stages were mostly organizers and journalists.

There are an estimated two million illegal immigrants in the L.A. area, and the poor attendance was likely due to fear of deportation. Today, 40 percent of the city's residents were born in another country, and 22 percent live at the poverty level. Three-fifths of the city's poor children are illegal. As many as 60 percent of Los Angeles County's uninsured hospital patients are non-citizens, the same illegal aliens who fill many job niches in the city and its suburbs.

As California's population threatens to nearly double by 2050, Los Angeles struggles with what have been identified as the country's worst congestion and traffic problems for the last 16 straight years. And rush-hour drivers in L.A. face further challenges as local traffic is expected to grow 40 percent by 2020.

Houston has been staying dirty as Los Angeles has applied the most rigorous air standards in the country. The very real improvements in cleaning up cars and trucks have had to overcome steady increases in vehicle miles traveled, and rising overall tailpipe emissions. It's not just the two million new residents added in the greater Los Angeles area between 1990 and 2000, it's also a steady sprawl out to Orange County and beyond.

None of these cities would be utopias without high immigration rates, but sharp population growth is exacerbating already serious environmental problems.

**CONTACTS:** Alliance for Survival-Los Angeles, (310)399-1000, [www.scced.org](http://www.scced.org); Georgia Conservancy, (404)876-2900, [www.gaconservancy.org](http://www.gaconservancy.org); Houston Mothers for Clean Air, (713)526-0110, [www.mothersforcleanair.org](http://www.mothersforcleanair.org). —Jim Motavalli

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jected to be a senior citizen, the Chamber says.

But selectively quoting the fertility rate is highly misleading, because it ignores the population growth fueled by immigration. Without the constant influx, the U.S. would indeed have a shrinking population similar to Western Europe. But with immigration it is slated to take a giant leap forward. The Census Bureau is projecting an incredible 419 million by 2050. With numbers like that, an American “birth dearth” affecting competitiveness is not only unlikely, it’s well nigh impossible.

Obviously, the employment issue has as many facets as a diamond; for every immigrant who “takes” a U.S. job, there’s another one being shipped overseas by the same companies that encourage high immigration rates. And new factories abroad encourage people to stay home and not emigrate.

agency rooms and attend schools, but are ineligible for welfare, food stamps and Medicaid. According to Gordon Hanson of the University of California at San Diego, the net effect of undocumented workers on native-born Americans is roughly zero. A 1997 RAND Corporation study had similar findings.

But Hanson’s numbers are far from definitive. Robert Rector of the conservative Heritage Foundation comes to much different conclusions. He says the 4.5 million low-skilled immigrant households circa 2004 produced an average net fiscal deficit of \$19,588, or \$89.1 billion in total. “Over the next 10 years,” he wrote last year, “the net cost (benefits minus taxes) to the taxpayer of low-skill immigrant households will approach \$1 trillion.”

Another study by Donald Huddle of Rice University estimates that immigration to the U.S. since 1970 (both legal and illegal) has cost taxpayers a net \$68 billion (after subtracting the taxes legal immigrants pay).

But it’s not all about money; the immigration debate also has moral dimensions. “Comprehensive immigration reform is a great moral debate,” says Jim Wallis, president and executive director of Sojourners/Call to Renewal. “‘Who would Jesus deport’ is a fair question.”

Rabbi Steve Gutow, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, says, “How we treat the 12 million undocumented who are here in many ways colors who we are as Jews. How we react to those who want to enter our borders and become part of our country says a lot about how well we remember our own stories when we were immigrants looking for a safe haven, a place to rest and live and prosper.”

## FIFTY-THREE PERCENT OF THE 100 MILLION PEOPLE WE JUST ADDED WERE RECENT IMMIGRANTS OR THEIR DESCENDANTS.

### COSTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Immigrants contribute much to American society, and it’s important not to scapegoat them. According to Sebastian Mallaby, director of the Council on Foreign Relations’ Center for Goeconomic Studies, in California in 2004 an impressive 94 percent of undocumented men ages 18 to 64 were in the workforce, compared with 82 percent of native-born men. The Pew Hispanic Center reports that approximately 7.2 million undocumented immigrants are working in the U.S. today, comprising some 4.9 percent of the overall workforce.

“Far from being part of a shiftless underclass, the act of coming to the United States makes immigrants among the most upwardly mobile groups in the nation, only a bit behind hedge-fund managers,” Mallaby says.

And there is conflicting information about illegal immigrants’ burden on social services. They pay no income taxes, but do pay sales and payroll taxes. They visit hospital emer-

Some environmentalists argue passionately that it’s not fair to simply tell aspiring Americans—some of whom risk their lives and their entire life savings in an effort to cross the border for a better life—that they should simply stay away.

Given the current, highly charged debate, it’s unlikely that we’ll achieve national consensus on immigration anytime soon. But we need to focus here. How big a country do we want to be? What is our country’s carrying capacity, and did we exceed it many years ago? Why do people choose to emigrate, and what can we do to ease conditions in their countries? That’s a debate worth having. **E**

**JIM MOTAVALLI** is editor of *E*.

CONTACTS: FAIR, (202)328-7004, [www.fairus.org](http://www.fairus.org); Population-Environment Balance, (202)955-5700, [www.balance.org](http://www.balance.org); Population Media Center, [www.populationmedia.org](http://www.populationmedia.org); Population Reference Bureau, (800)877-9881, [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org).

# IMMIGRATION: *Two Views*



**John Seager** is the president of the Washington-based Population Connection (formerly Zero Population Growth), which has consistently taken the position that stopping teen pregnancy and increasing family planning aid around the world is the best way to address the growing challenge of our over-populated planet.

David Durham is chairman of the board of another Washington-based group, Population-Environment Balance, which sees immigration as the key factor in our burgeoning numbers (and resulting environmental impact). Needless to say, they have differing world views. First, John Seager:

## **E Magazine: What conversation do you think we should be having about immigration?**

**Seager:** There are no bumper sticker solutions. Dwight Eisenhower, a far better Republican President than the one we have now, reportedly once said, "If you can't solve a problem, enlarge it." I think when we look at the question of immigration, our focus has been far too narrow. Because of that, we've had a hard time finding the kind of approaches that could actually move the issue forward in a way that could benefit everybody.

## **So what is the larger issue?**

The larger issue is migration. People don't just materialize at our border, or at any border. When you talk about immigration, you're talking about the second half of a process that begins when people decide to leave their homes. Most migrants are not well-off people who think it would be fun to spend a year in Paris; they're driven by extreme circumstances. There are 190 million people living outside their country of origin, which would make them the fifth-largest population of any country on Earth. Only China, India, the U.S. and Indonesia are larger than that. And yet we've focused in on one very narrow piece of a very broad issue.

**Your organization says the way to address the needs of these 190 million people is to better the conditions in their own countries, especially through family planning availability and new health clinics. But isn't it true that**

## **women in developing countries cite other factors in not using contraception, such as opposition from men, plus culture and religion?**

There's virtually no statement you could make about population growth and its implications that would be universally true. But when you look at the problem around the world there is definitely a lack of access to family planning that is a major factor, though not the only factor. In the last 10 years, in real dollars, international aid for family planning has been cut in half. And as a consequence, especially of the Bush Administration's actions, clinics have closed and access has gotten more difficult.

## **USAID steadfastly denies there has been any significant reduction in U.S. family planning aid.**

They're wrong. They've got the numbers wrong, especially when you look at real dollars.



Next, **David Durham:**

## **E Magazine: What do you say to the charge that groups like PEB are anti-immigrant?**



**Durham:** We are not scapegoating immigrants by setting limits; instead we are recognizing ecological realities

such as limited potable water, topsoil and infrastructure. Current U.S. immigration policy is far too lax from an ecological perspective because we are overshooting our long-term carrying capacity. Studies have shown that a permissive U.S. immigration policy drives up fertility rates in the sending countries, which is the last thing these sending countries need.

## **Through our foreign aid programs, can we succeed in reducing the push factors that lead people to migrate?**

While family planning programs that include incentives for replacement-level fertility might make a dent in fertility rates, probably the most effective thing we could do to lower fertility rates is to dra-

matically lower immigration into the U.S.

To be sustainable in the long term, we need to achieve U.S. population stabilization, because a number of studies show we have overshot our long-term carrying capacity. We need to work for a zero-net immigration moratorium, and dramatically reduce illegal immigration. A zero-net policy would allow 100,000 spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens as well as a select few truly needed workers and refugees annually.


## **What are the environmental effects of our current high immigration rate?**

For every person added to the U.S. population, one acre of wild or farmland is converted to human use or degraded. In addition, rampant U.S. population growth increases infrastructure burdens, including the need for new schools and healthcare facilities, and results in increased waste and pollution.

## **How do you respond when people say that the problems of high consumption and sprawl are caused by the American lifestyle, not by immigration?**

People who make that charge are mainly, but not entirely, wrong. Sprawl and aggregate consumption levels are caused mainly by increases in the *numbers* of people, not by the American lifestyle. The U.S. population increases by about four and a half million people per year, with about 90 percent of that caused by immigrants and their offspring.

In fact, *per capita* generation of greenhouse gases by Americans has begun to decrease. Americans should be proud that they are among the world leaders in changing a worldwide sprawl and consumption culture into an environmentally conscious one.

But despite these efforts, the U.S. population will hit one billion in 2075 if current trends continue. There's too little national dialogue about this. We have had attempts to formulate a national population policy in the past, but it's very controversial because such a policy deals with immigration, fertility rates and other hot-button issues. 

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