

Is Overimmigration in the U.S. Morally Defensible?

By Ben Zuckerman and Stuart H. Hurlbert
The San Diego Union Tribune (B7), August 3, 2001

President Bush and Mexican President Vicente Fox are now at the poker table deciding how many persons from Mexico currently residing illegally in the United States will be given amnesty this year, a first step in Fox's plan for an open border between the two countries. Not to be left behind, Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle has raised the stakes and proposed amnesty for all illegal immigrants.

Meanwhile, we read the latest Census Bureau figures showing a U.S. population increase of 33 million during the 1990s, which exceeded the bureau's projections by 6 million persons and is the largest decadal jump in U.S. history. The Census Bureau now projects that, by the end of the century, U.S. population might exceed 1 billion, even in the absence of an open border with Mexico. Most of these 1 billion will be immigrants yet to arrive and their descendants.

President Fox is one of numerous powerful persons and groups lobbying for continued and even increased high levels of immigration to the United States. Two such groups are (1) the Democratic Party which believes, probably correctly, that a majority of immigrants will vote Democratic and (2) some Republican business interests who understand that massive immigration depresses wages and provides additional consumers of products and services.

Today, we would like to speak on behalf of three multitudinous, but "voiceless" groups in America who are harmed by massive immigration.

The first group is the poorest segment of the U.S. population. Independent studies by the Rand Corporation, the National Academy of Sciences, and the Center for Immigration Studies all show that today's policy of overimmigration negatively impacts the economic well being of the poorest Americans. A summary discussion by James Goldsborough appears in the September/October 2000 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Needless to say, poor Americans are not the people who set our immigration policies.

In addition to the strictly economic considerations, overimmigration has had disastrous consequences for the quality of education available to poor inner city Americans. No wonder that poll after poll shows that a strong majority of poor Americans want to see immigration levels reduced.

The second voiceless group consists of indigenous non-human species. The Nature Conservancy's comprehensive new book "Precious Heritage" -- foreword by Harvard conservation biologist E. O. Wilson -- depicts the high correlation between U.S. endangered species and areas with rapid, immigration-driven, population growth,

including California, the Southwest and Florida. It is not hard to see exploding human populations eating up land that indigenous species have lived on for countless millennia.

This is quantified in a recent analysis by environmental/resource planner Leon Kolankiewicz and public policy analyst Roy Beck, titled "Weighing Sprawl Factors in Large U.S. Cities." This report, and two others devoted specifically to California and to Florida, show dramatically that massive human sprawl in the Southwest and Florida is due not to poor urban planning, but rather almost entirely to rapid population growth.

The connection to immigration? Here in California, for example, analysis of our state government and U.S. Census Bureau statistics indicates that about 90 percent of California's population growth during the 1990s was due to immigrants and their children.

The third voiceless group is people and other creatures not yet born who have no control over decisions being made today. An excellent analogy is China. In the 1950s and 1960s the Chinese government encouraged high fertility, which peaked at 6.5 children per woman in the mid-1960s. This irresponsible policy caused China's population to surpass 1 billion by 1980.

One consequence is the Draconian one-child-per-woman policy instituted around 1980. Thus, present and future generations of Chinese families are paying the price for previous shortsighted government policies. Rapid population growth cannot be turned off like a faucet and the Chinese population is projected to continue growing for at least another 30 years, at which point it will be about 1.5 billion, in spite of the present harsh fertility policies.

Current immigration policies are propelling the United States to a 22nd century population of over a billion. This will leave Americans then in the same nasty situation as the Chinese are in now. High fertility or overimmigration, the outcome -- too many people -- is all the same.

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