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## America, From Republic to Ant Farm

by Thomas Fleming

In July I took my four children back to the South Carolina village in which they had spent their earliest years. The most frequent topics of conversation were still, in order, Hurricane Hugo and its aftermath, a public school controversy that appeared to pit blacks against whites but really concerned the ambitions of a New York "intellectual" who wanted to change the character of a community that had accepted him into its midst, and, finally, the inevitable growth of the village as Charleston, swollen with refugees from Ohio, spreads up along the coast.

I spoke with an artist who had been given the task of drawing up a plan for controlled development, and he expressed the hope that the village could retain its character as a community that mixed black and white, rich and poor, shrimpers and lawyers. What the artist really wanted to talk about was a series of paintings depicting the activities of shrimpers, crabbers, and oystermen whose way of life was rapidly disappearing. "The problem is," he explained, waving his hand across a vista of palmettos and oaks, flowers and marsh grass as if it were a painting, "the problem is, we are in the midst of all this beauty. Everybody wants to live here, but there is a finite supply of prime coastal property."

It was the Rev. Thomas Malthus who first recognized that population growth exacerbated the competition for scarce resources. His theory was expressed in a pair of simple

sentences: "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence only increases in an arithmetical ratio." Although Malthus's formula failed to consider the consequences of technological change and economic growth, his insight gave Charles Darwin the key to understanding the process of natural selection. In the competition for scarce resources, it is the winners who survive, propagate, and pass on their characteristics.

Today, the population debate is dominated by two opposing views, neither of which fully appreciates the significance of Malthus and Darwin. On one side are the Pollyannas, led by Julian Simon, who think that modern man can continue to stay one step ahead of the Malthusian sheriff, so long as he continues to develop new technologies and devote himself to economic growth. On the other side are the Chicken Littles, whose champion is Paul Ehrlich, who have set themselves against all human increase to the point that they are against life itself. For Simon, it doesn't matter whether America grows by having babies or importing aliens, while Ehrlich points the finger of blame at the Vatican (particularly the profound encyclical *humanae vitae*) and refuses to distinguish between the American middle class and the beggars of Calcutta.

Neither Simon nor Ehrlich is asking the right question, which is not, What is good for the world or for the global

economy? The primary object of American national policy is the good of the American people and the health of the civilization we have imported from Europe. Obviously, an Earth on which human life is extinct would not be a desirable situation, but the immediate problems facing the United States are of a more specific kind. We, along with our European cousins, are in a competition for the world's resources, and the survival of our cultural characteristics depends upon the outcome of that competition. In this light, we need to examine the relationship between population growth and political change. We also need to decide, before it is too late, whose side our government is on in this question.

Let us begin at the beginning, by looking at the influence of population growth upon the development of political institutions in general, the state in particular. In political anthropology, the origin of the state has been the subject of lively controversy and the object of many theories. There are aggression and conflict theories (Oppenheim), irrigation and bureaucracy theories (Wittfogel), and growth and evolution theories (Aristotle, Elman Service). Increasingly it has been recognized that no one approach is sufficient to account for all the varied state-formations that have taken place in human history, and the nearest thing to a consensus is represented by Ronald Cohen at Northwestern.

For Cohen, population growth per se is a necessary but not sufficient cause of that concentration of power we moderns call the state. Ecological circumstances and external threats also play a part, but there is no denying the importance of population increase. Robert Carneiro has probably put forward the most elegant paradigm for the process. For Carneiro, the secret lies in the principle known as Gause's law of competitive exclusion, which has been stated by Garrett Hardin in just four words: "Complete competitions cannot exist," which is to say that no two species or human groups can occupy the same ecological niche. One competitor will always exterminate (or expel) the other. Population growth puts pressure on inter-group rivalries as different societies attempt to make use of essential resources. In this competition, a society is driven to organize its powers for victory, hence the genesis of the state. Competitors may imitate the example and form their own rival state, but through the millennia the effect of competition has been to increase the size of political entities and to decrease their numbers.

Population pressures do not cease to operate, once a state has been formed. On the contrary, these pressures are a fundamental part of all social organization. Chimpanzees have a generally loose social organization, but when larger groups are formed, the structure becomes more authoritarian and more hierarchical. Colin Turnbull has observed a similar process at work among the Mbuti pygmies. The Mbuti ordinarily travel about in small groups of kith and kin and rely upon only the most informal types of social pressure to maintain order. However, when larger groups collect to gather honey, even the pygmies begin to employ more formal methods of social control.

To understand what goes on, imagine an unspoiled beach, visited occasionally by picnickers, swimmers, surfers, and fishermen. At first, hardly anyone goes there, and there is no need to squabble over rights, but as the place catches

on and more and more people are going to the beach on the same day, an inevitable tension develops among surfers, swimmers, and fishermen. Litter left by thoughtless picnickers becomes a problem. The cry goes up that the beach is getting crowded and polluted, and decent families are menaced by irresponsible hooligans on surfboards. The state begins passing ordinances: no fires on the beach, no nude sunbathing, swimming only in designated areas, no food or beverages. Despite the ordinances, the numbers increase, and the state has recourse to parking fees and charges more for nonresidents. And so it goes.

The response of the Pollyannas to this scenario is to shout hooray. More people means a higher total index of pleasure. More people get to enjoy the beach in different ways. Some get to fish or collect shells, while others get to listen to Walkman stereos. (Growth buffs refuse to admit that some pleasures are higher than others or even that my desire for peaceful solitude conflicts with your addiction to noise.) I recently attended a conference on environmentalism that pitted mostly liberal journalists against the disciples of Julian Simon. Whenever a liberal pointed out that increased populations were degrading the environment and putting a strain on the world's resources, one "conservative" journalist invariably responded with the great success story of Hong Kong. Look at how so many people are making so much money. But, as the liberals always insisted, that does not answer the question of Hong Kong's environment or its dependence on the rest of the world for food and raw materials. Privately, one of the liberals asked me if anyone in his right mind would be willing to live in Hong Kong, if there were any alternative but Communist China.

**I**ncreased numbers seem to lead inevitably to increased complexity and organization. That, at any rate, is the general opinion among sociologists who study the phenomenon of growth. In modern times, more people leads to more "subsystems"—organizations and associations that handle tasks that might have been handled, in former days, by family and church. On the frontier, a family raised its own food, reared its own children, made its own clothes. Today, it is likely to turn over all these functions to a variety of commercial and governmental organizations, which continue to grow, fission, and proliferate in response to continued population growth.

While population growth does lead, at least in modern times, to greater productivity, growing organizations do not invariably become more productive and more efficient. Greater size and complexity in a society's systems render them more unwieldy, more bureaucratic, less sensitive to change, less able to communicate between the various parts. To counter this tendency, modern management techniques were devised, separating off the function of management from that of production.

Dartmouth sociologist Stanley Uddly in his contribution to a collection of essays on *Societal Growth* endorses the current complaint that nothing works anymore and argues that increased complexity leads inevitably to decreased performance. Unfortunately, the managerial remedies invented to combat the problem no longer work as well, and further growth will make systems more interdependent and organizations harder to manage.

There are natural limits to the size and scope of all social organizations. Primitive societies often cannot extend beyond a hundred members without breaking up into smaller groups. Modern techniques of distribution, communication, and political control have allowed fairly small elite classes to manage rather large territories, although it now appears that the Soviet Union was too large for the organizational carrying capacity of the Communist Party. The United States almost broke apart in the 1860's, and our continued growth in population and complexity may make some form of fissioning as necessary as it is attractive.

There are other scenarios. In a recent essay (*Population and Politics Since 1750*), William H. McNeill has explored the political consequences of the accelerated rate of population growth in 18th-century Europe. Going from a growth rate of about 0.2 percent per annum, the rate jumped up to between 0.5 and 1.5 percent. In England "improving" landlords were able to organize agriculture on a more rational plan, while England's economic and industrial growth managed—just barely—to defuse a growing social revolution. In France, the ruling class was not so lucky. French traditions made it more difficult for farmers and landlords to modernize agricultural methods, and the growth in French rural population meant not only food shortages but also a large number of peasant sons who could not find work in the country. The result, put simply, was the French Revolution, which solved the population problem by drafting the young men.

America had had its own revolution—or rather secession—a few years before, sounding a new variation on ancient European themes. In the beginning we were a thinly settled people along a narrow strip of seaboard, but even the modest civility of Philadelphia and Charleston was unknown to the inhabitants of the backcountry who spent their lives in a search for fresh game and rich land. The most typically American heroes, in life as well as in fiction, were men who (like Daniel Boone) could not bear the sight of smoke rising from a neighbor's chimney and had to light out for the territories, whenever they had a surfeit of order and gentility. The frontier was an escape valve for the restless, and even in my father's generation there were men (my father included) who were able to hunt and fish their way across North America.

Today, our fishermen invest tens of thousands into high-tech gear and handsome outfits from Orvis, and there's hardly a Yalie in the country who doesn't make a lovely cast with a fly rod. The sad state of American manhood was brought home to me recently by Michael Pollan, executive editor of *Harper's*. Writing with unconscious irony in the *New York Times Book Review*, Pollan reveals that "Fly-fishing would hold little appeal if not for the shelf full of classics that comes with it, and until snowmobiling or pickerel-fishing acquire a halfway decent literature, people like me will have no trouble leaving them alone." The Ski-doo company ought to run Pollan's statement as an endorsement.

The descent in virility from men like my father to the current crop of literary fly-fishermen is only a small sign of what has been happening. Since the Second World War, we have gone from being a nation of small-town outdoorsmen to a nation of suburbanites who talk about the zen of

standing in a trout stream or hand out Greenpeace pamphlets in other people's neighborhoods. When I visit Wisconsin lakes I used to fish as a boy, they are swarming with realtors from the Chicago suburbs. Armed with electronic fish-finders, graphite rods, chemical scents, and sound-emitting lures, they go after the stupid and sluggish walleye with enough technology to bring in a whale. The quiet beach in South Carolina, where our family built an isolated house in the 1960's, was teeming with condos, resorts, and look-alike houses (at least until Hurricane Hugo came along). There is hardly any wilderness or loneliness left in America, only marked trails, parking lots, and campgrounds that look like RV parks. Out in Montana recently with this magazine's books editor, we did some fishing in Yellowstone Park and noted, with some astonishment, how many vacationers stopped to take pictures of our quaint activity. But Mr. Williamson pointed out the one great consolation of places like Yellowstone: they draw the tourists as flies are drawn to a dead carp and take some of the pressure off the rest of Montana.

This is not an exclusively aesthetic or even a moral dilemma. Our political system was developed for an independent populace of farmers and small-town shopkeepers who knew how to mind their own business. Increased population means more government, more police, more regulations. But the no-limits-to-growth Pollyannas have no complaints about this development, either. In fact, they appear not to know what we are talking about. So long as profits continue to rise and the interdependent world economy is prospering, they do not worry about air and water quality, the abuse of precious resources, the loss of wilderness. In one important sense they are right. Their entire world view is based on growth at any cost, which means America must have more and more people to buy more and more useless junk to satisfy their degraded appetites. We have already spent the capital of previous generations and mortgaged our children's destiny (through the growing national debt). The national economy is like the Social Security system: it can only retain the appearance of solvency if more and more taxpaying consumers are recruited as investors. Let us just once falter, and the entire Ponzi scheme of this growth economy will come crashing down.

So far I have confined myself largely to the domestic consequences of population growth. However, expanding societies frequently look for solutions beyond their own borders: conquest and colonization. Imperial methods, McNeill points out, always seem to backfire, because as the master group becomes urbanized and affluent, its population no longer grows. The Roman solution was to incorporate the conquered nations into the imperial system, enfranchising the peoples and ennobling their leaders. What good that was to the old Roman stock and their descendants, it is hard to imagine, and in the later stages of the empire it was hard to find representatives of the old senatorial families among the Roman nobility.

Christian Europe, in the past several centuries, went on an even greater binge of conquest than the Romans and subdued most of the world's surface to its ambitions: the Americas, Africa, India, and much of China. Inevitably, we lost our nerve, symbolized by the will to procreate. In the



meantime, we had wrought important changes among the native populations we did not eliminate. We introduced modern medicine and improved agricultural methods as well as the political innovations associated with the modern state. The results, as inevitable as our loss of nerve, have been burgeoning Third World populations, followed by plagues and famines that for all our efforts we can only ameliorate without actually preventing or suppressing.

What a mess we Europeans made of things in Asia and Africa, and what a mess we are still making by propping up thugs and subsidizing the population expansion of poor countries while attempting (without success) to modernize their economic systems. Our ultimate solution for the crisis we have created is to throw open the doors to Third World immigrants and invite them to reduce our own level of civilization to that of Nigeria. Ethnic strife in the United States is already at painful levels. What can we expect when the conflict among Asians, blacks, and Hispanics is fueled by massive immigration and a competition for increasingly scarce resources?

Worldwide population growth results in a complicated set of problems for which we must find solutions simple enough for the U.S. Congress to understand. I would like to present a few basic principles (none of them new) to light our way through the labyrinth.

The main principle is to put the needs of America first and Europe second. Humanitarian policies that threaten the vitality of the West are the worst kind of treason. In foreign policy, this should mean a rapid withdrawal of all forms of economic and development assistance to poor nations, particularly those with high rates of population growth. (For this point I am obviously indebted to Garrett Hardin's classic essay on lifeboat ethics as well as to Dr. Tristram Engelhardt's response.)

Western aid, private as well as governmental, has been the cruelest sort of kindness. Most of the money spent has been lapped up by the bureaucrats who make good livings helping the poor and by the corrupt politicians who run nearly every Third World government. What supplies actually reach Africa often turn out to be warm blankets and canned food years past the expiration date. When our medical and food relief does score a success, the only effect is to increase the population of, for example, Ethiopia well beyond the carrying capacity of the environment.

In passing one might ask how a country that can't repair its bridges and roads can afford to subsidize any foreign government, rich or poor. It should also be our national policy to exert as much pressure as we can to discourage foreign governments and international agencies from practicing their lethal charities upon the Third World.

At home, we should give our own people the benefit of this policy, by cutting off all forms of welfare that discourage productivity and encourage irresponsible procreation. The left, which is so fond of handing out other people's money in the form of food stamps, AFDC payments, and subsidized housing, wants to handle the consequences of their folly by encouraging subsidized abortions. But if we quit paying poor women to get pregnant, perhaps we won't have to bribe them to kill their babies.

A little candor on this point would go a long way. I have met many rich Republicans who would be horrified if a

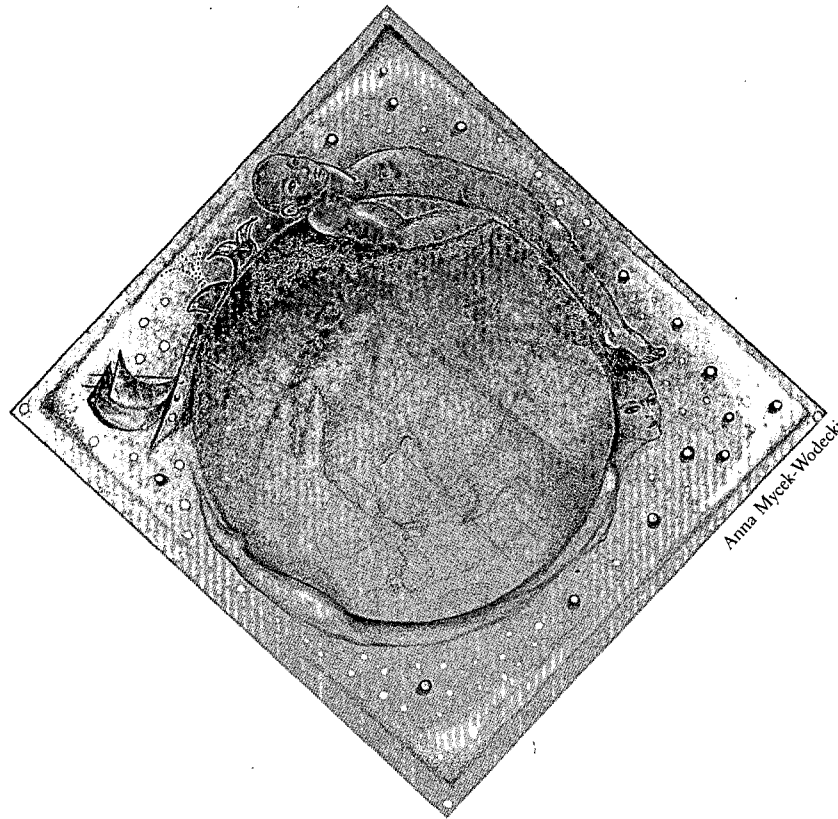
member of their family even contemplated an abortion, but who continue to give donations to Planned Parenthood. Is there any grown person in America who claims not to understand? Quite apart from the moral evil of abortion, the rich are missing the point. Planned Parenthood and the other anti-life organizations can do little to stop the population growth of the poor—there is too much counter-pressure coming from the government. Where they are successful is in teaching the contraceptive mentality of safe promiscuity to middle-class teenagers, who hear the message of hedonism but forget all the other, more complicated parts about birth control, except the bit about abortion being the safe (to say nothing of effective) birth control of last resort. The very people in America who ought to be forming stable marriages and having two or three children are growing up perverse, selfish, and unwilling to assume the burdens of family life. For the Julian Simons, this presents no problem, because the Third World is like a factory mass-producing cheap labor to be imported to the United States. But those who understand the law of competitive exclusion will have their doubts.

Since the native-born American population is not growing, the main domestic effort should be directed to immigration reform. This is doubly important, since Third World immigrants not only add to the general population pressure but also exacerbate the ethnic rivalries that are already tearing the country apart. A few years ago I took a drive with my family up to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, where some distant relatives of mine used to have a place. We stopped at a state park and wondered why the signs were mostly in Spanish. When we got to the beach, we understood. We were virtually the only Americans there. Most of the Latinos appeared to be having a good time, doing no harm. Viewed in the abstract, it was a colorful scene. But I've been to Mexico, and as much as I like and admire the people there, most of them are not ready for life in the United States, at least not in clean, Germanic Wisconsin. Some of the young men looked at me and my small son as if to say, "What the hell are you doing here? This is our park."



They're right, but internationalization is a two-way street. Puerto Rican nationalists say (so I'm told) that they no longer feel at home in their own country; there are so many signs in English. I understand their point and deplore the "cocacolonization" of Europe more than most Europeans do, but we can only work on our own problems, not the world's. (We could start by giving Puerto Rico its independence, whether the Puerto Ricans want it or not.)

But here in the great 48, we can already see the end. As Chicago and Los Angeles and Miami all turn into large-scale versions of Tijuana (or Shanghai or Lagos), and the gentle suburbanites run farther and farther into the countryside they are destroying, there will no longer be even a memory of the kind of Americans who built this country and made it, for a time, a refuge from the historical processes. "Lo, all our pomp of yesterday is one with Nineveh and Tyre." ◇



## Conspicuous Benevolence and the Population Bomb

by Garrett Hardin

**T**he one certain thing about population control is that we do not yet know how to achieve it. That needs a bit of explaining. If human beings do absolutely nothing about controlling their populations, nature will do it for us, simply because the world—*our* world—is limited. Sure, a few human beings might eventually be shipped off to the stars in a spaceship, but this could never be a feasible way in which to deal with unhindered population growth. At the present time, world population is increasing by a quarter of a million people per day. At a cost of tens of millions of dollars per astral passenger, we will never be rich enough to “solve” the population problem that way.

Never mind: nature will solve the problem for us. The high death rate in countries like Ethiopia, the Sudan, and Bangladesh will (if we sit on our hands) ultimately be great

enough to produce zero population growth (ZPG). At present, all that nature is producing is misery. Bangladesh, with an area the size of Iowa, has a population 38 times as great, and each year it adds another Iowa’s-worth of population. As miserable as conditions are in Bangladesh now, they are slated to become worse before ZPG sets in. That’s not the kind of population control we are looking for.

Some of the European models appeal to us more. From time to time one country or another has been in the ZPG-mode—for a few years. Hungary. East Germany. And recently, apparently, Italy. How did they manage to do this? Not by government fiat: the unsought answer was a housing shortage. A newly married couple moving into a tiny apartment with his or her parents was told in no uncertain terms, *No babies!* By the time they could get an apartment of their own the most fertile years of married life were past. A housing shortage is a great contraceptive—in Europe. But not, obviously, in most tropical countries (whatever the reason).

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