

Is It Immigrant-Bashing to Ask About Overpopulation?

by Harold Gilliam

President Clinton's recent speech on immigration at Portland State University was an excellent policy statement, but it raises some troubling questions that are almost universally swept under the rug.

He was quite right in praising the immigrants' contributions to American society and in denouncing prejudice against people "with new accents."

Is it possible, however, to have respect and compassion for present immigrants and still raise questions about the consequences of future immigration?

Despite the ravings of some racist fanatics, immigration is not a racial problem; it is a population problem. It is projected to be a principal cause of population growth.

Is it "immigrant-bashing" or simply common foresight to ask what would be required for a

doubled or tripled or quadrupled population? What about jobs, schools, parks, housing, air quality, open space, farmland and food production, transportation and infrastructure of all kinds?

We need more information about the carrying capacity of this state and the U.S. — the limits set by natural resources.

In California the most conspicuous resource in short supply is water. In drought years, this state does not have enough water available for the present population at the current rate of use.

Water conservation and recycling — both urban and agricultural — could make more water available, up to a point. But all possible belt-tightening measures could not indefinitely accommodate a continually growing population.

How much water could be imported to California — from the Columbia River, from the Yukon, from the Mississippi, and at what cost? What population could any such sources accommodate?

The ocean offers an unlimited supply, but desalting sea water and pumping it uphill would require colossal amounts of energy at a time when fossil-

fuel consumption must be diminished.

Nuclear power has seemingly insuperable problems of safety

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and radioactive waste disposal. Solar energy on a large scale would require vast amounts of land to collect sunlight. How much of the state would be covered by the collectors and how much energy would they supply?

Questions like these must be answered not only about water but about the limits of the other natural resources that are under population pressure — fertile soil, forests, wildlife, fisheries, open space, and the services furnished by ecosystems that are vital to the economy.

Population growth is not the only source of resource depletion. Possibly half or more of our water — and other resources — is wasted by careless

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consumption.

We need to learn how many people California could sustainably support if we ran a tight ship, eliminating waste while maintaining standards of living.

Population, of course, is a global problem. There is an urgent need to offer family-planning methods, education and economic aid to developing countries in sufficient amounts to

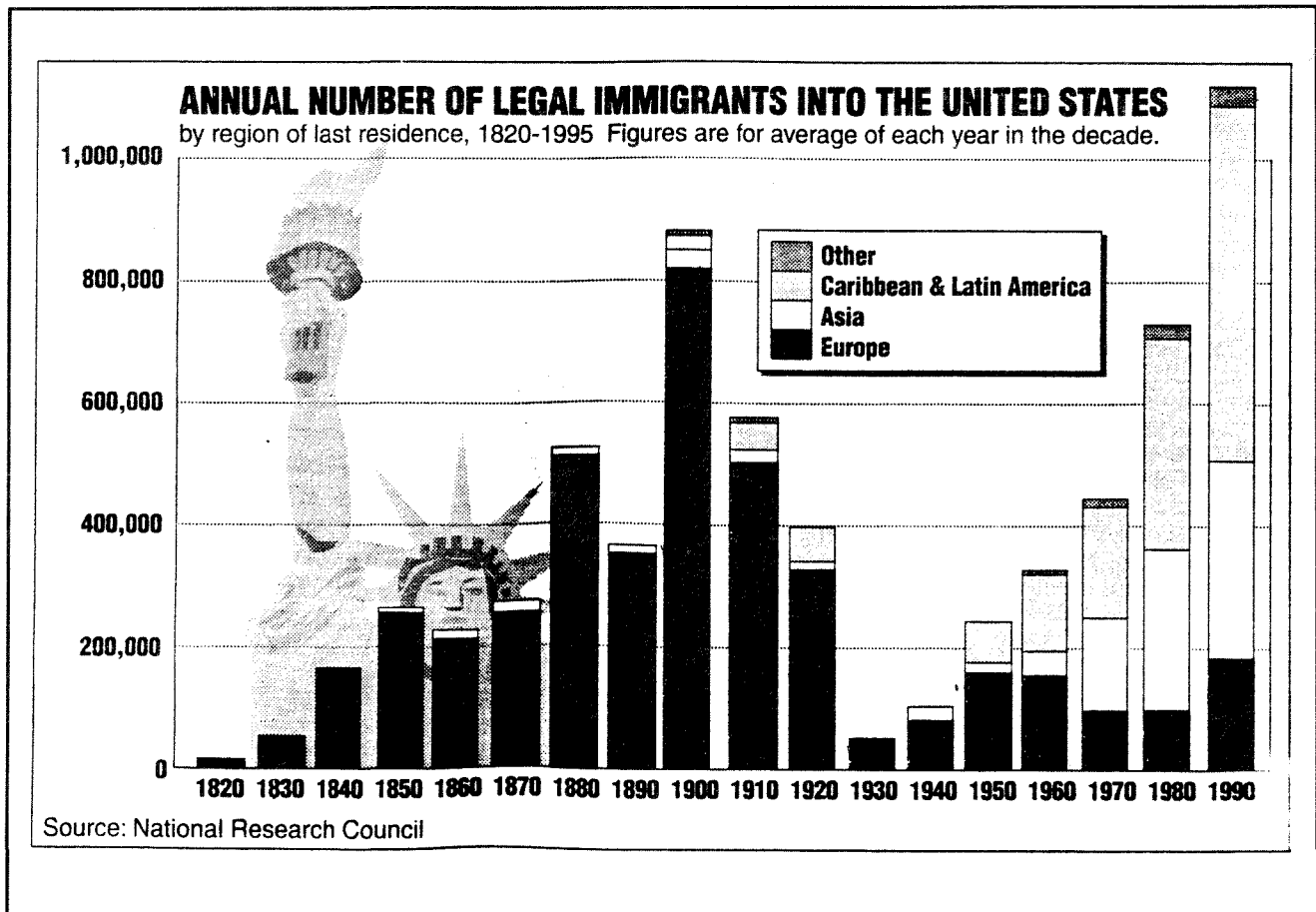
help them reduce population growth and build prosperous, sustainable economies that could diminish migrations.

But that's a very long-run prospect. In the meantime, we must plan for the local impact. The population of California has increased ten times within the lifetime of this writer. Can we anticipate another tenfold increase?

We have in this state some

top-drawer research universities capable of developing detailed pictures of California at various future levels of population and consumption.

Only with this kind of information can we have rational public discussion of immigration and population growth. But there will be no possibility of answers until we start asking the right questions. Let's get them out from under the rug. **TSC**



The National Research Council had been asked by the Immigration Reform Commission, headed by the late Barbara Jordan, to examine the demographic, economic and fiscal consequences of immigration. As this chart shows, they project that

the non-Hispanic "white" population of the U.S. will shrink from 74 percent of the population in 1995 to 51 percent in 2050. The biggest factor propelling population change is immigration, now mostly from Latin America and Asia.

Malthusian Truths About Today's World

by **Georgie Ann Geyer**

WARRENTON, VA
Rare is the man whose name becomes an adjective for centuries to come. Thomas Robert Malthus was such a man.

"Malthusian" has come down to us from the 18th century as describing the most terrifying possibilities that man, accustomed then to an abundant and open Earth, could imagine. Malthusianism meant that population growth, if unrestrained, would eventually destroy man's subsistence here on Earth. Population was destiny.

In recent years, despite the early fascination with his "An Essay on the Principle of Population," Malthus has lost ground among the skeptical classes. His predictions have not come true, deriders say. Despite mankind's well-documented carelessness in regulating its procreation, widespread poverty has *not* yet scourged the earth or doomed us to extinction.

Yet, now, because of developments in the last 40 years, we must come up with a strong "Yes,

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but ..." — for recent conflicts in the world tell us that Malthus' views are indeed all too alive and well. Malthus' famous essay was printed exactly 200 years ago this year, in 1798, and he died in England in 1834, but as the great poet Pablo Neruda once put it, "Everything that is buried is not dead."

The Social Contract observed the bicentennial of the publication of Thomas Robert Malthus' "Essay on the Principle of Population" in our Spring 1998 issue. These two op-ed pieces by Georgie Ann Geyer and Charlie Reese are further explorations of the ramifications of that essay.

At one of a score of recent conferences being held on this Malthus anniversary, writer Robert D. Kaplan, the guru on disintegration in the world, discussed the conflicts he had sought out and seen firsthand for many years. He has come up with a new and still more terrifying play on the Malthusian fear, one that involves conflict rather than food.

"Malthus may have been wrong on specifics, but in general principle he was right," Kaplan told a small group brought together by the

Biocentric Institute at Airlie House here. "All the countries with violent upheavals in the 1980s and '90s were the ones that showed the highest growth rate in the '60s! Every country where bloody internecine civil wars have occurred in recent years had a huge population preceding the conflict."

Could he be right? I went to UN population data. Rwanda, from 2.1 million in 1950 to 8 million today; Haiti, from 3.3 million then to 7.5 million today; Algeria, from 8.8 million to 30.2 million; Afghanistan, 9 million to 24.8 million; Zaire or Congo, 12.2 to 49 million; Nicaragua, 1.1 million to 4.8 million; Tajikistan, 1.5 million to 6.1 million; El Salvador, 2 million to 5.8 million; Ethiopia, 18.4 million to 58.4 million today. I was flabber-gasted.

"You must understand," Kaplan went on, "that in these conflicts the underlying causes come first and the beginning comes last. Take the civil war in Algeria. It all started with the '92 elections (when the military rescinded them because the Islamic fundamentalists were winning). But actually that 'beginning' was the end of a long culmination of events in the '60s when Algeria began to show one of the highest population growth rates in the world. That