

# Immigration to Canada Now That We've Grown

By John Meyer

Thirty years ago immigration to Canada was given its broadest examination in a national context in the Green Paper. The economic studies forecast lower per capita income growth with higher rates of immigration. Public opinion surveys showed very strong support (2:1) for a moderate population size and for very low levels of immigration.

Despite the clear delineation of public interest and public will for a balanced level of immigration which would have seen Canada's population stabilize at around 27 million, back room policy makers chose to implement the highest rate of immigration in the world.

Now three decades and five million additional people later, as predicted, Canada has underperformed every other OECD country in per capita income growth as our productivity has been left in the dust by nations focused on investing in their people. After all, importing cheap labor "to do the dirty low paid jobs that Canadians reject" was a policy designed to perpetuate low paying jobs and their inherent low productivity and poor working conditions. It worked.

Canadians economic well-being stagnated or declined but in simple GDP growth terms – still used as our main social and economic barometer – the economy boomed. Our national policies reflect what we measure and although GDP represents only a fraction of the wealth creation process, much less social well-being, it is still our main yardstick.

Immigration is the engine of a rapid population growth strategy, unique in the world, that no one seems to be willing or able to explain. The Canadian level is twice as high as that of the U.S. and four times that of Europe. And Immigration Canada is working toward boosting levels even further by 50% to 320,000

annually with escalating levels forever as called for in the Liberal Party Red Book. Such a smoke stack era policy assumes unlimited natural resources and ignores any negative effects on a myriad of social and environmental issues.

Fulfilling Canada's Kyoto commitment to carbon emissions 6% less than our 1990 level would be possible if, by 2012, we had the 1990 population. But we won't. We will have seven million more consumers with a resource-intensive industrial base

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geared to building one additional Regina every year. By 2050, the Red Book level pushes Canada's population to 52 million and our carbon emissions to 1230 mega tons – almost 2 ½ times our Kyoto target of 520.

With our current annual level of immigration around 230,000 (much less 320,000), any commitment Canada makes to Kyoto is worthless. But as one immigration policy maker remarked years ago, "The environment is not our responsibility."

And neither, it appears are stagnant per capita incomes or the deficits/program cuts that result from a cheap labor economy. Boosting hundreds of thousands of people into more productive, higher paying jobs would increase per capita income, reduce deficits and bolster social programs. But creating millions of low paying jobs, as Canada has demonstrated, makes it impossible to both balance budgets and maintain full social programs. An

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expanding pool of cheap labor fuels deficits as well as simple GDP growth.

It is safe to say Canadians want reduced working hours, higher incomes, longer vacations, more family time, cleaner air, less congestion, lower crime rates, and a full slate of social programs. High immigration impacts none of these areas positively. Knowing what we are measuring, looking down the road and developing integrated policies are core competencies for a democratic government – as is keeping a full set of books. Despite this, the impact of mass immigration on environment and deficits has never been officially examined, and for good reason; comprehensive analysis is not flattering. Immigration stands unchallenged, unscrutinized and unaccountable.

Where does the current policy come from? Follow the money. Cheap labor employers are supported by huge indirect subsidies and mass immigration makes markets for land speculators. The immigration lobby shouldn't be allowed to control immigration policy any more than the tobacco industry should be allowed to write health legislation.

Canada has matured and with 32 million people and a rapid loss of prime farmland is most likely now a net food importer. Few of our resources are being used below their sustainable levels. When did we change our national vision from feeding the world to consuming it?

Thirty years after the Green Paper, we are no longer asking questions about immigration and are locked in a downward spiral of dumbed down social policy fronted by a very controlled, murky, and detached political process.

The world is entering an era of climate change and resource exhaustion as our apparently once stable environment goes dynamic. Yet Canada's accounting system remains cash flow-based and positively values events such as the Quebec ice storm, crime, paving farmland, and sitting in traffic because these events increase the level of paid economic activity. We need to progress to a real wealth accounting system which values both environmental assets and unpaid human time so we can forge comprehensive and socially relevant national policies – of which limits on immigration are an integral part. ■

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# John Higham Revisited

## *Were immigration reform and nativism the same thing?*

by Otis L. Graham, Jr.

What we think about immigration restriction, and the role of “nativism” in it, has been powerfully shaped by historian John Higham’s *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism: 1860-1925* (1954), one of the brilliant and enduring volumes in American historiography of the past half century. But Higham’s continuing second thoughts on the role of nativism in America have not been sufficiently heeded or discussed.

Higham, who died in 2003, traced what he saw as a nativist tradition through three outbursts of especially intense and well-organized anti-alien political activity – the 1790s, the Know-Nothing era before the Civil War,

and the period of his main focus, the four decades prior to immigration restriction in the 1920s.

Higham seemed to cast the entire forty-year history of the New Immigration debate as in part a story of nativism – which he defined as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign connection.”

But were immigration reform and nativism the same thing?

Henry Cabot Lodge, a reformer in a restrictionist direction but a critic of those he saw as nativists, emphatically thought not. But historians writing after Higham and journalists following their lead have ignored the distinction.

In the years after *Strangers in the Land* was published, historians and journalists have tended to treat the cause of reforming immigration policy simply as an outbreak of nativism, essentially bigotry and fear of foreigners.

The cross-references under “nativism” in the index to Leonard Dinnerstein and David Reimers’ textbook *Ethnic Americans* (1988), for example, include “see also Bigotry, Discrimination, Prejudice.”

Nativism, one way of reacting to mass immigration in the decades before the Civil War, thus came to be spread as a label over

all subsequent criticisms of unlimited entry of foreigners into the United States, to the present day.

This is profoundly ahistorical. And the first dissenter was Higham.

Shortly after the publication of *Strangers in the Land* Higham published an article (1958) confessing:

*that nativism now looks less adequate as a vehicle for studying the struggles of nationalities in America than my earlier report of it. ...The nativist theme, as defined and developed to date, is imaginatively exhausted.*

As a concept, he went on, it directs our attention too much to “subjective, irrational motives,” and neglects and even screens out “the objective realities of ethnic relations” and “the structure of society.” The word “nativism” derives from a particular era in American history, the 1830s to the mid-1850s, when the first large waves of immigration came to the eastern seaboard, mostly from Ireland and Germany. Eastern cities were swamped by incoming migrants from the rural hinterland and overseas, and life was hard for all. But the immigrants seemed to intensify all existing problems and bring new ones. In this era and during the Great

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