

B. Meredith Burke is a demographer and economist who has consulted for major agencies in the United States, in Africa, and in the Caribbean. Her population and immigration articles have appeared in The Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, the Sacramento Bee, and the San Jose Mercury News. Here she reports on a conference on immigration held in San Francisco, April 25, 1994.

"Immigration and the American Mosaic": An Evaluation

By B. Meredith Burke

Opening the April 25th San Francisco conference, "Immigration and the American Mosaic", Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy (PRI) president Sally Pipes hoped the day would see some movement towards consensus. That was not to be. But to this observer the fault line in the immigration policy debate did become much clearer.

Although PRI and co-sponsor The Manhattan Institute (represented by Linda Chavez) are conservative think tanks and the preponderance of microphone time seemed to go to (relatively) open door advocates, nearly all views were represented among the fourteen presenters and numerous audience contributors. Never sufficiently emphasized in this debate anywhere is that neither political affiliation nor immigrant status is predictive of one's stance. Even the luncheon debate highlighted this fact: liberal Los Angeles resident Joel Kotkin, author of *Tribes*, favored open doors while senior *Forbes* editor and British immigrant Peter Brimelow favored closed ones.

In Favor of More Immigration

Besides Kotkin, open door advocates included Dennis Aigner, UC Irvine School of Management dean; Robert Bach of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Lord Peter Bauer, development economist; Don Devoretz, Canadian immigration specialist from Simon Fraser University; economist Rose Friedman (an immigrant and Milton's wife); Lawrence Fuchs, Brandeis University professor and Vice Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform; and Stephen Moore of The Cato Institute.

Open door advocates can be loosely characterized as follows:

1. If Republican, they see immigrants as a source of unlimited labor. They never propose that lower unit costs be achieved through higher labor productivity.
2. They tend to be critical of state suits to force the federal government to pay more of the costs associated with immigrant-related public expenses, saying these are the same communities which are benefitting from the concomitant economic growth.
3. If Democrat, they believe the U.S. can and should

take in every aspirant for a better life, including the more than one billion Chinese a court has now ruled can flee repressive childbearing policies.

4. Both either discount the long term population consequences of immigrants and their offspring or believe a bigger population is preferable to a smaller.

5. Both believe that linking population growth to pollution, urban sprawl, vanishing farmlands and wetlands, and the depletion of non-renewable resources reveals a lack of creative innovation to deal with these problems.

6. Both believe that all tax and social security payments paid by immigrants (legal and illegal) flow solely to the social service programs used by them, offsetting their costs, while the taxes paid by citizens support all other government-funded activities, including the military and the police.

7. Both use (often misleading) aggregate data to argue collective well-being is currently being enhanced by immigration and ignore such distributive effects as increased unemployment and lower wages among blacks, native-born Hispanics, and poor whites.

8. Conversely, both emphasize individual success stories among immigrants while ignoring immigrants' collective effects upon the receiving communities or the stories of individuals (such as unionized black janitors or parents with children in crowded classrooms) who have been harmed by immigrant competition.

9. Both ignore or discredit citizen's desires to live with reasonable proximity to jobs, uncrowded recreation land, and untrammelled wilderness, goals frustrated by ever-expanding cities.

10. All these speakers below age 50 were cavalier about the stagnant and declining incomes of their cohorts in the period 1973-93 — presumably because they themselves had ridden through unscathed in their

upper-middle-class sinecures.

***"Speakers of both
political persuasions
made egregious
demographic misstatements."***

11. Speakers of both political persuasions made egregious demographic misstatements. Kotkin, concerned about the increasing proportion of the aged in Japanese and German societies (a consequence of earlier baby booms followed by current low fertility), asserted "immigrants have a lower dependency rate than do natives." After adjusting for age and marital status, I find this difficult to believe given that Mexican nationals, the largest incoming group, average four children per woman. Perhaps Kotkin believes only the elderly can be classed as dependents. Moore erroneously attributed most of postwar U.S. population growth to declining death rates, saying his son's survival potential as a baby was three times greater than it would have been in 1900. Since better than 99.9 percent of white males now survive to age 1, this implies that only 33.3 percent did so in 1900. The true number was about 88 percent.

12. Neither side proposes that if America, supposedly still a developed nation, cannot produce sufficient technical workers and entrepreneurs from its own children, we should be mounting an urgent effort to do so rather than drain supposedly poorer countries of their own professional workers.

13. (I inferred that) none of these participants currently has children enrolled in immigrant-impacted public schools with declining per student expenditures.

In Favor of Restriction

Along with Brimelow, closed door advocates included Virginia Abernethy, Vanderbilt University anthropologist and editor of *Population and Environment*; Eloise Anderson, Director of Social Services of the California Department of Social Services; economist and Cuban immigrant George Borjas of UC San Diego; Nathan Glazer, Harvard University professor emeritus and co-author with Daniel Moynihan of "Beyond the Melting Pot"; and Daniel Stein, executive director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR).

Closed door advocates can be loosely characterized as follows:

1. If Republican, concerned about the historical differences in the rate of demographic displacement of the current native stock and the fact that citizens have not been consulted about whether they desire to abandon their cultural hegemony.
2. If Democrat, concerned about the strains on the

environment associated with even the present level of population and the discounting of the warning against further population growth by the 1972 U.S. Commission on Population and the American Future.

3. Both are concerned that the social infrastructure — schools, housing, sewage disposal, roads, pollution controls — is being overburdened and its performance reduced by high rates of population increase.

4. Both are concerned that the native born black population has been trounced economically by every large wave of immigration, including the current one.

5. Both are concerned that the resources which flow to programs and services benefitting immigrants are subtracted from those which might otherwise have gone to our native-born poor.

6. Both believe that politicians should be responsive to the polls showing that overwhelming majorities of American subgroups, including Hispanics and residents of the highest immigrant-receiving states, are calling for a sharp cutback in admissions.

7. Both feel that the federal government is not only temporizing on this issue but has stacked the U.S. Immigration Commission on Immigration Reform with pro-immigrant activists; four of the nine members are actively practicing immigration law.

8. Both feel states and communities should hold the federal government accountable for all expenses associated with the presence of immigrants since immigration policy is a federal responsibility.

9. Both feel the distinction between legal and illegal is gratuitous, given the similar environmental/ economic effects of each and our history of regularizing the status of illegals.

10. Both believe there are sufficient demographic discontinuities with the past that the U.S., though it might work against repressive regimes, can no longer accept more than a token few refugees and cannot serve as a pressure valve for rapidly growing populations.

11. Both are willing to withhold American citizenship from infants born here of parents who are neither citizens nor legal residents.

Agreement About Illegals

Were there any points of agreement? Definitely. All were against illegal immigration, if only because as Fuchs put it, "We are a society of law." Except for Kotkin, who felt it was "fine" to move away from a country which is European, all felt that the primacy of the Anglo-American legal and political system should be affirmed. Without exception, all

deplored multiculturalism, defined as elevating languages (and their attendant cultures) other than English into equality with English in the public sphere. All deplored "tribalism" and feared for the cohesion of American society. No one was happy about the declining educational level of immigrants in the past twenty years, but whereas Borjas felt this strengthened the case for restrictions, Moore advocated admitting 500,000 additional immigrants with high skills, annually, thereby raising the median skill level.

And when Governor Pete Wilson made a late, brief appearance to announce the state of California was bringing a law suit against the federal government for it to cover all costs associated with felons who are illegal aliens, the vast majority of the speakers and of the audience seemed enthusiastic. ■

[Editor's note: the two following articles are reprints of the speeches made at this San Francisco Conference by Governor Pete Wilson and California Social Services Director Eloise Anderson.]