

How Will Immigration Transform Texas?

A Book Review by Gary F. Freeman

THIRTY MILLION TEXANS?

By Leon F. Bouvier and Dudley L. Poston, Jr.
Washington, D.C.: Center for Immigration Studies,
1993, 113 pages, \$9.95

The nation's second largest state is undergoing an ethno-demographic transition such that early in the 21st century its population will have grown from 17 million to between 24 and 30 million and substantial changes in ethnic composition will have left it with no majority group. In this provocative study, Bouvier and Poston claim that population growth in Texas over the next half-century will produce rising taxes, crumbling infrastructure, and crowded schools, and prisons. Rapid growth will strain the environment's carrying capacity and make it doubtful that Texans will enjoy the same quality of life after 2020 they do in 1990. Quite apart from absolute numbers and rate of population growth, immigration and differential fertility among specific ethnic groups are bringing about changes in the ethnic and age structure of the population. These, the authors fear, will lead to intensified social conflict and the breakdown of existing cultural values.

Although the book is a call to action, and a number of policy changes are proposed, the authors' own analysis indicates that little can be done to slow growth or avert the ethnic changes and, although they eschew political analysis, a consideration of the political dynamics the transition they describe is likely to produce indicates no serious effort to slow down or reverse these trends is in the cards.

The authors produce three sets of projections based on different assumptions about fertility, mortality, and migration (domestic and international). These show that by 2020, the population of Texas will be either 30,776,000 (high), 25,867,000 (medium), or 24,545,000 (low). Their medium projection assumes that the fertility rates of all major ethnic groups will decline slowly till 2020, life expectancy of all groups will rise gradually, and immigration will remain at its present high level. Immigration interacts with other elements in the model as well and continuing streams of new Latino migrants with high fertility may prevent the expected decline in overall Latino fertility (p. 11).

Texas has grown more rapidly than the country as a whole since 1850 and its population more than doubled between 1950 and 1990 (p. 4). According to

the 1990 Census, Anglos accounted for 60.6, African-Americans 11.6, Latinos 25.5, and Asians 2.3 percent of the total. The Anglo population is ageing, while almost one-third of Latinos are under 15, so that "even if immigration were to end immediately and even if all groups were to have the same fertility and mortality rates, the share of minorities would increase at the expense of the majority because of their differences in age composition" (p. 6.).

By 2020, Anglos will make up only 47.2 of the state's population, Hispanics 37.3 percent, African-Americans 10.8 percent, and Asians 4 percent. "Even under the low scenario, Anglos will cease being the majority just after 2020" (p. 35). Fourteen percent of Anglos, 16 percent of Asians, 31 percent of African-Americans, and 33 percent of Latinos live in poverty. The authors warn of "an emerging two-tier society where Anglos and Asians are doing well but where African-Americans and Latinos are barely surviving" (p. 18).

Bouvier and Poston assert that population growth is driving public school enrollments up and a dramatic shift in the ethnicity of the student body is taking place. "Because African-Americans and Latinos score lower on the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills Program (TABS), the overall quality of the Texas work force of the future will decline as the share of its population that is African-American and Latino grows at the expense of the Anglos" (p. 52). Culturally, Texas is becoming much more hetero-geneous, but under conditions that make it unlikely that the new emerging ethnic groups will be absorbed into a common culture as happened in earlier periods (p. 74).

This book steps on a lot of toes and is likely to be dismissed as utopian by business and development interests, or criticized as biased by Latino and African-American representatives and avid multi-culturalists. The authors don't help their case by occasionally slipping into exaggerated alarmist language (pp. 9, 29, 39) or undocumented claims (p. 34). On the whole, however, this is a balanced if chilling analysis of the future of the state if current trends continue over the next 30 years.

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The critical question Bouvier and Poston raise, but do not answer, is whether the Texas political class will respond to these impending social changes and try to manage them. The authors call for "drastic reductions in fertility and migration ... particularly, but not only, among minorities" (pp. 101-102), and observe that "every effort must be made to reduce, and to eliminate if possible illegal immigration" (p. 102). They also suggest a number of steps the state government could take to reduce illegal immigration, including requiring a fraud-proof state identification card. They conclude that if "immigration — legal as well as illegal — were drastically reduced, and if fertility were to fall rapidly for all groups, growth could end soon after 2050 with a population in Texas of less than 30 million" (p. 103).

Because immigration is at the heart of the forces driving the demographic transition, and as it is the only variable directly under the control of government (at least the 60 percent the authors estimate is international in origin), it is essential to consider what policies are likely in the short and medium term. The authors' two higher scenarios assume no restrictions on legal immigration and no progress in controlling illegal migration over the next 30 years. Yet they argue that just such policies must be adopted. Which is more realistic?

The first thing to understand is that there is relatively little a state government can do to regulate immigration or fertility, despite the suggestions of the authors. Most of those things it could do are implausible. A state legislature that will not enact an income tax is unlikely to adopt a state ID. The second thing to understand is that demographics do not equal politics. Anglos will certainly dominate Texas politics long after they are no longer a numerical majority. They control the most important political, economic, and cultural institutions. Anglos are more likely to vote because they are older and more affluent and because many Latinos are either illegal or have failed to naturalize. One of the more disturbing prospects the analysis in this book holds out is a state with a shrinking white majority ruling, in the Third World style, a vast and impoverished brown and black majority.

It is possible, of course, that the prospect of the disappearance of their majority will provoke the Anglo leadership to use their political resources to ensure continued hegemony by retarding or reversing these demographic trends. I doubt this will happen. The lure of expansive policies will be too hard to resist. Texas is a pro-growth state and most Texans are likely to

think that the doubling of the population over the next thirty years is a good thing, further proof of the superiority of Texas ways. Growth means fortunes to be made in real estate, industry, sales, and agriculture. It means cheap labor. The pro-growth impulse in Texas is much stronger than environmentalism, whose advocates in any case tend to be supportive of mass immigration, even when it is illegal, for ideological/humanitarian reasons.

If the political balance does begin to shift away from Anglo dominance to ethnic parity, Latino politicians and activists will have powerful incentives to resist proposals to control immigration and Latino fertility. The millions of Texans involved directly or indirectly with recent migrations will be a major constituency demanding more immigration. As the Latino population grows, its political spokespersons will see their electorate swell. Suggestions that public policy should be wielded to limit Latino fertility will be condemned as genocide. In other words, if the ruling Anglo majority is unable or unwilling to take dramatic steps to stem the ethno-demographic transition, there is no reason to expect Latino leaders to be any more responsive to the socio-economic consequences of runaway population growth. ■