

Are Environmentalists Their Own Worst Enemy?

Book Review by John F. Rohe

The When protecting forests, the environmental movement seeks regional solutions. When addressing solid waste issues, it promotes local laws. When communicating a core message, it invokes slogans like, "Think Globally, Act Locally."

Forest conservation, solid waste and ethics are global concerns, yet the environmental movement does not hold out for an all-or-nothing worldwide resolution. Would the environmentalist boycott local protective efforts pending an international consensus on conservation? Not likely. Environmental losses are incremental. Solutions are often less than complete. The environmentalist still finds it worth the effort. Piecemeal solutions are sometimes as good as it gets.

Ironically, some environmentalists shrink from regional solutions for the one fundamental cause serving as the multiplier of all the others. Whether it is urban sprawl, global warming, air pollution or groundwater contamination, two times as many people will have approximately twice the impact. Environmental causes intractably involve global issues. But on only one issue do some environmentalists shy away from a local solution: immigration.

Dumbstruck by the paradox? So are the authors of

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this book.

In this 1999 publication from the Federation for American Immigration Reform, authors Scipio Garling and Ira Mehlman, with researcher Jeff Gellner, challenge the holdouts in the movement who will not embrace immigration reform as an important part of the solution to environmental problems. The 63-page text brims with factual support for the relationship between the ills of urban sprawl and the consequences of U.S. immigration policies.

Residents of the United States have started to take control of their demographic destiny. We have responded to population and environmental concerns by reducing fertility on a voluntary, non-coercive basis. In the early 1960s, women in the United States, on average, were still having 3.5 children each. By the early 1970s, the U.S. fertility rate actually dropped below replacement level! The represents a compelling statement for less congestion, pollution, waste, groundwater contamination and resource depletion.

By now the effects of our decision could have been reflected in the landscape with less sprawl. But instead sprawl continues to devour 1.1 million acres of valued farmland every year, according to the American Farmland Trust. The present cause of our nation's population surge is immigration. "Thirty million housing units," according to the authors, "will be needed by the year 2050 to accommodate the immigration boom." The 270 million U.S. residents of 1998 would grow to 314 million in 2050 if immigration were equal to the 225,000 people leaving the country. But, at present, the U.S. is admitting over one million immigrants annually. Under expected immigration levels, the 2050 U.S. population will swell to 400 million as it will continue to increase.

**The
Environmentalist's
Guide to a
Sensible
Immigration Policy**

*by Scipio Garling
and Ira Mehlman*
Washington D.C.: Federation for
American Immigration Reform
63 pages, \$10.95



No one cares to think of the U.S. becoming a nation of 500 million, or, like China, one billion. Yet, on this issue even the compassionate environmentalist becomes a strange bedfellow with big business despite having a different agenda. Big business strives to maintain access to cheap foreign labor while the environmentalist wants to be seen as a welcoming humanitarian.

The higher fertility levels of recent immigrants has a subtle but profound impact on future population projections for the United States. According to the authors, it becomes the “invisible multiplier.”

There is still another sprawl-inducing aspect to immigration policies. U.S. residents have a way of escaping the effects of unprecedented high levels of immigration. Garling and Mehlman call it “secondary migration.” Recent immigrants are generally not settling into Portland, Seattle, or the “verdant rolling hills of Virginia’s horse country.” Yet, these areas are becoming more populated. Population pressures in those areas result from internal migration driven by regions with high immigration populations. This has been dubbed “white flight” by some demographers.

To fret about sprawl without addressing its fundamental cause (more people) is much like fussing about an overflowing sink without reaching for the faucet.

This handy text, with its ample supply of charts and photographs, is suitable for gift-giving to the reluctant environmentalist still unwilling to make the connection between immigration and sprawl.