

Would 300 million Americans be enough? If so, we must act now, according to demographer Leon Bouvier.

MAKING THE CASE FOR "HUMANE RESTRICTIONISM" A Book Review

PEACEFUL INVASIONS: IMMIGRATION AND CHANGING AMERICA By Leon Bouvier

Dr. Leon Bouvier, a noted demographer and author on population themes, describes himself as a "liberal limitationist" on immigration policy. A pro-immigrant scholar and former staff member of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, Dr. Bouvier is concerned about the social, economic and environmental costs of this era's mass immigration.

In his new book, *Peaceful Invasions: Immigration and Changing America*, published in March 1991 by the Center For Immigration Studies, Bouvier makes a compelling case for a humane restrictionist policy on immigration, which now brings the country nearly one-million legal and illegal newcomers each year. Dr. Bouvier's book portrays an America now caught up in rapid and sweeping population changes wrought by past and current demographic behavior. These major changes raise major issues, confronting the nation with choices today that will vitally affect its society, economy and culture tomorrow. Examining these momentous changes, Dr. Bouvier concludes that the nation would best adjust to them with less, not more, immigration.

Slow but significant shifts in the size and composition of the population, he finds, are echoed in the transformation of American society and institutions, raising new issues and complicating long-standing ones. The country's population is growing more rapidly than in other industrial countries, while it is becoming both older and more heterogeneous. Increasing diversity, he warns, has the potential for conflict as long as economic status and class are associated with ethnicity.

Nor is the American labor force, so critical to future US competitiveness and so influenced by immigration, exempt from the pervasive social and demographic change, Bouvier observes. It is still growing, but more slowly, turning older and more diverse, and becoming more demanding of skills. The number of jobs requiring a high school education or less is plummeting. Dr. Bouvier sees the labor force's changing ethnic composition as possibly the biggest challenge. Blacks and Latinos are under-represented in the industries and occupations expected to add jobs at

the fastest pace. They are over-represented in slow-growing or declining fields. The author wonders whether US society will be able to educate and find good jobs for the growing number of minority members who have fared so unevenly in the labor market in the past.

Slower labor force growth offers the nation both an incentive and an opportunity to open stable and remunerative jobs to disadvantaged minorities. But the author cautions that this opportunity could vanish if large numbers of compliant, low-skill workers continue to come from abroad, further enlarging a productivity-sapping mismatch in the labor market between unmet demands for steadily higher workforce proficiency and an over supply of low-skill workers.

Dr. Bouvier looks at immigration in light of the nation's nagging problems of sluggish productivity growth and the proliferation of low-wage jobs. He finds evidence that the last two decades' heavy inflow of less skilled workers has been an industrial policy that has helped steer sectors of the economy away from innovative, capital-intensive investment toward low value-added, labor-intensive production and services. The high levels of immigration of the 1980s led to rapid job creation, but an unsustainable type of economic growth, while diverting attention from long-term remedies for the problem of "bad jobs."

Dr. Bouvier sees an historic challenge for the United States in maintaining its increasingly diverse population as a modern, united and fully participatory society. Reduced immigration, he argues, would ease the task of cultural adaptation for the millions of newcomers of the past two decades and those likely to come. Recognizing that assimilation is now seen as the suspect goal, the author perceives the alternative models for adaptation now as either cultural pluralism, in which Americans find their identity primarily as members of ethnic and/or religious blocs, and "pluralistic assimilation," which takes the best of cultural pluralism and assimilation while maintaining an American culture and assuring its acceptance by all. But without reasonable limits on immigration, Bouvier warns, pluralistic assimilation could yield to more negative forms of cultural pluralism or cultural

separatism. In the author's words, continued high immigration can lead to

...large ethnic ghettos where the English language is practically unknown, where patriotism is oriented toward the motherland, and where the concept of community is limited to the specific area itself.
(p.203)

Only a non-racial immigration policy is acceptable for a humane, democratic society like the United States, the author argues. But racial neutrality in the selection of immigrants, he contends, does not justify disregarding the political and social tensions that could accompany the racial shifts that will leave the United States with no racial majority in the next century. Lower levels of immigration, he argues, will make for easier adjustments by both residents and newcomers to the coming racial shift.

Dr. Bouvier deplores the tendency of immigration policy makers to dwell on the question of *whom* to admit to the exclusion of the larger question of *how many*. Noting that the 1990 immigration legislation reforms will mean 35 million more Americans in 60 years, he considers the question of numbers now critical. With current increases in fertility there could be 454 million Americans by 2050 and 900 million by 2120. For Dr. Bouvier and many others, the stress of Americans' high-consumption lifestyle on resources and the environment makes such growth a distinctly unwelcome prospect--for the nation and for the world. Immigration affects the US population outcome, he notes, not only by the new residents it brings but also by the strikingly higher fertility that persists among the foreign born. For the author, early attainment of "zero population growth" must be an urgent national goal. What is most needed is a national population policy which would carefully monitor fertility, mortality and immigration and periodically set appropriate levels of immigration.

Current demographic momentum makes an increase of 60 million in the US population virtually inevitable by the middle of the next century. To achieve a stationary population beyond that point, Dr. Bouvier concludes, the country should reduce all forms of immigration to around 450,000 yearly--roughly half of the current flow.

The author recognizes that his appeal for humane restriction in the national interest will be scorned by some as an echo of past fearful, nativist warnings against heavy immigration. But new circumstances, he claims, demand breaks from the past. The current immigration wave differs markedly from its historical predecessors. The US economy and labor market are less conducive to upward mobility than those that welcomed immigrants a century ago. The prospects for frequent inter-ethnic marriages are dimmer now with an

immigrant stream heavily dominated by Asian and Latin American sources. The emphasis in recent decades on group rights prizes ethnic identity over individual adaptation.

Finally, the great waves of immigration of the late 19th and early 20th centuries receded during the four decades following the First World War, allowing a pause for the successful integration of millions of newcomers and their children. The current wave is now in its fourth decade of growth with no pause in sight. Bouvier concludes that current levels of immigration, if left unrestricted, will be far too great to permit a renewed multi-ethnic melting pot in the nation's foreseeable future.

Peaceful Invasions: Immigration and Changing America by Leon Bouvier is available in paperback for \$19.95 from: Center For Immigration Studies, 1424 16th Street, NW, Washington DC 20036.

Dr. Bouvier has co-authored other studies on population change as it affects California (1985), Texas (1986), and New York (1988) which are available from the Population Reference Bureau, Inc., Box 96125, Washington DC 20090-6152.

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