

A California Native Looks Back—and Ahead— at the Golden State’s Population Predicament

By **JOE GUZZARDI**

I am one of a vanishing breed—a native Californian raised in Los Angeles back when it was only a town.

In the mid-1950s, California’s population hovered around 10 million people. The old family album has pictures of my parents, my sisters, and me sitting on Santa Monica beach with only a few scattered people milling around.

Some of my earliest childhood memories include the Sunday drive from our West Los Angeles home into the San Fernando Valley to visit my grandfather’s ranch.

The traffic-free trip took us through orange groves until we pulled up at Granddad’s isolated ranch, long ago paved over.

Several factors contributed to California’s transition from the land of milk and honey to an overdeveloped urban nightmare where nothing seems to work.

Jet travel made it easy for easterners to visit the Golden State. And once they saw California for themselves, the tourists returned only long enough to pack their bags and head west.

The California mystique, promoted on car radio from coast to coast by Beach Boy songs, was hard for people to resist. If you lived in Philadelphia, you couldn’t wait to trade in your rusted out sedan for a woody and shoveling snow for December picnicking on the Pacific Ocean.

But by the mid-1960s, damaging demographic changes came to California. The disastrous

Immigration and Reform Control Act altered California’s make-up forever.

Today, my hometown of Los Angeles has 10 million people—equal to the state’s population when I grew up. And look at Los Angeles now!

During the five years since Census 2000, nearly one million of those 10 million people arrived in Los Angeles. Most of them are legal and illegal immigrants.

Over 40 percent of Los Angeles residents were born outside the US—mainly from Mexico, Central America and East Asian countries. And unlike the blue-collar factory workers of the mid-twentieth century, many of today’s immigrant families are young, poor and have few job skills. In the 1950s, a hard working family man could hope to latch onto a factory job and work his way up to foreman or plant manager. But now, only one in seven work in the vanishing manufacturing sector. Household income for the newest residents is as follows:

- Mexican \$29,480
- Nicaraguan \$29,229
- Venezuelan \$28,947
- Belizean \$28,528
- Korean \$26,506
- Cambodian \$26,406
- Salvadoran \$26,257
- Guatemalan \$26,066
- Honduran \$21,686

What happens to all those people? Where do they live? Increasingly, they feed sprawl by moving to the outlying areas north and east of Los Angeles. In their 2000 report *Sprawl in California*, NumbersUSA.com Executive Director Roy Beck

Joe Guzzardi, an instructor in English at the Lodi (California) Adult School, has been writing a weekly newspaper column since 1988, as well as a regular column for the immigration webzine www.VDARE.com. In 2003, he was a candidate for California governor but finished behind Arnold Schwarzenegger.

and environmentalist Leon Kolankiewicz found that California’s population boom has been the No. 1 factor in the state’s relentless urban sprawl, even though most anti-sprawl efforts, the so-called Smart Growth philosophy, exclusively target per capita land consumption as the villain. But California’s supposedly gluttonous appetite for more and more urban space per consumer has in fact played little role in the sprawl.

In most urbanized areas, Los Angeles included, land use per resident did not grow at all—and it usually shrank in both the central city and in the suburbs.

Thus, one could argue correctly that the average Californian now consumes land in an increasingly environmentally responsible way. But each year there are so many more Californians (nearly 600,000 per annum) that sprawl marched ever on regardless of decreasing per capita land consumption. Put succinctly, the volatile growth of California’s population propels sprawl.

As California’s population approaches 40 million people, Los Angeles and its surrounding area is not the only city exploding with people. A July 2005 Census Bureau report charted growth among large cities (as defined by a

population of 100,000 residents or more) showed four California cities in the top ten. Elk Grove, south of Sacramento, ranked second with a 10.6 percentage population increase from July 1, 2003 to July 1, 2004, Moreno Valley; sixth with a 5.7 percent increase; Rancho Cucamonga; ninth with

5.0 percent increase and Roseville, tenth with 4.7 percent increase.

Don’t be deceived by the relatively small percentages; those represent huge, unsustainable increases.

Expanding the census review to include the top twenty-five largest cities, California adds six more: Fontana, Bakersfield, Irvine, Visalia, Chula Vista and Stockton. In total, ten of the top 25 fastest growing cities are in California.

Despite those gloomy statistics some Californians, obviously with their heads firmly wedged in the sand, continue to insist that “*Smart Growth*” is the answer to accommodating the state’s population pressures.

But the Smart Growth concept—that sprawl induced housing developments and the environmental degradation that followed could be alleviated by building upward instead of outward—has always offensive to the enlightened among us.

We know that the unabated population



Some California suburban communities have adopted “smart growth” policies to limit sprawl, which have spawned tightly designed subdivisions, such as these in San Ramon, that are crammed with homes.



increases, now approaching 300 million U.S. residents, overwhelms any effort to control housing, road construction, and smog.

On the rare occasion someone suggest to me that Smart Growth represents the future, I ask them to point to one place where it has succeeded.

Whether development takes the form of sprawl by building on the fringes of our communities or landfill by building inside the city limits, the net result is the same: our quality of life erodes, our sense of place vanishes and our hope of finding a small plot of land somewhere in this vast nation to retire to grows dimmer by the day.

The American dream, wrong-minded though it is, includes McMansions and SUVs (maybe two of them) and living in small, self-contained housing enclaves and riding a bicycle to work.

Interestingly, Smart Growth vs. Sprawl may play a pivotal role in the 2006 California gubernatorial election.

Democratic challenger and state treasurer Phil Angelides is a long-time advocate of smart growth while Schwarzenegger is in the developer's pocket. Real estate developers have donated more to Schwarzenegger than any other special interest groups.

On his website, Angelides promises, if elected, to push for new laws requiring local governments to develop "*meaningful regional growth plans*" and targets. Cities and counties that meet these targets—protecting farmland, matching houses with job growth—would be eligible for financial incentives from the state.

Angelides understands the challengers that lie ahead: over the next 40 years, California will add about 20 million people.

Where will they live? How will they travel? Will they find homes in transit-friendly villages, as Angelides hopes? Or will they live in sprawling suburbs, built in deepest of deep floodplains in the

Central Valley?

Addressing the Congress for the New Urbanism, a group that advocates for cities to be planned more on the European model than on the U.S. template, Angelides laid out a grim scenario for California. He said:

We are a state of 26 million cars, SUVs and trucks that travel 314 billion miles a year and burn 15 billion gallons of gasoline. We are on a path, over the next 20 years, to becoming a state of 36 million cars that travel 446 billion miles and burn nearly 18 billion gallons. We must choose not to take that path. We must choose to grow smarter, to give Californians more transportation options, the choice to drive fewer miles and burn—and pay for—fewer gallons of fossil fuels.

But can Angelides be counted on? What he chooses to talk less about is his sixteen-year career pre-political career as a real-estate speculator and land developer.

The centerpiece of Angelides development career is Laguna West, south of Sacramento, which he touted at the time of its completion as "an environmentally sustainable community."

But Angelides is the only one who sees it that way. The *Sacramento Bee*

and several urban experts called Laguna West "a catastrophic disaster."

If someone as wealthy and as committed to Smart Growth as Angelides is cannot make it work in California, who can?

On the rare occasion someone suggest to me that Smart Growth has a chance, I ask them to point to one place in California where it has succeeded.

Dr. Joel Hirschhorn, Director of Environment, Energy and National Resources at the National Governor and author of the new book, *Sprawl Kills: How Blandburbs Steal Your Time, Health and*

I f we continue on our suicidal immigration path, whether the inevitable development takes the form of sprawl by building on a city's periphery or landfill by building inside the city limits, the net result will be the same: an eroded quality of life and a vanished sense of place.

Money, told me this when I asked him about why Smart Growth has failed in California:

The huge contribution of illegal immigration to our high growth is a major problem; it definitely contributes to driving the housing market to continue using its familiar and profitable business model; immigrants first flock to urban locations, but as soon as possible they too buy into the phony American dream concept and seek a home in sprawl land, with the big difference that multiple or very extended families occupy the sprawl homes with a large number of occupants (especially school age children) and large number of cars.

The sad truth is that over recent decades there has been no will in this country to seriously examine our high population growth (the equivalent of adding a Chicago every year) and the implications for land use.

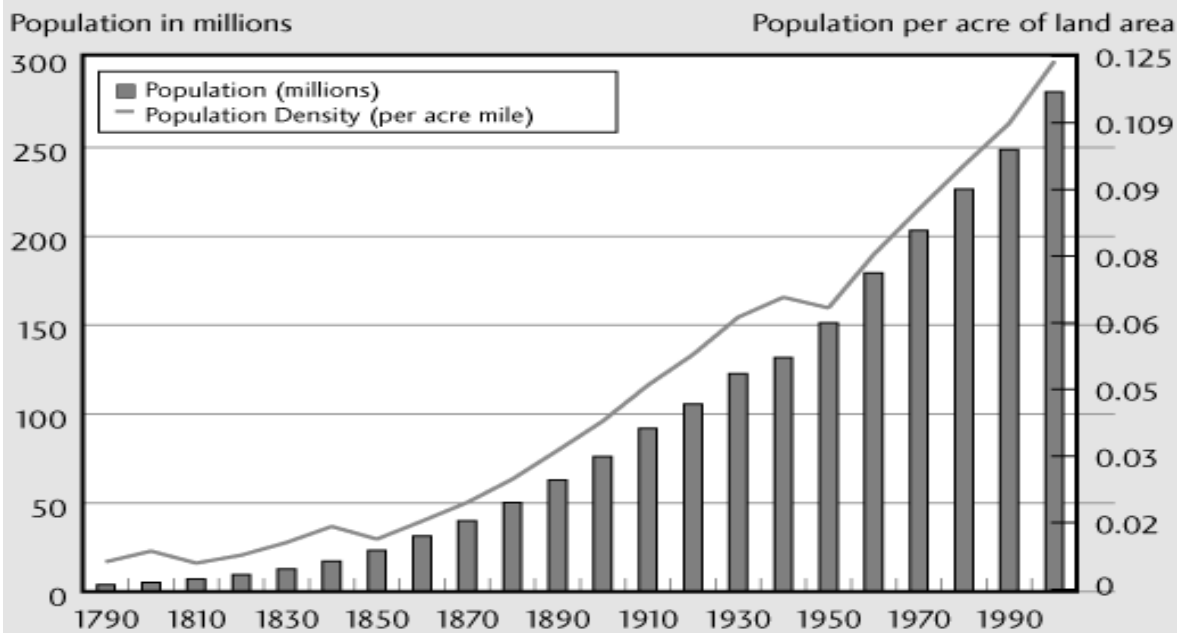
If people would contemplate the additional 100 million people coming our way in the not too distant future, and our current gluttonous land use, then they might become more alarmed.

In a word, the problem is population. If it can be stabilized through sensible immigration policies, we have a chance to level off growth.

But if we continue on our suicidal immigration path, whether the inevitable development takes the form of sprawl by building on a city's periphery or landfill by building inside the city limits, the net result will be the same: an eroded quality of life and a vanished sense of place.

If America could get a grip on our immigration crisis, we could at the same time put the brakes on the rampant development few seem to want but all are resigned to. ■

Exhibit 3-1: Population and population density, 1790-2000



Note: Large amounts of land area were added to the United States in the early 1800s (Louisiana Purchase, 1803), mid-1800s (adding the present states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado, Kansas, Arizona, and New Mexico), and in 1959 (Alaska and Hawaii statehood). These land increases explain population density decreases during these periods.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2001: The National Data Book*. Washington DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2001.