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Ever More Californians?

A Book Review by Garrett Hardin

FIFTY MILLION CALIFORNIANS?

By Leon Bouvier
Center for Immigration Studies
Washington, D.C.
93 pp., \$9.95 (paperback)
(202) 466-8185

In 1909, the British Ambassador to the United States asked "What will happen when California is filled by fifty millions of people...? Will [the people] be happier than they...are at this moment?" When Lord Bryce asked that question, the population of California was just two million. Now, there are over 31 million and the state is within striking distance of 50 million. More and more Californians are wondering if they are even happy now. Grudgingly, they are beginning to admit that sheer numbers can limit happiness. Real estate "developers," as a matter of faith refuse to admit that the land has a finite carrying capacity, but citizens who suffer daily from pollution and traffic jams insist that resources are finite. Unfortunately, human reproduction has no built-in limitation. So what are we to do?

Leon Bouvier does not tell us what to do, but (as a good demographer should) he lays out the indubitable facts. People who are afraid of statistics need not tremble before this little book of 93 pages. The author introduces only the essential figures and explains what they mean with admirable clarity. He points to the trends, and then leaves the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

When we increase from the present 31 million to 50 million, what will be the state of our water supply? Air quality? Waste disposal? Highway crowding? Who among us has so strong a faith in "progress" that s/he believes that any of these problems will be less irritating at the higher population level?

One of the most noticeable facts about California's population is that its ethnic composition is changing rapidly. In the 1980-90 decade, while the total population increased by 30 percent, Hispanics increased by 80 percent and Blacks by 22 percent. The increase of the "Anglos" was a mere 11 percent. What will the future be? No one knows for certain because demography does not predict; it merely **projects** present trends, which must then be examined for plausibility. "Trend," as Rene Dubois was fond of saying, "is not destiny."

The most reliable projector of future population size is the "total fertility rate," that is, the number of

children produced by a woman during her lifetime. The magic number is 2.1 children; at that level, two parents just replace themselves. On the average, half of the children are female, hence capable of producing the next generation. "Replacement level fertility" is 2.1 rather than 2.0, because a small fraction of the children will die before maturity, and some women will remain child-free. As of 1989, the fertility rate for Anglos in California was 1.74, which is well below the replacement level. For Asians, the figure was 2.42; for the Blacks, 2.55; and for the Hispanics, 3.91.

As time passes, differential fertility rates translate into "shifting shares" of the total population. In 1989, Anglos were a bare majority of the population at 59 percent. Projection of the present trends leads to the conclusion that Anglos will be only 48 percent of the population in the year 2000 (only eight years from now), while Hispanics will be 32 percent; there will be no majority. By 2020, Hispanics will outnumber Anglos at 40 percent and 36 percent respectively, but there will still be no majority. It should be obvious to everyone that politics in a multiple-minority state will be quite different from what it has been in the past.

Coupled with these numbers will be the fact that Anglos will be the older, richer portion of the population, relatively speaking, while the more numerous Hispanics will be younger and poorer. Even if one assumes no cultural differences between the two populations, it should be obvious that significant political changes will take place in the next quarter of a century. Experience shows that a plurality of poor people is apt to be more enthusiastic about taxpayer-supported social services than is the minority of wealthy people who pay disproportionately more in taxes.

Demographers' projections must be the basic data of all political prophecy. Bouvier's book should convince every Californian who reads it that it is not too soon to start thinking about the implications of the demographic facts.

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Projected numbers must be interpreted in the light of psychology. In the beginning of the present century, it was thought that immigration and the differential composition of the American population would present no problem because America was a "melting pot," in which total "assimilation" would occur as social and religious differences were ironed out. Recent experience casts doubts on that simple faith. Bouvier makes the optimistic assumption that what he calls "pluralistic assimilation" will occur, that is, the different ethnic groups will maintain their cultural integrity while learning to live in peace with all others. The realization of this dream depends, says Bouvier, on four kinds of adjustments:

1. Immigration levels must be reduced.
2. The avenues to social and economic advancement must be opened to all.
3. The immigrants must actively desire to assimilate.
4. Long-term residents must actively welcome the newcomers, in subtle matters as well as in the more obvious ones mentioned in number 2, above.

More than two thousand years ago, Polybius, a Greek-born historian of imperial Rome, concluded that "every state relies for its preservation on two fundamental qualities, namely, bravery in the face of the enemy and harmony among its citizens." As Californians move into the new world that seems all-but-inevitable on the basis of trends, can the required "harmony among its citizens" be achieved? This is the question which Everyman and Everywoman must ask.

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[*Fifty Million Californians?* by Leon Bouvier is also available in a pocketbook version from the Federation for American Immigration Reform at \$4.00 per copy. Write to FAIR at 1666 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20009.]