

Is the AAAS Oblivious to U.S. Overpopulation and Its Consequences?

Or Is It Just Another Censor?

BY STUART H. HURLBERT

Introduction

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is the lead scientific organization in the United States. Its flagship publication, *Science*, is widely read and influential. To *Science*'s credit, 18 articles and essays in the July 29, 2011 issue focused on the size and growth of the global human population, arguably the most important issue of our time.

We were surprised to see no analysis of U.S. population problems (aside from a couple of misleading comments made in passing).^{1,2} There were separate articles on population problems in China, India, Japan, and the Third World, among others, but nothing on U.S. population. Two colleagues and I submitted a letter to *Science* questioning the omission. *Science* declined to publish the letter. It is given below as an appendix to this essay.

One instance of possible bias in the treatment of an issue may not be noteworthy by itself. Considered in the context of other facts, however, it raises the question as to whether it is just a coincidence that all these suggest an affirmative answer to the first question in my title. Or, alternatively, do they suggest decisions have been made by AAAS editors or officers to actually suppress discussion of U.S. population and immigration issues? Such censorship or biased reporting on the topic is common enough in other scientific³ and environmental⁴ organizations and the mainline media.⁵

'Other Facts'

John Holdren is a past president of AAAS and now chief science advisor to President Obama. In 1973 he argued that an environmentally sustainable U.S. popula-

tion would be smaller than the 210 million then present.⁶ Last year Cornell agricultural scientist David Pimentel and colleagues estimated that in a post-petroleum world, the U.S. might be able to sustain a population of about 200 million — if per capita U.S. consumption rates were reduced by 50 percent.⁷

With more than 100,000,000 Americans added since 1973 and with John Holdren at the President's side, isn't it time to make development of a national population policy a matter for open discussion in the pages of *Science* and by the scientific community and society at large? Many environmental scientists, natural resource experts, and ecological economists agree with this idea that the U.S. is *already* overpopulated in relation to long-term availability of resources, intergenerational equity, and the just needs of other nations.

But sometimes in battle you look over your shoulder only to discover your supposed comrades-in-arms have turned tail. In February 2007 Holdren gave his presidential address at the annual meeting of the AAAS. It was titled *Science and technology for sustainable well-being*.⁸ Though about 9,300 words long when published (excluding figures and footnotes), only one sentence (24 words) dealt with population. And that simply noted that "continued population growth" exacerbated all the other problems, environmental and otherwise, he was discussing. Helping develop scientific support for population stabilization and then population reduction, national and global, was not one of the tasks he was suggesting for the scientific community. Technology would solve all our problems.

That attitude of Holdren was a harbinger of things to come when in 2008 he moved to Washington, D.C. to become part of President Obama's administration. Indeed, demonstrating his evolved docility on population issues, his population-oblivious 2007 AAAS address may have increased his appeal for President Obama and the Democratic Party establishment, not to mention many Republicans with over-active imaginations

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that equate population stabilization with ‘death panels,’ forced sterilization, forced abortions and so on.

In February 2011 Holdren gave a plenary address at the AAAS annual meeting in Washington, D.C.⁹ The title of his talk was *Policy for Science, Technology and Innovation in the Obama Administration: A Mid-Course Update*. Of the 37 text slides in his PowerPoint presentation, seven had the word ‘environment’ or ‘environmental,’ another seven had ‘sustainable’ or ‘sustainability,’ and others had ‘ecosystem,’ ‘water quality,’ ‘stewardship,’ ‘global change,’ ‘conservation,’ etc. Fine words all. But again the success of the hopes and initiatives outlined are in no way threatened by population growth as far as his slides indicate. Tellingly, there is one mention of ‘immigration policy’ but no mention of ‘population policy.’

Now, almost simultaneously with the July 29 issue of *Science*, the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST), of which Holdren serves as co-chair, has just put out a major report titled *Sustaining Environmental Capital: Protecting Society and The Economy*.¹⁰ Co-chairs of the working group that wrote the document were biologists Rosina Bierbaum of the University of Michigan and Barbara Schaal of Washington University.

A kissing cousin to Holdren’s 2007 and 2011 addresses to the AAAS, this new report contains only a single sentence (repeated in three places) on population: “The root causes of the degradation of environmental capital are the combined pressures of population growth, rising affluence, and frequent reliance on environmentally disruptive technologies....” In a section of the executive summary titled “The Role of Government,” there is no hint, let alone a clear recommendation, that the government consider developing a national population policy that would lead to stabilization of the U.S. population a few decades down the road.

No decision-maker reading this report will have any reason to think, or to think that scientists think, that ‘sustaining environmental capital’ requires tamping down the high U.S. rate of population growth or that that tamping down can only be accomplished via large reductions in immigration. The report is not a road map for moving toward solution of fundamental problems but only another self-serving plea for more funds for environmental scientists in academia and government agencies.¹¹ With hands outstretched, the ecotechnocrats fail once again to address forthrightly the unsustainability of U.S. population growth.

But can lesser mortals be blamed when Holdren himself has forgotten the subtitle — *The case against*

complacency — of his 1973 article?

There is a large negative synergistic effect when organizations like AAAS and PCAST behave as irresponsibly as do the mainline media. Robert Samuelson noted in 2006 how neither in Congress nor in the mainline media was there any pre-vote discussion of the huge population increases that would have resulted from the ‘comprehensive immigration reform’ legislation that was almost passed by Congress that year⁵. AAAS Policy Alerts and *Science* were likewise asleep at the switch for these debates.

Scientists thus have some excuse for their clouded vision and production of one inadequate white paper after another on sustainability issues. To the extent they have relied on AAAS, other scientific organizations, or the mainline media for accurate information on U.S. population issues, scientists have had to stumble in the dark like everyone else.

AAAS Shows Its True Colors?

Another recent action by AAAS pretty much confirms that AAAS does indeed have an unwritten policy of suppressing open discussion of U.S. population and immigration issues at its meetings and in its publications. It is a policy never approved by the AAAS membership.

In the summer of 2011, Californians for Population Stabilization (CAPS) decided that a valuable education project might be to set up an exhibitor booth at the February 2012 annual meeting of the AAAS in Vancouver, British Columbia. CAPS is a non-profit, non-partisan, 501(c)(3) educational and environmental organization that advocates for U.S. population stabilization via immigration reduction and small families.

The exhibitor booth would involve providing large amounts of free literature on population issues, a book display, posters, and one-on-one interactions with attendees over a period of several days. The idea was discussed with some Canadian scientists who supported the idea enthusiastically. Two, David Schindler of the University of Alberta and Madeline Weld of the Population Institute of Canada, even volunteered to help staff the booth.

CAPS submitted to AAAS its application for a booth in mid-August 2011, the application was approved, and a \$2,500 check was sent to cover the booth fee. On September 26 CAPS received word from AAAS that our application was now rejected and that our fee would be refunded. The sole reason given was that “AAAS is a non-profit, non-partisan, scientific association and unfortunately, CAPS, does not align with AAAS.”

As secretary to the board of CAPS, I wrote to Barbara Price, AAAS Director of Meetings, provided more information about CAPS, and asked for an explanation of “not align.” Her minimalist reply was that, “The description of your organization on your web site indicates CAPS has a concerted political agenda and lobbying effort around immigration issues that impact the state of California and are of interest to its residents.”

To that I responded at length, saying, *inter alia*, “that CAPS does indeed, just like AAAS, have a ‘political agenda and lobbying effort,’ but that, as indicated by the abundant materials on the CAPS website and contrary to her statement, CAPS is *not* concerned solely with immigration or with its impacts only on California and its residents.” We are concerned about the environmental impacts of population growth throughout America and, indeed, throughout the world.

After one more round with Ms. Price, I appealed the matter to the AAAS Board of Directors.¹² AAAS Chief Executive Officer Alan Leshner replied on behalf of the entire board communicating their refusal to reverse the decision. His only explanation was that, “[We] do not provide booth space to organizations with as direct political and lobbying intent as CAPS has on issues that go beyond the interests of our multidisciplinary membership and meeting audience.”

The response seemed disingenuous. Other organizations that are strongly engaged in educating and lobbying on scientific and environmental policy issues have been allowed to have booths at AAAS meetings. Examples include the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), the Marine Conservation Alliance, and SeaWeb. The nature of UCS is particularly germane. It is an activist organization with particular political agendas and, occasionally talks about global population problems and their environmental implications in its publications, but, like AAAS itself *and all other exhibitors allowed at AAAS meetings*, is silent on the causes, consequences, and correctives of U.S. overpopulation or the desirability of having a national population policy for the U.S.

Moreover, it seems the ultimate in hypocrisy for AAAS to one month publish an issue of *Science* on “Population” and two months later to claim that U.S. population stabilization, the core mission of CAPS, is “beyond the interests of our multidisciplinary membership and meeting audience.”

Many members of the AAAS Board of Directors may have forgotten or never known about the fate of the 1972 Rockefeller Commission on Population Growth and the American Future.¹³ Among the conclusions in its report to President Nixon was this:

After two years of concentrated effort, we have concluded that, in the long run, no substantial benefits will result from further growth of the Nation’s population, rather that the gradual stabilization of our population would contribute significantly to the Nation’s ability to solve its problems. We have looked for, and have not found, any convincing economic argument for continued population growth. The health of our country does not depend on it, nor does the vitality of business nor the welfare of the average person.

Years later, Stephen Mumford¹⁴ recounted how implementation of that admirable report was killed, largely at the hands of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops:

During the year that followed the presentation of the Rockefeller Commission Report, it became clear that there would be no further response to the Commission’s recommendations. In May 1973 a group of pioneer population activists acknowledged this inaction and asked Ambassador Adolph Schmidt to speak with his friend, Commission Chairman John D. Rockefeller 3rd. They met in June 1973 at the Century Club in New York City. Schmidt noted his own disappointment and that of his colleagues because no program had been mounted as a result of the Commission’s recommendations. What had gone wrong? Rockefeller responded: “The greatest difficulty has been the very active opposition by the Roman Catholic Church through its various agencies in the United States.”

In 1992, one Rockefeller Commission member, Congressman James Scheuer (D-NY), spoke out publicly for the first time on what had happened: “Our exuberance was short-lived. Then-President Richard Nixon promptly ignored our final report. The reasons were obvious — the fear of attacks from the far right and from the Roman Catholic Church because of our positions on family planning and abortion. With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear that this obstruction was but the first of many similar actions to come from high places.”

Since that time the Catholic Church has further distinguished itself for its strong support of illegal aliens

and opposition to enforcement of many U.S. immigration laws.

Perhaps, the AAAS directors and *Science* editors need to reflect on the integrity of their own behavior as affected by unacknowledged ideological positions. Exactly why are they ignoring the costs of continued U.S. population growth in perfect step with the Catholic Church? Why are they unrelentingly opposing education on and discussion of U.S. population and immigration issues in AAAS venues? Why are they not championing the frank, honest messages of the Rockefeller Commission and of organizations like CAPS? The Rockefeller Commission report and CAPS focus on voluntary family planning and the setting of legal immigration quotas

at a level that allows for acculturation of immigrants into U.S. society and that allows for ‘replacement level’ immigration in order to move the U.S. toward population stabilization — all in order to achieve national sustainability.

Why is AAAS actively perpetuating widespread ignorance within the scientific community on these issues?

If the AAAS board of directors is capable of answering such questions coherently, it could respond to them in the pages of *Science*. Until that is done, many will assume that some mixture of ideology, fear and ignorance is the driving force. One is reminded of a book by a couple of obscure academics titled *Betrayal of Science and Reason*.¹⁵ ■

The rejected letter, as submitted

To the Editor:

We were flabbergasted to discover that the 55-page special section on Population (29 July) lacked a discussion of U.S. population growth, its causes and consequences. Such an omission is a complete mystery given that the U.S. has the world’s third largest population and that *Science* is U.S. based.

In addition to discussion of various countries around the world whose populations and environmental impacts are far less than that of the U.S., the special section included substantial reviews of the situation in India and, also, in China. These reviews show that, since 1990, China’s population has increased by about 200-million persons and India’s by about twice that amount. Yet when per capita environmental impact is also considered (as measured by energy/resource use and carbon footprints), the 60-million persons added to the U.S. population during the same time period were more important than either the Chinese or Indian additions; indeed, environmentally speaking, U.S. population growth was the most damaging in the entire world.

U.S. population growth has many negative environmental impacts in addition to increases in anthropogenic atmospheric carbon. As just one example, in our home state of California, endless rapid population growth is degrading the quality of life for most people and robbing wildlife of habitat it has occupied for millennia. More generally, population growth in the USA and worldwide represents a glaring example of intergenerational and interspecies injustice.

For many decades the USA has needed a population policy. As emeriti we three are all old enough to have seen U.S. population more than double in our lifetimes. The cause of this increase when we were young was primarily the high fertility of U.S. born women. In recent decades population increase has been due mostly to immigration and the U.S. born children of immigrant women. Whatever the causes, Congress should implement a national population policy so that Americans being born today, when they reach our age, do not see a U.S. population approaching a billion persons. In 1972 the distinguished Rockefeller Commission on Population Growth and the American Future noted that they could see no “substantial benefits” for further increases in the U.S. population. Now, more than 100,000,000 additional Americans later, the same is true, only more so than ever.

(Originally submitted by Benjamin M. Zuckerman, Emeritus Professor, Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of California, Los Angeles; Stuart H. Hurlbert, Emeritus Professor, Department of Biology, San Diego State University, San Diego; Otis L. Graham, Emeritus Professor, Department of History, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA. Letter was later published by Californians for Population Stabilization in CAPS News, vol. 52, no. 2, Fall 2011)

Endnotes

1. The cover of the *Science* issue is a photo of a crowd of heads in New York City. The caption (p. 493) for that photo states, "Unlike many developed countries, the U.S. has a fertility rate slightly greater than replacement level, which provides balanced growth of youngsters, working-age adults, and elderly dependents." The "growth" referred to is now due primarily to immigrants and their offspring. It reflects a state of increasing 'imbalance' between population size and our resource base.
2. David E. Bloom, "7 Billion and Counting," *Science*, 333, 562-576 (2011). On p. 565, Bloom states, "Population momentum explains why the U.S., which has had a TFR below 2.1 since the early 1970s, has grown by 100 million people since 1972 (well in excess of the 37 million net immigrants)." This is misleading as the demographic impact of post-1972 immigration includes the tens of millions of children and grandchildren born to those 37 million immigrants.
3. Diana Hull (guest ed.), "Scientists as Censors: How Political Correctness Corrupts Environmental Science," *The Social Contract*, 21(3), 1-60 (2001).
4. Fred A.B. Meyerson, "Immigration, Population Policy, and the Sierra Club," *Population and Environment*, 26, 61-69 (2004).
5. Robert J. Samuelson, "What You Don't Know About the Immigration Bill," *The Washington Post*, May 31, 2006. [Reprinted in *The Social Contract*, 21(3), 59-60 (2011)]. Comprehensive immigration 'expansion' is the more accurate label for these 2006 and 2007 legislative efforts. See also: Jack Martin and Stanley Fogel, "Projecting the U.S. Population to 2050: Four Immigration Scenarios," Federation of American Immigration Reform, Washington, D.C., 44 pp. (2006). Available at: http://www.fairus.org/site/DocServer/pop_projections.pdf?docID=901
6. John P. Holdren, "Population and the American Predicament: The Case Against Complacency," *Daedalus*, 102(4), 31-43 (1973).
7. David Pimentel et al., "Will Limited Land, Water and Energy Control Population Numbers in the Future?" *Human Ecology*, 38, 599-612 (2010).
8. John P. Holdren, "Science and Technology for Sustainable Well-Being," *Science*, 319, 424-434 (2008).
9. John P. Holdren, "Policy for Science, Technology and Innovation in the Obama Administration: A Mid-Course Update. Plenary Lecture," 2011 Annual Meeting of the AAAS, Washington, D.C., 18 February 2011. PowerPoint presentation available at: http://www.aaas.org/meetings/2011/program/plenaries/media/0218holdren_presentation.pdf
10. President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, "Sustaining Environmental Capital: Protecting Society and The Economy," Washington, D.C., 2011. 126 pp.
11. Several past such pleas are reviewed in: Stuart H. Hurlbert, "Wives of the Bishop of Worcester: The Ecological Society of America and Globalist Copoutism," *The Social Contract*, 21(3), 7-13.
12. Members of the 2011-2012 AAAS Board of Directors who approved denial of a booth for CAPS in Vancouver are: Alice Huang, Chair of the AAAS Board, California Institute of Technology, alice.huang@caltech.edu; Nina V. Fedoroff, AAAS President, Pennsylvania State University, nvfl@psu.edu; William Press, AAAS President-Elect, University of Texas, Austin, wpress@cs.utexas.edu; David Evans Shaw, AAAS Treasurer, Blackpoint Group, David.Shaw@DEShawResearch.com; Alan Leshner, AAAS Chief Executive Officer, aleshner@aaas.org; Nancy Knowlton, Smithsonian Institution, knowlton@si.edu; Stephen Mayo, California Institute of Technology, steve@mayo.caltech.edu; Raymond Orbach, University of Texas, Austin, orbach@energy.utexas.edu; Julia M. Phillips, Sandia National Labs, New Mexico (no email address available); Sue V. Rosser, San Francisco State University, srosser@sfsu.edu; David D. Sabatini, NYU School of Medicine, David.Sabatini@nyumc.org; Inder Verma, Salk Institute for Biological Studies, verma@salk.edu; Thomas Woolsey, Washington University Medical School, woolseyt@medicine.wustl.edu
13. John D. Rockefeller III, Chairman, *The Report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future*, Washington DC (1972).
14. Stephen D. Mumford, *The Life And Death of NSSM 200: How the Destruction of Political Will Doomed a U.S. Population Policy* (1996). See also: Robert Kyser, "Population Policy and the Roman Catholic Church," *The Social Contract*, 5(3), (1995).
15. Paul Ehrlich and Anne Ehrlich, *Betrayal of Science and Reason*, Island Press (1996).