

*Below we reprint the chapter on immigration from Population and the American Future: The Report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future submitted to President Nixon and the Congress twenty years ago by chairman John D. Rockefeller, 3rd.*

# IMMIGRATION, POPULATION GROWTH, AND THE AMERICAN FUTURE

Report of the Rockefeller Commission, March 27, 1972

Because population growth has rarely been a concern of immigration policy makers, it is especially important to study immigration from the perspective of population policy. In the years 1861 to 1910, the average annual immigration rate per 1,000 total population of the United States was 7.5; the rate for the period 1911 to 1970 dropped to 1.8. The rate for the recent period reflects a rise from the 1930's, when there was a net outflow of migrants, to the 1960's when the rate was 2.2.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, immigration has contributed profoundly to the growth and development of this country. In fact, we pride ourselves on being a nation of immigrants. Traditionally, because of the desire to settle advancing frontiers and the demand for labor in the expanding industries, there were few restrictions on immigration. However, a changing situation early in this century became reflected in new immigration policies. The situation is now changing again, and it is appropriate that the Commission review the role of immigration.

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## The Past

Our nation's history repeatedly reveals the outstanding contributions of immigrants. They provided much of the manpower and initiative that settled the colonies and opened the west. They helped build the railroads, worked in the factories, organized labor, succeeded at the highest levels of business and government, and have left an indelible mark on American arts and scholarship. Immigrants today are contributing in equally significant ways, and there is every reason to expect such benefits from immigration in the future. Our society has been shaped by the many identities of its citizens.

In response to the needs of the economically, religiously, and politically oppressed around the world and to our needs as a new and growing nation, there

were no significant restrictions on immigration until after the Civil War. In 1882, Chinese immigrants were excluded. Later, other narrowly selective requirements were imposed for health and public welfare reasons. After World War I, there were strong social and political pressures to impose tight restrictions on immigration. The Immigration Act of 1924 defined special categories of immigrants (close relatives, refugees) not subject to numerical limits and set a quota of about 150,000 for all others. The legislation was based on complicated formulas to restrict immigrants from certain countries in order to retain the racial and ethnic composition of the United States population. This system was replaced by the Immigration Act of 1965.

The 1965 legislation shifted the restriction from national origins to priorities based on family reunification, asylum for refugees, and needed skills and professions. Because of past policy, there has been a dramatic shift in the geographic origins of our immigrants. From 1945 to 1965, 43 percent of immigrants came from Europe. But, from 1966 to 1970, only one-third of the immigrants were European, while one-third were Canadian and Latin American, and the remaining third were West Indian, Asian, and African.<sup>2</sup> This geographic change has also affected the racial composition of immigrants, increasing the number of nonwhites. Because of earlier changes in composition, women now outnumber male immigrants, and there are more families with dependents.<sup>3</sup> During the sixties, the flow of aliens arriving for permanent residence averaged about 332,000 per year. There were about 100,000 more such persons entering the country in 1970 than was the case in 1960.<sup>4</sup> Because the 1965 changes in immigration policies are so recent, it is not entirely clear whether these adjustments will develop into long-range trends.

## The Demographic Implications<sup>5</sup>

Immigrants are now [1972] entering the United States at a rate of almost 400,000 per year. The relative importance of immigration as a component of population growth has increased significantly as declining birthrates diminish the level of natural increase. However, the proportion of the population which is foreign-born (about five percent) is not

changing much. Between 1960 and 1970, about 16 percent of the total population growth was due to net immigration (the difference between the number of people entering the country and the number leaving). However, the increasing relative significance of immigration can be misleading for, if native births and deaths were balanced, immigration would account for 100 percent of population growth.

If net immigration were to remain at about 400,000 per year and all families were to have an average of two children, then immigrants arriving between 1970 and the year 2000, plus their descendants born here, would number 15 million at the end of the century. This would account for almost a quarter of the total population increase during that period.<sup>6</sup>

One should ask not only how much immigration contributes to population growth, but also how seriously immigration affects the advent of population stabilization. If immigration were to continue at the rate of about 400,000 per year, a rate of 2.0 rather than 2.1 children per woman would eventually stabilize the population, though at a later date. And the size of the population would ultimately be about eight percent larger than if there were no international migration whatsoever.<sup>7</sup>

If the flow of residents leaving this country were as large as the flow of immigrants, they would balance each other and have no impact on the growth rate. Unfortunately, no records are kept of people permanently leaving the country; emigration statistics must rely on indirect estimates. Indications are that emigration has been increasing recently from about 23,000 in 1965 to 37,000 in 1970. The most popular destinations are Canada, Israel, and Australia, and these may possibly account for more than half the emigrants. Emigration now is probably only about one-tenth the volume of immigration, but it has been proportionately larger in other periods of history. Of course, it is possible that it may increase again in the future.

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Immigration affects not only the growth of the population, but also its distribution. It is not surprising that the settlement patterns of immigrants reflect the distribution trends of the native population, since most immigrants come to this country either to join their relatives or obtain a job. In fact, immigrants tend to prefer metropolitan areas and are concentrated in a few

of the largest cities. Immigrants will contribute about 23 percent of the population growth which is projected to occur within fixed metropolitan boundaries between 1970 and 2000, assuming the 2-child growth rate.<sup>8</sup> Not only do immigrants tend to be highly metropolitan, they are also concentrated in a few states. Two-thirds of the recent immigrants intended to settle in six states — New York, California, New Jersey, Illinois, Texas and Massachusetts.<sup>9</sup>

### **Illegal Aliens**

A major and growing problem associated with immigration is that of illegal immigrants. It is impossible to estimate precisely how many escape detection; but, during 1971, over 420,000 deportable aliens were located. This figure is larger than the number of immigrants who entered legally during the same period. Estimates place the number of illegal aliens currently in the United States between one and two million. Most are men seeking employment. Because the number of illegal aliens apprehended has risen dramatically (from less than 71,000 in 1960 to over 400,000 in 1971), the number of aliens in illegal status has probably been increasing significantly. Also, the problem has been spreading from the southwest, along the Mexican border, to all the major metropolitan areas across the country.<sup>10</sup>

The economic problems exacerbated by illegal aliens are manifold and affect the labor market and social services. It is often profitable for employers to hire illegal aliens for low wages and under poor working conditions; these workers will not risk discovery of their unlawful status by complaining or organizing. Thus, illegal aliens (who usually take unskilled or low-skilled positions) not only deprive citizens and permanent resident aliens of jobs, but also depress the wage scale and working conditions in areas where they are heavily concentrated. Although many aliens enter the United States in order to work and send much of their earnings back to their families and homeland, others are not as fortunate in finding jobs and can be a drain on public welfare and social services. Because of the illegal and precarious nature of their status, these aliens are ready prey for unscrupulous lawyers, landlords, and employers.

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Eight out of 10 illegal aliens found are Mexicans. Most of the others are Canadians and West Indians, although there are also sizeable groups of Portuguese, Greek, Italians, Chinese, and Filipinos. Their countries were affected by immigration policy changes in the

1965 Act, and there is considerable demand and pressure for immigrant visas. The flow of illegal immigrants could probably be reduced if the number of permanent residence visas were increased, the economic incentive for hiring illegal aliens were eliminated, and/or the economic advantages of obtaining a job in this country were reduced. In any case, an aggressive enforcement program must be developed along all borders and ports of entry. Any enforcement programs against illegal entry and possible laws against employment of illegal aliens must take special care not to infringe upon the civil rights of Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and others who are legally residing here and working or seeking work.

### Competition for Work

In addition to the adverse economic pressures caused by "illegal" aliens, it is possible that "legal" immigration could have a negative impact if not regulated carefully. It is the purpose of the labor certification program to ensure that immigrants do not compete with indigenous labor, particularly in periods and geographic areas of unemployment. But, only a small percent of immigrants are actually required to be certified. Since immigrants often have relatively high education and skills, there is an economic incentive for employers and institutions to favor them. This can work to the disadvantage of the native-born, particularly members of minority groups and women, who have traditionally been discriminated against and denied opportunities to upgrade their skills.

A flow of highly trained immigrants can mask the need for developing and promoting domestic talents — for example, in the medical field. Although medical schools have recently been expanding enrollments, a significant proportion of the demand for doctors is being met by immigrants trained abroad. It appears that, without the availability of these foreign doctors, the medical schools would be under greater pressure to increase their enrollment and to provide more educational opportunities for all Americans — particularly minorities and women. The fact that there are more registered Filipino doctors (about 7,000)<sup>11</sup> than black doctors (about 6,000)<sup>12</sup> practicing in the United States shows the inequities that can arise.

If immigrants are also favored in the unskilled and semi-skilled occupations, the discrimination should be attacked directly. Obviously, such discrimination may have other important sources which may not be affected by immigration policy. Thus, it is important to watch occupational trends, particularly in metropolitan areas, to ensure employment and development opportunities to racial and ethnic minorities. Traditionally, regardless of their ethnic origins, immigrants have started employment at the lowest levels and worked their way up to gain a measure of affluence. For various reasons, blacks have

not benefitted equally. Special attention to career advancement programs and promotion practices, as well as hiring, is needed to permit blacks to travel the same economic path and have the same opportunities as immigrants.

### Recommendations

The Commission believes that it is imperative for this country to address itself, first, to the problems of its own disadvantaged and poor. The flow of immigrants should be closely regulated until this country can provide adequate social and economic opportunities for all its present members, particularly those traditionally discriminated against because of race, ethnicity, or sex.

Thus, the Commission believes that an effectively implemented and flexible labor certification program is necessary to ensure that immigrants do not compete with residents for work. Immigration policies must react quickly to change in domestic unemployment rates and in occupational and geographic shifts in the labor force. Also, national manpower planners and immigration officials ought to be aware of the more subtle form of discrimination related to immigration. A readily available source of trained professionals from other countries may slow the development of domestic talents and the expansion of training facilities. While this importation of talent may be economical for the United States, it is not fair either to the foreign countries that educate the professionals or to our own citizens — particularly those minority groups and women whose access to professional training and economic advancement has been limited.

In order for Congress and immigration officials to consider these economic problems, apply appropriate regulations, and expect the economic conflicts to be alleviated, they must also eliminate the flow of illegal immigrants. As has been shown, the economic and social problems associated with illegal immigrants have reached significant proportions.

**The Commission recommends that Congress immediately consider the serious situation of illegal immigration and pass legislation which will impose civil and criminal sanctions on employers of illegal border-crossers or aliens in an immigration status in which employment is not authorized.**

*To implement this policy, the Commission recommends provision of increased and strengthened resources consistent with an effective enforcement program in appropriate agencies.*

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While the elimination of illegal aliens will alleviate the acute problems associated with immigration, there is still the question of the legal immigrants and their demographic impact. The Commission recognizes the importance of the compassionate nature of our immigration policy. We believe deeply that this country should be a haven for the oppressed. It is important that we be in a flexible position to take part in international cooperative efforts to find homes for refugees in special circumstances. In addition, we should continue to welcome members of families who desire to join close relatives here. Our humanitarian responsibilities to the international community require consideration of matters beyond national demographic questions.

Because the immigration issue involves complex moral, economic, and political considerations, as well as demographic concerns, there was a division of opinion within the Commission about policies regarding the number of immigrants. Some Commissioners felt that the number of immigrants should be gradually decreased, about 10 percent a year for five years. This group was concerned with the inconsistency of planning for population stabilization for our country and at the same time accepting large numbers of immigrants each year. They were concerned that the filling of many jobs in this country each year by immigrants would have an increasingly unfavorable impact on our own disadvantaged, particularly when unemployment is substantial. Finally, they were concerned because they believe that immigration does have a considerable impact on United States population growth, thus making the stabilization objective much more difficult.

The majority felt that the present level of immigration should be maintained because of the humanitarian aspects; because of the contribution which immigrants have made and continue to make to our society; and because of the importance of the role of the United States in international migration.

**The Commission recommends that immigration levels not be increased and that immigration policy be reviewed periodically to reflect demographic conditions and considerations.**

*To implement this policy, the Commission recommends that Congress require the Bureau of the Census, in coordination with the Immigration and Naturalization Services, to report biennially to the Congress on the impact of immigration on the nation's demographic situation.* ■

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Irene B. Taeuber, "Growth of the Population of the United States in the Twentieth Century" (prepared for the

Commission, 1972). For this chapter, see also Charles B. Keely, "Immigration: Considerations on Trends, Prospects and Policy" (prepared for the Commission, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> See note 1.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Irwin and Robert Warren, "Demographic Aspects of American Immigration" (prepared for the Commission, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *1971 Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*.

<sup>5</sup> See note 3.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-25, No. 470, "Projections of the Population of the United States, by Age and Sex: 1970 to 2020," 1971.

<sup>7</sup> Ansley J. Coale, "Alternative Paths to a Stationary Population" (paper prepared for the Commission, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Regional Metropolitan Projections" (special tabulations prepared for the Commission).

<sup>9</sup> See note 4.

<sup>10</sup> See note 4.

<sup>11</sup> J. N. Haug and B. C. Martin, *Foreign Medical Graduates*, American Medical Association, 1971. On professional immigration, see also Judith Fortney, "Immigration Into the United States With Special Reference to Professional and Technical Workers" (prepared for the Commission, 1972).

<sup>12</sup> Estimate based on figures appearing in: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1970*.