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CALIFORNIA'S FUTURE POPULATION: LARGER AND MORE DIVERSE

By Leon Bouvier

The announcement from the US Bureau of the Census that California's 1990 population was 29,760,021 was a surprise. Yet that number is an undercount. On June 13, 1991, the Bureau announced it had missed over 1.1 million. Almost 30.9 million people lived in the Golden State as of April 1, 1990.

This unexpectedly rapid growth brought the issue of over-population home to many people. During the 1980s, California's population increased by over 25 percent. So rapid growth is nothing new, but it has new significance as the state approaches or exceeds its carrying capacity.

Equally remarkable has been California's shifting ethnic composition. As recently as 1970, over 77 percent of Californians were Anglos or Non-Hispanic Whites while Hispanics represented 12 percent of the population. By 1980 the ethnic shares had narrowed to 67 and 19 respectively. Today Anglos comprise only 56 percent of all Californians while Hispanics constitute 26 percent. Asians and Others (including Pacific Islanders and Native Americans) grew from 4 percent in 1970 to 10 percent in 1990, while Blacks remained at about 7 percent. (These proportions differ slightly from those of the original count by the Bureau of the Census — they reflect the adjustments for the undercount of 1.1 million.)

What happened demographically in the 1980s in California? Migration, domestic as well as international, averaged 330,000 annually rather than the expected 200,000 to 250,000. While not anticipated, this was not a big surprise. Furthermore, the 1986 Immigration and Refugee Control Act (IRCA), which allowed for amnesty for certain illegal immigrants living in the country before 1982, may have resulted in more foreign-born residents coming forward to be enumerated in 1990 than in 1980.

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What was surprising was the rise in fertility.

Recent data from the Demographic Unit of the California Department of Finance indicate a substantial increase in fertility during the 1980s. In 1982 the total fertility rate was 1.95. By 1989 it had reached 2.48 — an increase of 27 percent. All ethnic groups participated in this increase, but the gain was particularly marked among Hispanics. Their fertility rose from 3.2 in 1982 to 3.9 in 1989. Given the demographic surprises of the 1980s, what can we expect in the future?

According to our medium scenario, **California's population will surpass 50 million by 2016 and reach almost 54 million by 2020** (See Table 1). [*For the medium scenario, fertility rates fall linearly to 2.0 in 2020 for Blacks and Asians and to 2.5 for Hispanics. The Anglo rate is 1.8. Total net migration is 330,000 per year distributed as follows: 45% Hispanic, 40% Asian, 10% Anglo, 5% Black. For the high scenario, fertility rates remain at their current levels and net migration is 440,000 per year. For the low scenario, fertility falls linearly to 1.8 by 2020 for all groups and net migration is 150,000 per year.*] By 2020 there will be almost two Californians for every one today. Despite fairly rapid fertility decline and only moderate levels of migration, the state can expect to continue to grow at an annual rate (1.8 percent) almost as high as that noted in developing countries like Brazil and India.

According to our high scenario, California's population will surpass 50 million by about 2011. By 2020, it will approach 62 million. Over the thirty-year period, the average annual rate of growth will approximate 2.3 percent.

According to our low scenario, California's population will reach about 44 million by 2020. Over the thirty-year period the average annual rate of growth will be 1.2 percent — greater than that recorded for any industrial nation in recent years. Thus, despite extremely optimistic assumptions about declining fertility and migration, the state's population will continue to grow rapidly for the foreseeable future.

The demographic die may be cast. Unless drastic declines in immigration and fertility occur soon, California is destined, not only to grow, but to grow

swiftly for many years to come.

FUTURE ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION

According to the medium scenario, Anglos will be 48 percent of the state's population by the year 2000; that share will fall to 36 percent by 2020 and by then, Hispanics will be the largest minority in a state composed solely of minorities. Asians will see their share of the population increase from 10 percent today to 17 percent in 2020 while the Black share will fall slightly. (Table 2)

The shifts in ethnic proportions are somewhat more marked under the high scenario. The "no majority" situation is imminent and by 2010 Hispanics and Anglos will be almost even in numbers. Even under the low scenario, Anglos will lose their majority status by 2005 and Hispanics will approach parity by 2020. California is on the verge of becoming a truly multi-racial society where no single group will predominate numerically.

California in the 21st century will be much larger than it is today; it will be increasingly heterogeneous; it will be older. Regardless of the scenario, the conclusion is the same.

THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

The educational system in California is facing a challenge of crisis proportions. In county after county and city after city, budgets are being cut, teachers and non-teachers alike are being laid-off, class sizes are increasing while arts, music and even after-school sports programs are being dropped. At the same time, the school population is growing by 200,000 every year.

About 5.7 million children between 3 and 18 are currently attending California schools — both public and private. Less than half are Anglos while 34 percent are Hispanics, 11 percent Asians, and 8 percent Blacks. (Table 3)

Future changes, whether in numbers or in ethnic composition, will be striking. Over this decade, school enrollments are projected to increase by 2.1 million — assuming a continuation of recent enrollment rates. Over the next 30 years, the state will have to build one 650-student school every day to keep up with growth. If we assume 10 acres for each school, 160 square miles will have to be set aside for school construction over the next 30 years. That area is equal to about four San Franciscos!

By 2010, student enrollments could reach 9.3 million and by 2020, over 10.4 million children will be enrolled in California schools.

Within ten years, Hispanics will surpass Anglos and be the largest ethnic group attending primary and secondary California schools. The Asian share will almost double that of Blacks. Only among secondary

schools will Anglos still outnumber Hispanics.

The rapid ethnic shift will continue unabated in the 21st century. Within thirty years, almost half of all children attending California public and private schools will be Hispanic, while Anglos will represent just over one-quarter, Asians 19 percent, and Blacks 7 percent.

The growth and diversity anticipated for California's schools pose qualitative and quantitative challenges. Qualitatively, schools must reduce high dropout rates, especially among Hispanics and Blacks; continue to raise academic achievement levels; employ more teachers and more effective teachers; and continue to play a central role in the cultural adaptation of the children of immigrants. Quantitatively, California must be prepared to spend more, and not less, for its educational system.

Such financial demands could not have come at a worse time. As the state struggles with its largest deficit in history, it must also face the fact that its schools are in critical condition — and that condition will worsen in the future.

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All Californians have a stake in the effectiveness of the state's schools because schools train tomorrow's workers and leaders and are thus significant for the health of the future economy. The schools must give California's future work force the knowledge and skills needed to increase the standard of living in the world's sixth largest economy. Furthermore, California's labor force will be an increasingly larger fraction of the national labor force, so declining quality of the state's labor force has growing national implications. The future work force mirrors the changing student body; over the next twenty years almost all of the net additions to the work force will be women, members of minority groups, or immigrants — most of them persons who, at the present, are being ill-prepared by the schools.

DIVERSITY: BLESSING OR DRAWBACK?

Diversity has long been considered one of the great strengths of California. Immigrants and minorities have contributed significantly to the betterment of the state. However, the current racial and ethnic shifts taking place leave unanswered the question of how further immigration and diversity will affect the citizens and institutions of the state. The

point is not that these shifts toward a "minority-majority" society are bad. They definitely are not. Fifty million people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds living harmoniously together would be the ultimate model of a "true community" for the rest of the world.

The question is: will they live together harmoniously or will the recurrent interracial battles so often reported in the media become the norm? While much has been written about the benefits of diversity, little has been said about possible increased tension among groups.

To put it in sociological terms, what form of cultural adaptation will emerge in such a heterogeneous society? At one extreme is cultural separatism, in which the groups are socially isolated from one another, often through segregationist practices by the host group. At the other extreme is cultural amalgamation where a new society and culture results from massive intermarriage among the groups.

Between these extremes are pluralism, assimilation, and the melting pot. In pluralism, the society allows the various ethnic groups to develop, each emphasizing its particular cultural heritage. Assimilation assumes that the new groups will take on the culture and values of the host society and gradually discard their own heritage. Following the seminal study by sociologist Milton Gordon, cultural assimilation (or acculturation), where a subordinate group takes on many of the characteristics of the dominant group, is distinguished from structural assimilation, where that subordinate group also gains access to the principal institutions of the society.¹ In the melting pot, the host and immigrants groups share each other's cultures and in the process a new group emerges. Throughout California history newcomers as well as long-time residents have had to adapt to one another. Otherwise the society could not have survived.

Can the relative success achieved in the adaptation of previous immigrants and their descendants into a new "melting pot" within the majority population be duplicated with the current and future mix of racially diverse ethnic groups?

This seems unlikely given the situation in 1990-2000 as compared to that in 1890-1900. The differences in economic structure, in the possibilities of inter-ethnic marriages, and in the increasing emphasis on group rights, and particularly in the level and persistence of immigration — are far too great to envision a new interracial melting pot in the foreseeable future.

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cultural pluralism."

Hopefully cultural separatism is a thing of the past. Yet there are those who would favor such a process. A few Mexican-American irredentists dream of a new Spanish-speaking Southwest as a way to take back demographically what the United States took militarily some 140 years ago. And there are always a few segregationists who would dearly love to keep all the races separate and "in their places."

The choice apparently is between assimilation and pluralism. Too often we confuse the pluralistic character of our society with acceptance of cultural pluralism. California is pluralistic in the sense of having many religions and ethnic groups in its population. Nevertheless, it has constantly striven to achieve overall unity in its basic interests and ideals. The nation's motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, succinctly captures the "ideal" society.

On the other hand, cultural pluralism, as presently conceived, gives rise (in the words of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.)

to the conception of the United States as a nation composed not of individuals making their own choices but of inviolable ethnic and racial groups. It rejects the historic American goals of assimilation and integration. And, in an excess of zeal, well-intentioned people seek to transform our system of education from a means of creating 'one people' into a means of promoting, celebrating, and perpetuating separate ethnic origins and identities. The balance is shifting from unum to pluribus."¹

Cultural pluralism is not the best path for the state to follow if it seeks unity rather than fragmentation.

The challenge to California is to ensure that all its residents, of whatever background, have equal access to all avenues to success and, in the process, adapt to the mainstream culture, while contributing to that culture's ever-changing content. At the same time, all of the state's residents, of whatever background, deserve the option of maintaining their own subculture within the broader society. As the state becomes increasingly multi-ethnic, it is important that it choose a form of adaptation that combines the best of pluralism and assimilation.

Admittedly, assimilation and multiculturalism are difficult subjects to discuss. As California Tomorrow's Lewis H. Butler has stated: "I understand the arguments for avoiding the subject, but I think they are totally irresponsible."³ The demographic engine is running. The state is growing and changing rapidly. Advocates of pluralism argue for increased multiculturalism; advocates of assimilation argue for more unity with respect to diversity. The people of California must decide which direction to follow in

the 21st century.

POPULATION GROWTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

California, like the United States, is beset with environmental problems. A bad water shortage is getting worse; air quality is deteriorating; waste disposal capacities have been pressed beyond their limits; the state's transportation system is clogged. The list goes on and on.

These critical problems have one thing in common. Population growth is a major contributing factor. To be sure, other factors are involved. However, in every instance, reductions in population growth would ease the problems. Population growth may not always be *the* villain of the piece — it is always an accomplice, at the very least.

1. **Water Supply.** In its July 22, 1991 issue, *Time* devoted its cover story to the over-utilization of the Colorado River. It concluded: "So far, California has been able to cope with water shortages which have been exacerbated even further by its booming population, by syphoning off the unused portion of the Upper Basin states' allocation from the river and encouraging conservation. But the time when such halfway measures will no longer suffice is fast approaching."⁴

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Last year the demand for water was about 34.7 million acre-feet. Yet the amount that can be delivered with normal rainfall and without drawing more from the ground than is normally restored is some 2.4 million less.⁵ The output of water from the Colorado River has been grossly overestimated. "Instead of the 16.9 million acre-feet estimated to be there for the dividing [*i.e.* between the states of the Upper and Lower Basins], the river has been flowing at a rate of only 14.9 million. During the present drought that figure has dropped to about 9 million acre-feet a year."⁶

California may soon be using 3 million acre-feet more water than it receives in a typical year. It is estimated that an acre-foot of water is enough to meet the needs of a family of four for one year. Twenty million more Californians will require about five million additional acre-feet of water if their needs are to be met. Is it realistic to assume that that much potable water can be located over the next two decades?

2. **Air Quality.** Most Californians breathe unhealthy air, and they have for years. State Air Resources Board member Harriet Weider recently

commented: "The south coast air basin has the worst air quality in the nation . . . three times more ozone than federal standards allow." She further noted that "recent studies found a 10 percent to 15 percent erosion in the lung function of children born and raised in crowded Southern California."⁷

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According to the Air Resources Board (ARB), virtually all of the carbon monoxide problem is due to motor vehicles. The transportation sector accounts for 57 percent of all carbon emissions, half of which comes from cars and light trucks.⁸ Over 7 million automobile trips take place every day. If the state is to reduce air pollution, the number of such trips, and, by implication, the number of automobiles, must be reduced. Many schemes have been suggested such as increasing the number of passengers per car or stressing public transportation. But even if these suggestions were feasible, any improvements would soon be engulfed by population growth.

For example, before 2020 the population will have increased 60 percent. If nothing else changes, this will require a reduction of 37.5 percent in the *miles* driven by each person just to keep the already poor air quality as it is. Is such a draconian reduction feasible?

3. **Waste Disposal.** Landfills everywhere are nearing capacity and ocean dumping sites are increasingly limited. Southern California has already reached its limits for burying garbage: the landfills are full. Sewage problems are equally severe. "The city of Los Angeles processes most of its sewage at the Hyperion Sewage Treatment Plant which is unable to keep up with demands caused by increased population. Because of this, 800 million gallons of only minimally treated sewage spews into the ocean every day."⁹

On average, each Californian produces about 3.5 pounds of solid waste every day. That amounts to over 19 million tons per year. Even if per capita consumption remains at current levels, annual waste will reach 32 million tons before 2020 at current population growth rates. Where will it be disposed of?

4. **Infrastructure.** The problems facing California's infrastructure are immense and growing. Freeways, bridges, railroad tracks, and mass transit (where available) are all deteriorating. Over the past two decades, traffic has grown six times faster than highway capacity. State transportation officials fear that it will be virtually impossible for enough new miles of highway to be constructed to keep pace with

population growth. This is particularly true as suburbs are extended farther and farther away from the central cities to accommodate the burgeoning population. The result is sprawl, choked highways and massive traffic congestion. The number of vehicles is projected to increase from 19.4 million to 35 million by 2020.

The list of similar infrastructure problems related to population growth is almost endless. Population growth worsens each of these problems. All levels of government are struggling to catch up with the needs of growing numbers, and all too often fail to maintain systems built in the past or to improve them for the future.

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CONCLUSION

Past and present demographic behaviors have given us 30 million Californians. Present and future demographic behaviors promise to give us many more millions. Yet Californians can do something about limiting growth and even ending it if they really want to. California need not "grow out of control," as *Newsweek* recently suggested.¹⁰

Growth can only be diminished, and eventually ended, through drastic reductions in fertility and migration. (Increasing mortality levels is another way to reduce population growth, but it is unlikely to be accepted as an option!) If growth is to stop eventually, fertility must fall substantially among all groups. Public and private agencies alike should work to raise the consciousness of all Californians about the problems of high fertility and population growth. Reducing adolescent pregnancy as well as unwanted pregnancy at all ages should be a special concern.

This does not mean that the society or the parents don't love children. Many parents would dearly want to have more children, but they know that it is better to limit themselves to perhaps two offspring for the benefit of both the children and the society.

But even success in reducing fertility will not solve population growth problems if immigration is allowed to remain high. If net migration — domestic and international — were drastically reduced, and if fertility fell rapidly for all groups, California's growth could end soon after 2050 with a population of less than 50 million.

Yet, bringing up the subject of lower immigration subjects one to bitter accusations: one is labelled xenophobic, racist, or worse. With the quality of life of *all* Californians at stake, it is time to leave behind the name-calling and examine what the levels of immigration should be if the state is to ever see an end to growth.

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population growth and must be addressed without fear of emotional attacks."

Limiting immigration contributes to lowering, if not ending, population growth. Limiting immigration makes it easier for the society to assist immigrants in adapting and progressing in American society. It also makes it easier for the immigrants themselves to join society's mainstream.

This does not mean that the society doesn't like immigrants. Immigrants have contributed tremendously to the social and economic success of California; they continue to do so today and will in the future. Just as many Californians are "pro-children," but value quality over quantity, so, too, are they "pro-immigrant," but, again, prefer quality over quantity.

It makes no sense to be able to discuss birth control and not immigration. They are both components of population growth and must be addressed without fear of emotional attacks. If population growth is a problem, then all sources of population growth must be examined.

There is a built-in momentum in the state's population growth, and this makes it a crisis situation. The time to act is now. The population will grow — how much depends on what is done to reduce fertility and immigration. The state's ethnic composition will change. That can be all for the good if reasonable people address the issue rationally, or it can lead to a new kind of cultural and racial separatism.

California is at a crossroads. It is time for representatives of all groups — racial and ethnic, political, educational, business, religious — to meet together to ask: What kind of California do we want in the twenty-first century? In the process of addressing this question, the California population and society of the future will gradually be defined. ■

NOTES

- ¹ Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, (New York: Oxford Press, 1964), chap. 3.
- ² Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "The Cult of Ethnicity, Good and Bad," *Time*, July 8, 1991, p. 21.
- ³ As cited in Dick Kirschter, "A Multiracial, Multicultural Golden State," *National Journal*, September 1, 1990, p. 2048.
- ⁴ Paul Gray, "A Fight Over Liquid Gold," *Time*, July 22, 1991, pp. 24-25.
- ⁵ Eliot Diring, "Heart of Water System is a Sinking Mess," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 15, 1991, p. 8.
- ⁶ *Time*, op. cit., p. 23.
- ⁷ Harriet Weider, as cited in Tom Harris, "State Anti-Growth Era Called Likely," *Sacramento Bee*, November 3, 1989, p. A-5.
- ⁸ California Energy Commission, *The Impacts of Global Warming in California*, 1990.
- ⁹ Dawn Glesser Moore, "Testimony before the Subcommittee on Census and Population of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, U.S. House of Representatives," 1988, p. 18.
- ¹⁰ *Newsweek*, "California Grows Out of Control," July 11, 1991, p. 30.