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A Transformation for Texas?

By Cord Meyer

Two population experts at the Center for Immigration Studies in D.C., Leon F. Bouvier and John L. Martin, have just published a fascinating study on the consequences for Texas of the growth of its immigrant population. It demonstrates the pace and depth of change in the ethnic distribution of its population, and shows how massive immigration is transforming the future that Texans can look forward to.

In effect, a huge foreign migration, largely from Latin America and Asia, has brought about deep changes in the ethnic composition of the Lone Star State. For example, the Hispanic population has more than doubled to 4.3 million in 1990, and the Hispanic share of the population has increased from 18.4 percent in 1970 to 25.5 percent in 1990 — and is even higher today. Similarly, from a minority of 50,000 in 1970, the Asian immigrant population grew to 379,000 in 1990, distributed among 69,634 Vietnamese, 63,232 Chinese, 55,795 Indians and 31,775 Koreans.

Although there has been some increase in the native black population of the United States, their share of the total has fallen from 12.5 percent in 1970 to 11.6 percent in 1990 because of the greater increase in the number of other minorities. As a consequence of the continued high level of immigration, the white, non-Hispanic majority has been reduced from 68.7 percent in 1970 to 65.7 percent in 1980, to 60.6 percent in 1990 — and to below 60 percent today.

Among Texas cities, El Paso has become about 70 percent Hispanic, and Houston, with only 37,501 foreign-born residents in 1970, came in 1990 to have a 58 percent foreign-born population, of which 132,596 were Mexican. By 1990, the white share of Houston's population was down to 40.3 percent. One result was that by 1990, fewer than 70 percent of the Houston population aged 5 and over spoke English at home. One-quarter spoke Spanish, and 125,000 citizens of Houston admitted that they either did not speak English at all or spoke it "not very well."

As the two population experts point out, "The demographic dice may well be already cast," and unless effective efforts to control immigration and to reduce birth rates are undertaken soon, "Texas is destined to grow more rapidly into the foreseeable future." Based on current momentum, more than 20 million Texans are foreseen for the turn of the century, and 30 million is "not an unreasonable estimate" for how many people will live in Texas in 2020.

While the white population of Texas will increase from 10.3 million in 1990 to 12.7 million in 2020, the

Hispanic population will increase from 4.3 million to more than 10 million — and the Asian population will increase to more than 1.2 million.

This enormous growth of a diverse Texas population from 11 million to possibly 27 million in a period of 50 years poses a formidable challenge to even the most self-confident Texas politician. Mr. Bouvier and Mr. Martin point out that by 2020, nearly 5.6 million children will be in the public elementary and secondary schools of Texas, compared to 3.5 million today. It is estimated that Texas will have to build two schools every week for the next 25 years just to keep up with rising enrollments.

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In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v Doe* that Texas schools must educate all children between the ages of 5 and 17 living within a school district, regardless of immigration status. With blacks and Hispanics scoring behind whites in mathematical and reading skills, much work and resources will be required if parity among ethnic groups is to be attained. Moreover, additional expensive bilingual educational programs will be required. As Messrs. Martin and Bouvier point out, the competitiveness of the Texas work force of the 21st century will be determined by the language training provided by its schools.

As a result of immigration and population growth, the number of registered vehicles in Texas will approach 23 million in 2020, compared to 14.5 million in 1990. This will require an additional 100,000 lane-miles of Texas state highways to provide for an additional 8.5 million vehicles.

Then there is the fiscal impact of immigration. Because elderly recent immigrants have never worked in the United States to qualify for Social Security benefits, they become heavy beneficiaries of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, and ingenious scams have been devised to exploit this program. Then there is also the net drain on the state's budget of programs to control illegal immigration and assist refugees.

There are strict limits on what Texas can do to protect itself against rising immigration pressure. It is

dependent on the Clinton administration and Congress for the measures necessary to expand the Border Patrol and reduce the rate of legal immigration. It must wait for the president to strengthen the Immigration and Naturalization Service and to bring effective influence to bear on Mexico to control its porous border. Until these necessary measures are taken, Texas will live under the threat of an expanding world population. ■