

# Population As Destiny

Book Review by Michael W. Masters

*[I]t is the growth of population that causes poverty, and the affluent West can lose its affluence by packing more people in. Poverty is growing in inner cities already.*

— Paul Colinvaux

It is depressing to note just how much political correctness colors perceptions and distorts otherwise sensible thought processes. In the realm of population, perhaps no recent event more vividly illustrates this than the vote of the conservation-minded Sierra Club to take no position as an organization on America's record levels of immigration. Members allowed themselves to be intimidated into conformity by ideologically motivated shrieks of "racism" and "xenophobia."

As a result, one of the nation's premiere environmental organizations has paradoxically chosen to bury its head in the sand with respect to a major factor that undermines environmental ideals, i.e. burgeoning human numbers. The consequences of this myopia will not go away just because members temporarily ducked the smear campaign. Worse, their fear of name-calling is unfounded. Admittedly some make the case that massive immigration of culturally and ethnically alien peoples brings its own impact on quality of life. But for those too squeamish to face that reality, it is also true that numbers alone will wreak havoc.

Indeed, as the title of biologist Paul Colinvaux's 1980 book, *The Fates of Nations*, implies, the destiny of entire peoples can be wrecked by wrong decisions concerning population numbers. Colinvaux's work is particularly helpful because he thrives on taking beliefs that everybody knows to be true and standing them on

their heads, showing that not only are they not true, but that the consequences of continuing to believe them can be counter to long-term survival. Among Colinvaux's bon mots:

⊂ Civilizations arise from the technical competence of their founders; rising numbers are merely the consequence of that competence as the civilization is able to feed more and more people.

⊂ Crowding impacts the well off, who invest heavily in child rearing, more than the poor, who have little to spend on children.

⊂ Trade, often seen as necessary to cope with growth, is not a solution at all; in reality it is a primary cause of growth, robbing nations and people of self-reliance.

⊂ Repression is the elites' means of preventing the middle class from sharing in the benefits of prosperity — benefits largely created by that middle class.

⊂ Revolutions arise from disaffected middle classes determined to seize their rightful due. (This will no doubt be gratifying news to Dr. Samuel Francis, author of *Revolution from the Middle*.)

Colinvaux bases his case on the theory of ecological niches — territory, food supply and habitability factors. "Niche sets the size of populations of all animal species." Moreover:

*People, like other animals, have niches in life. Much of the more violent sort of history comes about as individual people struggle for what they perceive to be their proper ecological niche.*

The concept of animal populations fixed by available resources is well accepted. The same, says Colinvaux, was true for our hunter-gatherer ancestors — but not modern humans.

*[O]ur remote ancestors had a superbly effective*

**The Fates of Nations; A Biological Theory of History**

by Paul Colinvaux  
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383 pages, \$12.95



*Michael W. Masters writes on issues of politics, history, moral philosophy, and sociobiology.*

*breeding strategy, but they lived in a fixed niche. Their populations, therefore, remained essentially constant ... What has changed since those ancient times is not the breeding strategy, but the niche. We have learned to live not only as hunters or gatherers, but as farmers and industrialists as well.*

This has allowed human populations to grow exponentially. But numbers, like ideas, have consequences:

*We invent new resources to support the expanded niche, just as we invent new ways of feeding. We call this process of creating more niche-space "technology" and "industry." The result is to provide large niche-spaces to larger numbers. But since the earth is finite, there is a limit to the niche-space that can be provided in these ways too. We defer the final poverty but not avoid it ... A desirable human niche is, therefore, at the mercy of an unchanged breeding strategy. It is this that has caused the major events of history. [Emphasis added.]*

Colinvaux quickly disposes of the popular myth that the much-ballyhooed "demographic transition" will provide a solution.

*Professional demographers, who make it their business to chart and project the course of human populations, describe the switch to smaller families in wealthier societies as "the demographic transition." Many a demographer ends a speech or article on the rising human population with this "demographic transition" as being a reason for hope. "Let us make the Third World wealthy," they say, "and the population problem will go away." But to find much hope in this is to fail to understand the ecological causes of those smaller families of the wealthy.*

He explains:

*Smaller families for the rich than for the poor are explained and predicted by the ecological analysis of the human breeding strategy, as we have seen. But this does not mean that numbers in a rich society rise, only that they will rise*

*more slowly.*

Nor does this mean that all classes will grow equally. Although Colinvaux treads lightly in this domain, history has shown that what tends to rise is the numbers of those who lack the ability to lift themselves out of poverty. If social policy promotes unconstrained growth of this portion of the population – whether by natural increase or by immigration – the effect will be to squeeze out those whose ability created the standard of living that benefited all.

*Ecology's first law may be written: "All poverty is caused by the continued growth of population." And yet a noisy propaganda is about which denies that rising populations cause poverty. We are told by most eminent politicians and international experts that the rising numbers, far from being a cause of poverty, are in fact a result of poverty.*

Colinvaux takes direct aim at self-professed experts who invite us to open our doors to the world's "huddled masses, yearning to breathe free."

*Three kinds of assumptions have been made in recent years suggesting that our population growth will stop by itself from some inner dynamic of its own. These assertions have had very wide publicity, for they seem to say that the "population problem" will go away ... The thinking behind all three assertions, however, is in grave error.*

He adds:

*The three erroneous assertions are that populations stop growing as people become wealthy; that the recent "explosive" growth in the world population has been due to medical advances and will go away as people adapt; and that there are signs that the human population is now at the "inflection point," at which numbers will level off as in other kinds of animal, remaining comfortably stationary thereafter. All three of these assertions violate scientific principles and assume that magic is at work in the control of numbers of all living things.*

In the long run, there are likely to be two

consequences for the West in allowing the current open-door immigration policy to continue. First, the personal freedoms enjoyed by Western peoples for hundreds, indeed thousands, of years is in jeopardy.

*Liberty, in the Jeffersonian sense, cannot survive a continual packing-in of people. If our numbers continue to rise on a resource base that expands but little, the future inevitably holds ever-greater restrictions on individual freedom.*

Loss of freedom is bad enough. However, worse awaits. Caught between twin jaws of elite control from above and invasion of niche space by immigrants from below, Western men and women, especially middle class ones, are making a fatal choice when it comes to family size.

*But it is still possible for the human breeding strategy to cause population losses, as well as population gains. This will happen when a community is reduced to such despair that the average opinion of the ideal size of family puts it close to zero. Or, if hope yet allows some couples to start families, then the conditions of the people are so desperate that they cannot succeed. A single generation of desperation can remove a whole community for good.*

It is all too common to hear well-off potential parents professing worry over the cost of rearing children and over the uncertain nature of the future as a prelude to stating their decision to defer or forego entirely the bearing of children. As a consequence, throughout the Western world the birthrate of European-descended women has dropped to an average of 1.7 births per woman or less, well below the 2.1 value required to sustain a stable population.

*It is to this possibility of near total failure of the breeding effort, not massacres of adults, that we must look for the decline of populations in history... The elimination of conquered populations with no better instruments than swords and spears is close to incredible. But people would be just as effectively eliminated from the pages of history if they failed to breed. The only deaths that waste the population then are the result of old*

*age.*

Destruction of entire population groups can be accomplished through theft of habitat.

*Even more starkly, a conquered people may be removed if they are forced out of their traditional lands. A conquering army can force people to walk away as refugees far more easily than it can rid itself of the nuisance of their presence by killing them.*

Those thus vanquished may retain their lives,

*but finding resources to raise the traditional number of children is another matter.*

Although Colinvaux does not say so, it is obvious that the same fate awaits those whose homeland is invaded and colonized by so-called peaceful immigration. The sad irony for misguided liberals, who claim they want to do good for everyone, is that such a policy will not lower overall population or eliminate poverty; it will only change the identity of constituent peoples.

*Although a total population is set by niche, there is nothing in this to say whose offspring will make up that population. All the niche-spaces or jobs made vacant in the next generation by death are going to be filled by somebody's babies. This is where the rather stark proceeding called "Natural selection" operates ... All individuals of all animal kinds are programmed to make and raise the largest possible number of surviving offspring. If they do not, they will be denied a posterity by the more busy breeding efforts of those around them.*

Although Paul Colinvaux's *The Fates of Nations* was published twenty years ago, its premises are grounded in sociobiology and the ecology of populations — scientific principles that transcend time and place. Its lessons are still relevant today, as they will be in the foreseeable future, and its perspective is a valuable one, particularly for new readers unfamiliar with the ecological arguments in favor of stable populations.