

# Professor Otis Graham Leaves behind Inspiring Legacy as Scholar and Activist

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In early November 2017, sad news emerged from the southern California coast that University of California–Santa Barbara (UCSB) emeritus professor of history Dr. Otis L. Graham, Jr., had died at the age of 82 from complications related to Parkinson’s disease. With his passing, one of the early leaders and most informed—and informative-chroniclers of the modern immigration reform movement has departed permanently from the scene. Fellow immigration reform pioneers, such as Dr. John Tanton, lamented the loss of their long-time colleague, friend, and “comrade in arms.”



**Otis L. Graham, Jr. 1935-2017**

Santa Barbara, right beside the majestic Pacific Ocean. The timeless Pacific surf pounded the shore just outside the open windows of the lunch room. It was a fitting setting to honor the achievements of a great man and patriot who reveled in nature and country.

Just weeks before his passing, I had the good fortune to attend a special luncheon paying tribute to Otis, sponsored by Californians for Population Stabilization (CAPS), on whose board Otis sat. Thanks to fellow CAPS board member Marilyn (Missy) Brant Chandler De Young, it was held in the historic, classy Coral Casino Club in Montecito, adjacent to

On the event’s program, written tributes from long-time leaders of the movement advocating lower-and-legal-only immigration—Dan Stein of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), and Roy Beck of NumbersUSA, among others—fondly recalled Otis’ insightfulness, kindness, patriotism, generosity, wry sense of humor, and scholarship. Speaking at the luncheon, former Colorado governor Dick Lamm and CAPS president and UCLA astronomer Ben Zuckerman praised Otis’ seminal contributions to a difficult cause, one that became ever more so over the years because Otis was a traditional American liberal. By 2017, those liberals in the Democratic Party (perhaps never a majority) who had once defended the American environment from immigration-driven overpopulation and American workers from excessive immigrant labor were no longer just an endangered species, but virtually extinct.

I am a great admirer of Otis’ work and feel personally beholden to him for helping advance my own standing among those who care about the future of America, Americans, our land, environment, natural resources, and wildlife.

Back in 1999, I had begun assisting Numbers-USA founder Roy Beck with his first draft of a scholarly paper for a special issue of the academic *Journal of Policy History* dedicated to “Environmental Politics and Policy, 1960s–1990s,” slated to be published in the year 2000. Otis, with his particular expertise as an environmental historian, was the invited guest editor of this special issue. Roy was impressed enough with my footnoting, edits, and overall contributions to his initial draft that he asked Otis if I could be listed as his co-author rather than just acknowledged as an assistant in an endnote. And Otis made it happen, even though this apparently was contrary to the journal’s typical practice or standards. Our joint paper, “The Environmental Movement’s Retreat from Advocating U.S. Population Stabilization (1970-1998): A First Draft of History,” was indeed the only one in the special issue with two authors. It has since been cited and linked to online many times over the last two decades. I am forever grateful for Otis’ pivotal role in making this possible.

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The first time I ever saw Otis in action was at a circa-1994 public meeting about illegal immigration in the city hall of Orange, California, in the heart of Orange County, sandwiched between Los Angeles and San Diego. He was one of a number of speakers addressing the Orange city council on the policies and procedures the Orange police department should adopt to deal with the massive influx of illegal immigrants which had begun sweeping across Orange County and all of Southern California like a tsunami. Otis stood out for the erudition and eloquence of his remarks, which earned enthusiastic applause from those in attendance.

In the following years, every time I read one of Otis’ informative, insightful books or articles, I was reminded of that very first time I saw him speak, for he was as captivating a writer as he was a speaker. His scholarly contributions to the stubborn movement for U.S. population stabilization and the rational and fair immigration policies needed to attain it are unique.

Otis L. Graham, Jr. was born in 1935 in Little Rock, Arkansas, into a “remarkable Southern family that was steeped in the best traditions of American scholarship and liberal patriotism,” as Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and CIS senior research fellow Jerry Kammer put

it. He was one of three sons of a Presbyterian minister. Otis’ older brother Fred was a legal correspondent for *The New York Times* and CBS News before becoming chief anchor and managing editor for Court TV. His younger brother Hugh was a history professor at Johns Hopkins, the University of Maryland, and Vanderbilt, with an expertise in Southern politics and the civil rights movement.

Otis embodied the family tradition of service and scholarship. He served in the U.S. armed forces—three years as an artillery officer in the Marines and four years in the Navy—even though he eventually came to oppose the Vietnam War. He received his B.A. from Yale University in 1957 and his Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1966. He taught at the University of North Carolina on the East Coast and then spent most of his academic career teaching at UCSB on the West Coast. Among other distinctions, he was a Guggenheim Fellow, as well as a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Center for Advanced Study and Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University.

Otis was also the Program Director for four years at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions,



ABOVE: Otis Graham discusses his book *Immigration Reform and America’s Unchosen Future*, an insider’s account of the battles over immigration policy, at the 32nd annual Writer’s Workshop, October 2008; UPPER RIGHT: Attendees gather to honor Dr. Graham (in wheelchair) on October 7, 2017, in Montecito, California, hosted by Californians for Population Stabilization (CAPS); Professor Otis Graham and the author, October 2017, in Montecito.



under its founder Robert (Bob) Maynard Hutchins, an American educational philosopher, former dean of Yale Law School, and former president and chancellor of the University of Chicago. An offshoot of the Fund for the Republic, a civil rights and civil liberties foundation, the Center was an influential think tank in Santa Barbara/Montecito founded by Hutchins in 1959. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas was for a time Chairman of the Center's Board of Directors.

The Center prided itself on its "thirst for knowledge and thirst for truth." Among the VIPs and luminaries who passed through its doors as participants and observers were *Brave New World* author Aldous Huxley, actor Paul Newman, biologist and *Population Bomb* author Paul Ehrlich, U.S. senator and presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy, *The Joy of Sex* author Alex Comfort, Elisabeth Mann Borgese (expert on international maritime law and policy, founding member of the Club of Rome, and daughter of German author Thomas Mann), Columbia University economist Rexford G. Tugwell (a member of FDR's "brain trust"), and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Harry Ashmore.

In 1999, Otis received the Robert Kelley Memorial Award from the National Council on Public History, honoring his "achievements and specific contributions to the public history movement." Over the course of his long career, he authored or edited 19 books and many articles on the history of the United States, with an emphasis on American reform movements, political economy, the environment, and of course, immigration.

Otis published his first article on the problems of mass immigration in 1977. Not long afterwards, as he told an audience in 2008, "I got a phone call from a doctor in Michigan. I said to my wife, 'These guys are desperate for work. This doctor's calling me from Michigan.' Well, he wasn't calling me for medical services; he had read the article and he said, 'I've looked you up, Mr. Graham. You're a Presbyterian. Presbyterians are supposed to tithe. I'll bet you don't tithe. But I'm going to give you a chance to tithe by serving on the national board of a new organization to reform immigration.' It takes your breath away to have a thing like that happen over the phone on a Wednesday night when you're tired. So that dragged me into what became FAIR."

The doctor from Michigan, of course, was ophthalmologist John Tanton. Dr. Tanton had a flair for finding like-minded folks with talent, passion, and resolve, and he tapped Otis to join FAIR's founding board of directors; Otis served on that board for more than two decades. He also served as chair and a member of the board of CIS, as well as a board member at CAPS. Otis' 2006 memoir *Immigration Reform and America's Unchosen Future* furnished a candid, insider's account of his experiences with these groups and the broader social movement that challenged what many saw as the inevitabil-

ity and desirability of America's sweeping demographic and cultural transformation as a result of incessant and ever-mounting immigration levels. FAIR's early board and staff had to learn for themselves on the job, continually breaking new ground, because no NGO had advocated for reduced immigration levels in at least half a century (it hadn't been necessary to). Otis provided a blow-by-blow account of the congressional maneuvers and machinations that ultimately led to President Reagan signing the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, with its reviled amnesty and its employer sanctions which were never implemented in good faith.

Among the other books Otis authored are *Great Campaigns: Reform and War in America 1900-1928* (Prentice-Hall, 1971), *Toward a Planned Society: From Roosevelt to Nixon* (Oxford University Press, 1977), *Losing Time: The Industrial Policy Debate* (Harvard University Press, 1992), *A Limited Bounty: The U.S. Since WWII* (McGraw-Hill College, 1995), *Unguarded Gates: A History of America's Immigration Crisis* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), and *Presidents and the American Environment* (University Press of Kansas, 2015).

His most recent book about American presidents and the environment was an engaging look at which presidents largely fought for America's environment, and which largely fought against it. His tale began not in 1789 with President George Washington's inauguration but a century later in 1889 with President Benjamin Harrison's. What about the century and 22 presidents that preceded Harrison? Professor Graham explained that the predominant issue of "environmental policy"—if it could even be called that—in the new republic's entire first century was the disposition of public lands: trying to facilitate the transfer of lands from the federal government into private hands so as to expedite their development by the burgeoning Euro-American population of the young, vigorous country. It was not really until the last decade or two of the nineteenth century that America's collective conscience was moved, as our forebears gradually became aware and then outraged at the accelerating destruction of forests, soils, wildlife, fisheries, and water resources resulting from unchecked growth and insatiable greed.

In 10 chapters that proceeded chronologically all the way to the administration of President Barack Obama, Graham traced the ups and downs of presidential attitudes and policies towards the American environment. Perhaps ironically, perhaps unsurprisingly, it is two larger-than-life Republican presidents (celebrated by some, criticized by others) who provide the highest high and the lowest low: progressive Theodore Roosevelt at the start of the twentieth century and reactionary Ronald Reagan towards its end. TR looked to government as a restraint on the private greed that he believed was plundering America's limited, vulnerable bequest of

natural resources, while RR looked to restrain that same government from interfering with Americans' God-given right to generate prosperity and jobs by using natural resources that he believed were abundant and inexhaustible. In the last chapter and final analysis, "Trying Again for Greener Presidents," Graham told readers who among the 22 presidents since Harrison "robustly and with sustained enthusiasm took up the challenge of nature protection."

Otis did not pull punches or craft some uplifting but dubious narrative about how U.S. presidents have trended upwards over time in their wisdom and prudence vis-a-vis the environment. The sad reality, he glumly informed us, was this:

To the retreating wildlife, the establishment of national forests and national parks in the TR era did little to slow the devastation produced by the reality behind two revered words, national growth. The human population, in 1900 at 76 million, was then roughly ten times the size of the indigenous population when the European invasion began and vastly more technologically advanced. It grew to 123 million by 1930, migrating from rural to urban settings and spreading westward into the Great Plains and southward toward the tropical allure of a watery Florida seen as begging for improvement—which meant drainage and development. None of the perils TR and his lieutenants warned about—deforestation, soil erosion, flooding,

wildlife extinction—had been arrested during this era of growth, let alone reversed.

In a speech some years back, Otis recounted how at the very first meeting of the FAIR board four decades ago, they were all in good spirits until someone somberly observed, "You know, this problem is really tough. It's going to take a long time. It's going to take five or ten years." That observation was made in 1978. As Otis remembered it in his speech many years later, the audience burst into ironic laughter at the combination of prescience and naiveté expressed by that early observer. And Otis commiserated with a wistful smile. Now forty years have transpired since that observation about how long it will take to solve a tough problem like mass immigration. The U.S. population is tens of millions larger than it would have been had immigration reform succeeded in the first decade of the struggle. On the other hand, if not for the unfaltering dedication of Otis Graham and other brave, committed souls, the problem would already be far, far worse.

When all is said and done, by the end of his full life, Otis Graham had not only recorded and interpreted and taught American history, he himself had helped make that very history. He did so as a revered leader of the patriotic movement to restore sane immigration policies that would actually serve the interests of all Americans—not just the elites and vested interests—and protect from the scourge of overpopulation the land, the resources, and the environment that sustain us. A thousand thanks from one of your many admirers, Professor Graham. ■

## An Excerpt from *Immigration Reform and America's Unchosen Future*

**A**t some point—I'm not sure I have these in order—John [Tanton] established a new journal, *The Social Contract*. The magazine's editorial offices were in Petoskey, where John had earlier set up a non-national organization to house his various enterprises—U.S., Inc. In 1978, when I had that phone call from this unknown Petoskey doctor and wondered what sort he was, I should have flown to visit the modest offices of U.S., Inc., in the remote place Tanton had placed it. In that attractive city overlooking Little Traverse Bay I would have met U.S., Inc. staffers Dorothy and Niki, retired Presbyterian minister Bob Kyser, lawyer/environmentalist John Rohe, historian Wayne Lutton, and of course environmentalist Mary Lou Tanton—and would have quickly realized that this new acquaintance of mine, John Tanton, represented, and gathered about him, expanding circles of fine Americans....

The first issue [Fall 1990] somewhat vaguely announced that *TSC* would devote its attention to a cluster of issues—population growth, immigration, a common language, the balance between rights and responsibilities. Whatever one thought of *TSC*, there was (and is) nothing quite like it—a place where the taboo-enshrouded topic-cluster of the demographic and cultural transformation of America (and Western Europe and Australia) was robustly reported and analyzed. Each issue of the journal usually had a topical focus—the costs of immigration, the role of the churches in immigration discussion and refugee issues, international immigration flows and politics, immigration, and free trade. ■

