

camera-dominated journalism. Photography convincingly shows us the horrors of starvation; it is very poor at documenting the eventual results of displacing thousands of citizen-workers with fresh immigrants who can be bought for less. Conceivably, skillful journalists might depict the human consequences of immigration in a country that seems never to have cured the unemployment problem, but few journalists make the attempt. As members of what has been called the ‘symbolic class,’ journalists are under no threat of being displaced from their jobs, because it takes more than a generation to become a competent symbolist. Few writers and photographers have a sufficiently sensitive view of the needs of the larger community. Or of posterity. Journalism is dangerously myopic. Our civilization desperately needs to escape the tyranny of the camera.

“The future,” Dennis Gabor said, “cannot be predicted, but futures can be invented.” Statistical studies can correctly identify trends, but they cannot say which trends will be continued. No statement about society’s

future is true in the same sense that the prediction of a future eclipse of the sun is true. As we contemplate the possible futures for humanity we must all decide to what extent we are content to be like “the Man from Mars,” a frighteningly intelligent, purely objective being who, from a great psychological distance, “calls them as he sees them” and does nothing. In human affairs, apparent objectivity can easily lead to fatalism, and fatalism undermines the foundations of democracy.

The alternative is to be ‘participant observers’ of the earthly drama, conserving as much as we can of the best of our civilization for posterity to enjoy. Since reproduction mixes the posterity of many genetic lines, saving something for my posterity ultimately means saving it for all posterity. No matter how family-centered my motives may be, I cannot help but benefit (or harm) everyone’s posterity. ■

[From the Preface of *The Immigration Dilemma: Avoiding the Tragedy of the Commons*. Washington, D.C.: Federation for American Immigration Reform, 1995]

## ‘Tragedy of the Commons’ Author Dies

CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Garrett Hardin never minced words in presenting his unvarnished view of humanity’s impact on the planet. And he was no less direct in planning his death. On September 14, 2003, he and his wife took their own lives at their home in Santa Barbara, California. Hardin was 88, his wife Jane was 81. Both were in very poor health.

Hardin is best known for his 1968 article in *Science*, “The Tragedy of the Commons” (December 13, 1968, p. 1243). It argued that if everyone had free access to common property, the resource would be lost to all. But Hardin was immensely influential in a host of related causes, including environmentalism, population control, abortion rights, and restrictions on immigration. His hard-headed approach to the competition for resources won him notoriety as well as fame — as when he suggested that, if rich people let poor people into their “lifeboat,” all will sink. “The human species viewed as a whole has been a disaster for the Earth,” he said in a 1996 interview.

He “pushed very hard, was an innovative thinker, and is certainly somebody we’re going to miss,” says Stanford University biologist Paul Ehrlich, whose 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, also stoked the debate over population and the environment. Herman Daly, an economist at the University of Maryland, College Park, says that Hardin showed a new breed of “ecological economists” the importance of “giving the welfare of future generations a weight in moral decisions.”

Hardin received a Ph.D. in microbiology from Stanford University in 1941 after studying zoology at the University of Chicago. He taught at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he was professor of human ecology, until his retirement in 1978. He remained active, however, and in 1986 he and his wife helped found Californians for Population Stabilization. His output totaled 27 books and 350 articles.

Friends said the Hardins practiced what they preached by collecting rainwater to drink, recycling, composting, and eschewing newspapers because they squandered newsprint. They were reportedly members of the Hemlock Society and their deaths occurred a week after their 62nd wedding anniversary. They leave four children. ■

[Excerpts from *Science*, September 26, 2003.]