



Population Control Nonsense

BY WALTER E. WILLIAMS

According to an *American Dream* article, “Al Gore, Agenda 21 And Population Control,” there are too many of us and it has a negative impact on the earth (tinyurl.com/63em794). Here’s what the United Nations Population Fund said in its annual State of the World Population Report for 2009, “Facing a Changing World: Women, Population and Climate”: “Each birth results not only in the emissions attributable to that person in his or her lifetime, but also the emissions of all his or her descendants. Hence, the emissions savings from intended or planned births multiply with time. . . . No human is genuinely ‘carbon neutral,’ especially when all greenhouse gases are figured into the equation. Therefore, everyone is part of the problem, so everyone must be part of the solution in some way. . . . Strong family planning programmes are in the interests of all countries for greenhouse-gas concerns as well as for broader welfare concerns.”

Thomas Friedman agrees in his *New York Times* column “The Earth is Full” (June 8, 2008), in which he says, “[P]opulation growth and global warming push up food prices, which leads to political instability, which leads to higher oil prices, which leads to higher food prices, and so on in a vicious circle.”

In his article “What Nobody Wants to Hear, But Everyone Needs to Know,” University of Texas at Austin biology professor Eric R. Pianka wrote, “I do not bear any ill will toward people. However, I am convinced that the world, including *all humanity*, WOULD clearly be much better off without so many of us (tinyurl.com/6jlyzysu).”

However, there is absolutely no relationship between high populations, disaster, and poverty. Popula-

tion-control advocates might consider the Democratic Republic of Congo’s meager 75 people per square mile to be ideal while Hong Kong’s 6,500 people per square mile is problematic. Yet Hong Kong’s citizens enjoy a per capita income of \$43,000 while the Democratic Republic of Congo, one of the world’s poorest countries, has a per capita income of \$300. It’s no anomaly. Some of the world’s poorest countries have the lowest population densities.

Planet earth is loaded with room. We could put the world’s entire population into the United States, yielding a density of 1,713 people per square mile. That’s far

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lower than what now exists in all major U.S. cities. The entire U.S. population could move to Texas, and each family of four would enjoy more than 2.1 acres of land. Likewise, if the entire world’s population moved to Texas, California, Colorado, and Pennsylvania, each family of four would enjoy a bit over two acres. Nobody’s suggesting that the entire earth’s population be put in the United States or that the entire U.S. population move to Texas. I cite these figures to help put the matter

into perspective.

Let’s look at some other population density evidence. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, West Germany had a higher population density than East Germany. The same is true of South Korea versus North Korea; Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore versus China; the United States versus the Soviet Union; and Japan versus India. Despite more crowding, West Germany, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore,

Walter Williams is the John M. Olin Distinguished Professor of Economics at George Mason University.

the United States, and Japan experienced far greater economic growth, higher standards of living, and greater access to resources than their counterparts with lower population densities. By the way, Hong Kong has virtually no agriculture sector, but its citizens eat well.

One wonders why anyone listens to doomsayers who have been consistently wrong in their predictions—not a little off, but way off. Professor Paul Ehrlich, author of the 1968 bestseller *The Population Bomb*, predicted major food shortages in the United States and that by “the 1970s . . . hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death.” Ehrlich forecasted the starvation of 65 million Americans between 1980 and 1989 and a decline in U.S. population to 22.6 million by 1999. He saw England in more desperate straits: “If I were a gambler, I would take even money that England will not exist in the year 2000.”

Expert Poverty

By a considerable measure, poverty in underdeveloped nations is directly attributable to their leaders heeding the advice of western “experts.” Nobel laureate and Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal said (1956), “The special advisors to underdeveloped countries who have taken the time and trouble to acquaint themselves with the problem

. . . all recommend central planning as the first condition of progress.” In 1957 Stanford University economist Paul A. Baran advised, “The establishment of a socialist planned economy is an essential, indeed indispensable, condition for the attainment of economic and social progress in underdeveloped countries.”

Topping off this bad advice, underdeveloped countries sent their brightest to the London School of Economics, Berkeley, Harvard, and Yale to be taught socialist nonsense about economic growth. Nobel laureate economist Paul Samuelson taught them that underdeveloped countries “cannot get their heads above water because their production is so low that they can spare nothing for capital formation by which the standard of living could be raised.” Economist

Ranger Nurkse describes the “vicious circle of poverty” as the basic cause of the underdevelopment of poor countries. According to him, a country is poor because it is poor. On its face this theory is ludicrous. If it had validity, all mankind would still be cave dwellers because we all were poor at one time and poverty is inescapable.

Population controllers have a Malthusian vision of the world that sees population growth outpacing the means for people to care for themselves. Mankind’s ingenuity has proven the Malthusians dead wrong. As a result we can grow increasingly larger quantities of food on less and less land. The energy used to produce food,

per dollar of GDP, has been in steep decline. We’re getting more with less, and that applies to most other inputs we use for goods and services.

Ponder the following question: Why is it that mankind today enjoys cell phones, computers, and airplanes but did not when King Louis XIV was alive? After all the necessary physical resources to make cell phones, computers, and airplanes have always been around, even when cavemen walked the earth. There is only one reason we enjoy these goodies today but did not in past eras. It’s the growth in human knowledge, ingenuity, and specialization and trade—coupled

with personal liberty and private property rights—that led to industrialization and betterment. In other words human beings are immensely valuable resources.

What are called overpopulation problems result from socialistic government practices that reduce the capacity of people to educate, clothe, house, and feed themselves. Underdeveloped nations are rife with farm controls, export and import restrictions, restrictive licensing, price controls, plus gross human rights violations that encourage their most productive people to emigrate and stifle the productivity of those who remain. The true antipoverty lesson for poor nations is that the most promising route out of poverty to greater wealth is personal liberty and its main ingredient, limited government. **FEE**

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