

Editor's Note

The relationship between the environment and population growth attracted renewed and intensified attention in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War as social scientists, philanthropic foundation officers, and population control activists sought to explain the causes of a global war that had brought untold disaster to the nations of the world and death to millions of people. The fundamental cause of war, it was concluded, lay in a Malthusian paradox: The advancement of civilization entails population growth at a geometric rate that eventually outdistances food supplies and national resources. The Second World War revealed that the necessary consequence of overpopulation was famine, war, and death. From this lesson, they warned that a new enemy threatened humanity—rampant population growth.

William Vogt, director of the conservation section of the Pan American Union and later research director at Planned Parenthood of America, articulated this relationship between overpopulation and environmental disaster in his influential *Road to Survival*, published in 1948. Vogt framed his neo-Malthusian argument around the environmental consequences of global overpopulation. He warned that without addressing the problem of overpopulation, international peace was impossible and that the world would face environmental disaster on an unprecedented scale. Translated into nine languages, *Road to Survival* became an international best seller.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, coinciding with the emergence of a reactivated environmental movement, anxiety about overpopulation had become apocalyptic. Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, published in 1968 and distributed by the Sierra Club, an environmental organization based in California, became a best seller going through thirteen editions within the first two years of publication. Warning that unless immediate steps were

taken, the 1970s would be a decade of mass starvation, irreparable environmental disaster, and war. His jeremiad intensified activism on part of the environmental movement, while influencing policy-makers and the general public to support new environmental legislation.

Under the Nixon administration, the federal government extended its role in protecting the environment. When an oil well burst off the California coast and spewed tons of sludge on the beaches in 1969, environmentalists demanded new legislation that led to the enactment of the National Environment Policy Act (1969). This historic law required every federal construction project to have an environmental impact study done before beginning work. Shortly after the passage of this act, Nixon consolidated all anti-pollution programs through the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA under William Ruckelshaus became an activist agency that brought scores of criminal actions against polluters. Nixon also called for drinking water standards, mass transit, stronger land use policies, the protection of coastal wetlands, and the preservation of endangered species. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency consolidated research in these areas. The Clean Air Act (1970) established national emission standards for automobiles and factories. Further legislation was enacted to provide funds to clean the nation's polluted waterways.

This new environmental legislation drew criticism from business groups, western ranchers, miners, lumber interests and farmers. Furthermore, when Ehrlich's predictions of impending disaster in the 1970s proved hyperbolic, at least to his critics, this reinforced a belief that the federal government had become an obtrusive impediment to economic growth. Ronald Reagan captured this anti-federal sentiment in the "sagebrush rebellion" led by western business and agricultural interests that called for an end to regulatory control of western states, where the federal government owned the majority of the land, timber, and mineral resources. During the Reagan presidency environmental groups filed dozens of lawsuits against federal agencies for not enforcing environmental laws or regulations. While environmentalists blasted Reagan, the administration scored some notable environmental successes, including a renewed Endangered Species Act (1982) and several dozen wilderness laws (1984). Nonetheless, environmentalists remained sorely disappointed by Reagan's international record, which included reduced support for the United Nation's environmental and population control programs. He also opposed international treaties on global cooperation for environmental protection of the seas and the atmosphere.

The return of the Democrats to the White House with the election of William Clinton in 1992 restored funding to environmental programs, both domestically and internationally. Clinton's Vice-President, Albert Gore, became a leading advocate of protecting the global environment, as the United

States entered into new international treaties to protect the seas and the atmosphere from pollution and “global warming.” In the decade of the 1990s, environmental issues had become intertwined with issues involving international trade, national security, and international cooperation to address environmental and population problems on a global basis.

Otis Graham in this volume extends the history of environmental politics and policies new directions. Contributors to this volume offer new interpretations of U.S. environmental politics since the 1960s through detailed and refreshingly insightful discussions of policymaking, international trade, and national security. A longtime population activist, Roy Beck, surveys divisions within the population movement over immigration and population control measures. Graham’s *Epilogue* provides a challenging assessment of the state of the environment today, which warns of sanguinity concerning population growth, global warming, waste disposal, and environmental disaster. I believe that Graham’s concluding essay, as well as other essays in the volume, will become historical documents in themselves for future generations of scholars writing about environmental politics and policies in our generation.

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