



FORMERLY THE
AMICUS JOURNAL

onearth

ENVIRONMENT | POLITICS | PEOPLE

SUMMER 2002

When Hate Goes Green

by Michael A. Rivlin

If you want to know what's causing sprawl in America, the immigration reform movement has a simple answer for you. Too simple. Michael A. Rivlin went to Greenville, South Carolina, to find out how the movement is using -- and abusing -- environmental issues.

Mexican-spotting isn't easy, even for an old hand like Terry Odom. Even if, as she has assured me, there are parts of Greenville, South Carolina, that are "just like Juárez." As I discover, you don't need binoculars or a field guide. What's called for is a good internal radar that can detect Latino immigrants a mile away.

Odom, who heads the South Carolina Committee for the Preservation of American Nationhood and Sovereignty, has planned a Saturday rally in the public library to discuss her town's immigration problem. She and her husband, David, are thrilled that I'm interested in her work, and they're driving me through town on a Friday afternoon expedition meant to showcase the cause. She promises me an immigrant bonanza.

"We are overwhelmed with Mexicans," says Terry. "They're taking over everything. I'm a patriotic American. I love America. And I can see that we're going to be a Third World country if we don't do something about this."

Odom, a tiny, rapid-fire woman, spent her childhood in Texas, where her father was a border patrol agent and her mother managed a Mexican restaurant serving mostly Mexicans. David, a country boy raised in Greenville, is a deeply religious born-again Christian with a soft, fleshy face and shy smile. He sits quietly in the back seat, anxious to talk whenever he has the chance.

I've come to Greenville because the Odoms, like many in the immigration control movement, believe that among the litany of evils the Latino immigrants are visiting on their community and the world are crimes against the environment. "They've taken over our parks," Terry tells me. "We have a park a block from us. We couldn't even get near it because of the Mexicans."

It's a theme I've also heard from the large, national anti-immigration groups. I'm here to see firsthand how the issue plays at the grassroots of the movement and to find out whether the environmental concerns of anti-immigration groups are genuine -- or just a smokescreen for their real agenda.

But the Odoms, as I come to understand, believe I'm in Greenville to witness and report on the Mexican

hordes. Generous, gregarious, hospitable Southerners, they assume the role of guides on an African big-game photo safari, leading me into the field to hunt the quarry down. We're driving along White Horse Road, the main Mexican habitat. But late Friday afternoon is apparently the wrong time of day, and we're not having any luck at all. Even with Terry's Mexican detection radar set on high, the Latinos invading Greenville are in hiding.



In a world where barriers are fast falling, people like the Odoms are unsettled by their sudden proximity to other cultures.

Green Themes

"This country -- thirty years after it decided it had to restore and protect the environment -- added over 30 million more people we had to deal with for air pollution [and] water pollution," says Roy Beck of NumbersUSA.

Beck, a ubiquitous figure in the anti-immigration movement, has arrived in my living room via video, in his widely circulated presentation on immigrants and population issues. A nerdy character with thin, brown, conservatively cut hair and wire-frame glasses, Beck worked as an environmental journalist for several years. He has now devoted himself full-time to the cause of convincing people that immigration is a big, big problem, and environmental arguments are a core element of his repertory.

Because of immigrants, the virtual Beck charges, "we have had to...build twice as many sewage treatment plants, build twice as many roads and streets." Ominous music plays at several points in the video, over a shot of a sort of population odometer with the numbers rolling ever higher. How, Beck asks, will the country cope with future growth "if at this population 40 percent of the lakes and streams in this country still are not fishable and swimmable?"

Beck is hardly alone in sounding the immigration/environment alarm. The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), Carrying Capacity Network, Population-Environment Balance, and many others all argue that immigrants should stay home to protect U.S. natural resources -- and the entire global environment. The reasoning is that most immigrants come from less technologically advanced countries, where they consume less energy and fewer commodities and thus, says FAIR, tend to "deplete and damage the earth's resources more slowly...than U.S. consumers."

That's accurate as far as it goes. The United States, with 5 percent of the world's population, is responsible for at least 20 percent of global environmental damage as the result of fossil fuel consumption, deforestation, acid rain, and emission of ozone-depleting substances. Anti-immigration groups consider that fact justification for keeping would-be immigrants in their homelands, where their standards of living will remain low, rather than allowing them into the United States to consume more natural resources. In other words, leave injuring the planet to Americans.

But the environmental issue that most exercises immigration reform activists is suburban sprawl. FAIR calls it "one of the most daunting environmental problems facing humankind."

In 2000, during a period of debate over immigration visas and amnesty provisions, FAIR and other groups mounted an anti-sprawl campaign. It included print and broadcast advertising in South Carolina and the District of Columbia blaming "runaway population growth" for traffic congestion, overcrowded schools, and loss of farmland. (One estimate placed FAIR's 2000 ad budget at \$12 million.)

A NumbersUSA ad in the *Washington Post* showed a photograph of a congested highway with the headline "Don't Get Mad at the Traffic. Get Mad at Congress." And in 2000, Don Chen, director of the anti-sprawl group Smart Growth America, began seeing tables at land-use planning conferences that were staffed by immigration reform advocates.

Then there's the special green version of Roy Beck's 1998 video, "Immigration by the Numbers: An

Environmental Choice." It features an introduction -- replete with footage of wildlife and nature scenes on the one hand, backhoes and construction on the other -- by a woman named Monique Miller, executive director of a now defunct group called Wild Earth, standing in a deep pile of snow. "Americans are worried about sprawl," says Miller. "And the primary cause is population growth. No matter how well we manage that growth...it inevitably leads to more sprawl and congestion."

Amen

Terry Odom has reserved a public meeting room in the back of the Greenville library for one o'clock. Almost as soon as I walk in, a gentleman in a white hat and long white beard hands me a copy of a skinny tabloid entitled *The Truth* (second "T" in the shape of a cross) and hits me up for a one-dollar donation.

In the back of the room, Terry hangs red, white, and blue bunting on a long table displaying various pieces of literature, including the Phyllis Schlafly Report on immigration. Eventually a crowd of fifty settles into their seats.



The meeting begins with an invocation delivered by the minister of the Odoms' Baptist church. An older gentleman with gleaming white hair, the preacher starts out behind the lectern. But as he warms to the crowd he moves out to the side, hooks his left thumb into his belt, picks up his Bible, and holds it in the air. "Where do you go in the Bible to substantiate an argument on immigration?" he asks. "Well, I believe Jesus states it well when he states, 'I am the good shepherd. I am the door of the sheep. The sheep know my voice and I know their voice, and they enter in and out and have good pasture.' Amen! But if any man tries to enter in another way, some way he feels like is better than what God says, then he is nothing short of a thief and a robber. A lot of people are not going to heaven when they die, because they said 'phooey' to what Jesus said."



In the back room of the public library in Greenville, speakers such as Baptist minister Stan Craig, above, warn of an America overrun with immigrants.

The keynote address is by James M. Staudenraus, eastern regional field director for FAIR. Staudenraus is a tall, personable man with a wholesome, all-American face and blond hair, wearing a blue blazer with an American flag pin in the lapel. When I met him a few minutes earlier to ask for an interview, he gave me a booklet detailing the organization's environmental arguments and told me his speech would answer most of my questions. But the message he's delivering now doesn't have a word in it about the environment. Instead, he tells us he's going to "connect the dots" between illegal immigration and September 11 -- "because there's a very, very clear connection."

Among the topics Staudenraus covers: INS incompetence; how globalism, GATT, and NAFTA encourage the flow of cheap immigrant labor to serve the needs of big business; and the "bilingual education racket," a business that "depends on a whole bunch of people coming to this country who don't speak a word of English." Then he turns his attention to the media. "Blinded by their obsession with diversity," he explains, "the news media viciously attack us in the immigration reform movement.

"Let me tell you the thermonuclear response the next time someone calls you a racist," he continues. "You ask them this question: 'Are you saying a person's race gives them the right to come to our country and break our laws?' They'll slink out of the room like you just took their spine out." The audience claps, and Staudenraus is stirred by the applause. "That's exactly what they're saying," he emphasizes. "If a person breaks the law and he's not white like you" -- he is apparently oblivious to the lone African-

American in the audience -- "you have to just let that happen." Then comes the finale: September 11 has changed the immigration debate. "In the wake of the terrorist attacks," Staudenraus tells us, "I think that more Americans understand what you do -- that our immigration system is completely broken. Three thousand people were murdered, and all of a sudden we can talk about why."

One of the few mostly coherent, consistent speakers is Mark Thies, a Clemson University professor of chemical engineering whom Terry has billed as the environment expert. Thies, a wiry, intelligent man wearing a polo shirt, is a longtime member of the Sierra Club and an enthusiastic whitewater canoer. His genuine concerns are forest fragmentation and sprawl. Halfway through, however, he abruptly switches to the growth of state elementary school programs for students for whom English is a second language.

After the rally, some of us adjourn to Prime Sirloin, a huge cafeteria with an all-you-can-eat buffet for \$7.99. The talk of immigration is generously interlaced with bits and pieces about the Confederate flag, abortion, states' rights, property rights, Pat Buchanan, and George W. Bush's betrayal of America.

Flags of Convenience

In many cases, the immigration reform movement's environmental arguments are plausible, reasonable, and similar to those of mainstream environmental groups. But critics charge that the seeming concern for the environment is a sham.

Mitra Rastegar of Political Research Associates, a liberal Massachusetts watchdog group, observes that "the whole 'population control' framework is designed to try and win over more politically moderate people -- to get those people who are not comfortable with blaming immigrants for changing American culture."



James Staudenraus is the eastern regional field director of FAIR, at 70,000 members the nation's largest anti-immigration group.

Patrick Burns of the National Audubon Society, who has followed immigration and population issues closely for more than twenty years, notes that, although there are people in the immigration reform movement with "bedrock, unassailable environmental credentials," the movement is "an opportunistic fighter." Says Burns, "When unemployment was high the immigration reform movement tended to talk about immigration reform as a jobs issue. If sprawl becomes a concern, they pick that up as their topic. So a lot of the rationales for immigration reform -- [whether] illegitimate or legitimate -- are flags of convenience. Because this is the quickest way to sell it."

To understand just how cynical is the claim of some immigration reform organizations that they are driven by concern for the environment, one need only review their materials, their history, and their actions. FAIR, at 70,000 members the country's biggest anti-immigration group, provides a case study.

Staudenraus is a charming man who lives on Shelter Island, New York, likes cats, and gladly shares frequent flier travel tips. According to Patrick Burns, FAIR's board represents a wide range of political views and includes among its principal donors individuals with strong credentials in family planning. But Staudenraus smiles through too much of the bigoted chitchat at meals in Greenville. And, whatever his personal beliefs, it turns out he works for an unsavory organization.

FAIR was founded in 1979 by John Tanton, a Michigan ophthalmologist who is still on its board. Tanton once told a reporter for the Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service that immigration adds millions of people "defecating and creating garbage and looking for jobs." He resigned as chair in 1988 when a memo of his, fretting that California's Anglo population might eventually be outnumbered by Latinos, was made public. "Will the present majority peaceably hand over its political power to a group that is simply more fertile?" he wrote. Also on FAIR's board is celebrated University of California human ecologist Garrett Hardin,

whose essay "The Tragedy of the Commons" is beloved by many environmentalists. But Hardin, according to many published reports, is an ardent supporter of eugenics. In a 1992 article, he wrote that "sending food to Ethiopia does more harm than good" because it "encourage(s) population growth."

There's also the Pioneer Fund, FAIR's most notorious funder (now ex-funder). Located in New York City, the fund was created in 1937 to finance research in hereditary intelligence, eugenics, and "race betterment." One of its grantees was a Canadian professor who theorized that whites have larger brains and therefore greater intelligence than blacks. Between 1985 and 1994, FAIR received \$1.2 million from the Pioneer Fund.

FAIR flies many different flags of convenience besides that of the environment -- because there are very few areas of American life that FAIR thinks are not being worsened by immigration and immigrants. One gets the impression that the organization isn't merely concerned about "mass immigration," but that it just plain doesn't like immigrants. A recent selection of stories from the bulletin board on FAIR's website includes stories on a "Cambodian lifer" who committed murder after release by the INS; an increase in foreign student enrollment at Arizona State University; and a report on how a California appeals court has been lenient with an "illegal alien drug addict."

Among the projects singled out in FAIR's 2000 annual report is its work with the Sachem Quality of Life Organization in Farmingville, New York. Farmingville is one of many suburban towns on Long Island that, like Greenville, have recently experienced a wave of Latino immigrants, most of whom find work as day laborers. SQL's website includes a long "declaration" against "the perils of invasion." "Our neighborhoods are overrun and occupied by foreign nationals," it warns. "This inexorable march toward globalization will yet result in the death of a nation. This must be stopped!" SQL carefully, and cannily, specifies that its opposition is to illegal immigration. But its goal, clearly, is to get the immigrants out of town. Last year, it invited like-minded groups to a "Congress on Immigration Reform." According to a story in the *National Catholic Reporter*, invitations went to the John Birch Society and to American Patrol, an extremist anti-immigration group.

When I first mention SQL to Staudenraus, calling them anti-immigrant, he leaps to their defense. "You'll find that their concerns are not anti-immigrant-based at all," he says. "That's one of the labels that people who don't want a dialogue slap on the movement." And after I return to my office, I discover Staudenraus is no stranger to the Sachem group. In fact, it was he who organized the good citizens of Farmingville as part of FAIR's "citizen action program" -- the same grassroots organizing agenda that has brought him here to Greenville.

Peter Kostmayer, president of the family planning advocacy group Population Connection (formerly Zero Population Growth), calls FAIR "offensive." Adds Kostmayer, "I don't think they're taken that seriously on the Hill. I think people see them for what they are. Members of Congress try to include people -- [but] I think FAIR makes members of Congress a little edgy."

On the other end of the political spectrum is Damon B. Ansell of Americans for Tax Reform. Two years ago, he excoriated FAIR in the *Washington Times* as "hate-filled extremists" and said that true conservatives "should be horrified" to be identified with them.

Unwilling Bedfellows

There are a few bona fide environmentalists who have become advocates of immigration reform. But for the most part, the issue has gotten little traction in the mainstream environmental movement.

At their most rational, immigration reform advocates plead that all they want is for the country to look at the 2000 census numbers. In fact, population is a major environmental issue, and the numbers are worth studying.



Latinos are still a small minority in the South, though their population has tripled in the last decade.

The United States has the third largest population on earth, behind only China and India, and the fastest-growing population of any industrialized country. According to the 2000 census, the nation grew by about 33 million people in the last decade. Of this, about 13 million people, or 40 percent of the growth, were new immigrants. Some demographers, and all immigration control advocates, also count as "immigrants" the U.S.-born children of immigrants, which raises their number to nearly two-thirds of the total growth. If birth rates and immigration rates stay the same, the U.S. population is projected to grow to about 404 million shortly after 2050, and to 571 million -- more than twice the present population -- by 2100.

If they discuss population at all, most mainstream environmentalists do so from a "global" rather than a domestic perspective. They support economic and family planning aid, citing research showing that improved economic conditions lead to smaller families. Worldwide population is in fact growing more slowly now than it was ten years ago (though this has clearly not slowed immigration to the United States). Most environmentalists also reject immigration-based solutions as too provincial. "If an organization wants to shut down the borders to protect part of its own turf," says Kaid Benfield, director of NRDC's smart-growth program, "number one, it's probably not going to work. Number two, I have a problem with that as a matter of environmental ethics. If you care about the planet, you can't protect Texas at the expense of Mexico."

Annette Souder, director of the Sierra Club's global population and environment program, reflects the position of most national environmental groups when she argues that "if we really want to know how we impact the planet, we need to look at how we use resources and how we consume products." She adds, "Large population or small, if you have poor environmental regulations, it doesn't matter."

Southern Hospitality

Greenville, which hugs the foothills of the Smoky Mountains, has indoor football, Double A baseball, and Bob Jones University -- best known for its recently lifted ban on interracial dating. And now there's immigration.

The 2000 census revealed a dramatic rise in Hispanic populations across the South. In South Carolina, the number of Latinos more than tripled in the past decade, rising from 31,000 in 1990 to 95,000. Including illegals, the actual number could be twice that. Greenville has one of the state's highest concentrations of Latinos -- almost 4 percent of the city's total population of about 380,000. Most arrive directly from Mexico, Colombia, and several Central American countries.



Anti-immigration groups complain immigrants contribute to sprawl. Experts see almost no correlation.

There's something else new to Greenville: sprawl. Excess growth into the countryside is an overwhelming environmental problem -- here and just about everywhere else. Between 1982 and 1997, the Greenville-Spartanburg area had a 22 percent increase in population but a whopping 74 percent increase in urbanized land use. Nationwide, in the last twenty years the hundred largest urban areas have sprawled out over more than 9 million additional acres of natural habitats, farmland, woodlots, and other rural space.

But Thomas Meeks of the Greenville County Planning Commission says immigration has had little if any impact on Greenville's sprawl -- other than providing the labor to build it. In fact, given that most of the immigrants take relatively low-paying jobs on construction sites and in the nearby peach orchards, it's hard to see what role they play in driving construction of suburban shopping centers, corporate campuses, and exurb McMansions

with eight bedrooms and four-car garages.

Rolf Pendall, a professor of city and regional planning at Cornell University, says that the style in which people live and the land use plans and patterns and tax laws that govern how they live -- not the sheer number of people -- are the determinants of sprawl.

Pendall's analysis of 282 U.S. metropolitan areas found that population growth explains slightly less than a third of sprawl. Even places experiencing no population growth during the last decade had 18 percent more sprawl. And the 56 metro areas experiencing population declines, such as Pittsburgh and Cleveland, also saw increased sprawl.

"Population growth is a very weak factor contributing to sprawl," says Chen of Smart Growth America, "and a lot less strong than the presence of local and state growth management laws." Chen concludes that immigration's impact on sprawl is "exceptionally weak."

Pendall explains that there are many reasons for the disconnect between population and sprawl. Women may enter the workforce, creating more workplaces, roads to reach them, and attendant sprawl -- all with no population increase. The increased household income they create means those families tend to trade in their current houses for larger ones on larger lots. In areas with slow or no population growth, falling land and housing prices encourage current residents to buy ever larger houses and lots. Local zoning also plays a role; communities of new single-family detached houses in some western states may have six to twelve times the density of fast-growing communities in the Northeast, where local zoning often demands large lots and low density.

Barbara McCann of the Surface Transportation Policy Project adds that, of the 70 percent rise nationwide in miles driven, automobile trips taken, and traffic congestion in the last sixteen years, only 13 percent is attributable to a bigger population. Instead, suggests McCann, most of the auto travel increase is the result of behavior and lifestyle choices, such as living in distant suburbs with no nearby retail shopping.

Mexican-Spotting

Terry Odom telephones me from the lobby of the Greenville Hyatt at seven-thirty Sunday morning, before I've had my coffee. She and David are a good half hour early for a trip we're going to take to a flea market at the fairgrounds on White Horse Road.

The market proves to be a bit of a bust. In the town overrun by Mexicans, in the place where the Mexicans do their shopping, Mexicans prove difficult to actually spot. Most tables are manned by Anglos or African-Americans, who are also doing most of the shopping. Terry is concerned I'll be disappointed.



Spanish-language newspaper publisher Wilfredo Leon says Latinos have been good for Greenville.

So, after we leave, we cruise up and down White Horse Road, making occasional sightings. "There's one," Terry cries, spotting a Latino out the front windshield. "There's one there. They're everywhere. It's just like ants."

At the Hallmark Shopping Center, Terry produces proof positive that the Mexicans have taken over -- a strip mall in which all the stores have signs in Spanish. "You see," says Terry. "What did I tell you?" She reads each sign out loud for the record. There are boutiques, a jewelry store, and a sort of poor man's all-in-one professional financial and legal services store. No galleria anchored by a Neiman Marcus, it is nonetheless a respectable collection of shops. Still, the Odoms see in it the ruination of Greenville.

Our last stop is the "Super Mercado," a grocery store, where the first thing that hits me is a volatile sweet, spicy, exotic aroma. There are stacks of freshly baked tortillas, Mexican canned goods, the smell of cumin and chilies. There's a parrot sitting in a large cage, bottles of hot sauce on the

counter, a huge Plexiglas box filled with gigantic pieces of fried pork rind, and, in the center of the store, a shrine with a statue of the Virgin Mary, cheap plastic flowers and a pool of water at her feet, and I'm enchanted.

But to the Odoms, the place is just "a front." The Mercado, Terry says, is one of the spots where buses regularly discharge newly arrived Mexican immigrants. "They tell them where to get the jobs," she explains. "How to get welfare." The story of the buses is fuzzy, and I can't pin her down as to whether the immigrants are legal or illegal, boarding on the U.S. side or in Mexico. One thing is clear: The people getting off the buses speak Spanish, and that makes Terry mad.

"Spanish," she says, dismissively. "We talk English here, folks. This is America."

Back at the Hyatt, I have a long shower and a beer. Listening to the bigotry is exhausting. It is made worse, not better, by the fact that Terry and David are in all other respects lovely, gentle people. They have charmed me with their kindness and welcomed me as generously as I have ever been welcomed anywhere I've traveled. They are nice to everyone, except the people they hate.

Monday morning, I meet with Wilfredo Leon, publisher of the statewide Spanish-language newspaper *Latino*. Leon is an intense man with closely cropped dark hair and piercing eyes, who speaks deliberately and avoids smiling at all costs. Born in Puerto Rico, he came to Greenville in 1985 via Phoenix to work as an executive for Digital Equipment Corp. He tells me a very different story, quietly offering an antidote to the last three days of poison.

Without my mentioning it, he tells me about the very same Hallmark Shopping Center I've visited with the Odoms. In his version, it's a Latino success story -- a formerly rundown, abandoned area brought back to life.

When I share with him some of the anti-immigration groups' environmental arguments, and the Odoms' belief that Latinos are responsible for an increase in local drug traffic and other crime, Leon is seething, in his controlled fashion. It takes him half a minute to catch his breath.

"My initial reaction to a person who came up to me and said that stuff would just be to walk away," he says. "Because I consider myself an intelligent person. And anyone who'd say something like that I don't consider to be very intelligent. Many nights I'm on the road traveling, and I see the crews building and repairing the bridges or roads. And sometimes I get calls from companies who hire people to do these jobs. And sometimes we have conversations about what's so exciting about hiring Hispanics. And the answer is consistently the same. It has to do with the work ethic of the Hispanic. It's got to do with the dedication and the efficiency and the productivity of these workers. When we had the asbestos cleanup, who was doing that? Hispanics, for the most part. Isn't that the opposite of what these people are saying?"

A call to Sgt. James McCann at the Greenville County Sheriff's Office confirms that the crime situation is not as the Odoms have portrayed it. From 1991 to 2001 the number of Part 1 crimes -- murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft -- remained virtually unchanged, despite a 20 percent overall increase in population.

Leon reassures me that the Odoms and their friends are an aberration, that the presence of international corporations such as Michelin and BMW has lent Greenville a tolerant, almost cosmopolitan atmosphere. "What you heard is not reflective of most people in Greenville," he says.

It's all confirmed when I call Sharon Smathers, executive director of the Greenville County human relations commission. Smathers paints a picture of a thriving group of people in a relatively tolerant place with "very little hate crime."

In Greenville, as in most of the country, the anti-immigration movement remains small. It may make a lot of noise, cause a lot of trouble, but its ideas are unpopular -- a suit that doesn't fit and never will, no matter how skilled the tailoring. Most Americans are not likely to embrace an issue that smacks of bigotry. Conversely, in a refutation of the movement's environmental claims, Latino political leaders and voters in California are emerging as environmental advocates. The *San Jose Mercury News* reported that 74 percent of Latino voters approved a recent bond measure for open space, compared with 56 percent of white voters.

Outside the Greenville Hyatt, there's a new urbanist transformation -- a narrow tree-lined street with a half-dozen restaurants per block, small, smart shops at street level, and apartments up above. Turn the corner, and there's the downtown, a maze of modern tan, gray, and glass buildings and parking lots. There are plenty of pretty trees. The brokerages, newspaper and law offices, and radio and TV outlets all cluster around, keeping Bob Jones University, Pat Buchanan rallies, and the city's smattering of anti-immigrant bigots at bay.