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The 'Fourth Wave' of Mass Immigration

A Book Review by Arthur F. Corwin

MASS IMMIGRATION
AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST

by Vernon M. Briggs, Jr.

M. E. Sharpe, Inc. (1992)

275 pages

Hard cover, \$49.95, Paperback, \$19.95

Vernon M. Briggs is a labor economist at Cornell University and author of many publications about American labor markets and immigration. He served as chairman of the National Council of Employment, 1985-1987. His message in this book is that America has the wrong immigration policies for an economy long immersed in a post-industrial transformation and for a society already swamped with immigrant-fed minority problems. Variations of this message are found in other publications of the author but never has the thesis been so clearly stated, so timely, and so firmly supported by in-depth historical analysis and labor market studies. In short, the book is all about how the "fourth wave" of mass immigration came into being, how it affects the national economy and society, what maintains its growing momentum, and what should be done.

One starting point is the family-reunification act of 1965. As an "unintended consequence" — and the book speaks of many such — the front gates were thrown wide open to family-connected migration from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean in a seemingly endless chain. At the same time, the Federal government failed to enforce immigration control on the Mexican border and at international airports. Thus the "fourth wave."

To provide historical perspective, three earlier waves of mass migration, from 1830-1930, were identified. The "third wave" was especially huge. From 1881 to the national origins quote act of 1924,

close to 27 million immigrants were admitted. In a pre-welfare era, possibly 30 percent returned, especially unattached migrants, or "birds of passage." The "third wave" was, for the most part, "cheap labor" from eastern and southern Europe recruited for labor-intensive industries and services.

The restrictionist acts of the 1920s did not apply to the Western Hemisphere under a policy of Pan American favoritism. Nevertheless, the quota acts of the 1920s did radically reduce, as intended, mass labor migration from non-Nordic Europe. One consequence was that the nation, for the first time, had to turn inward and make greater use of hitherto neglected labor reserves, such as poor whites and blacks in rural America.

As Professor Briggs shows, labor shortages, including that during World War II, benefitted the cause of labor standards and opened opportunities to marginal groups.

From 1946 to 1968, regular immigration remained at modest levels and U.S. labor, all in all, gained. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (McCarran-Walter Act) maintained the national origins system, but gave token quotas to Asian countries. The quota ceiling for the Eastern Hemisphere was around 164,000 per annum. Again, immediate relatives were quota free. Notably, the 1952 Act introduced a new first preference: up to 50 percent of Eastern Hemisphere visas were available to persons with needed knowledge and skills within the system of quota favoritism. As the author comments, in principle, at least, this Act "gave official recognition to the idea that immigration policy could be used as a human resource instrument" (p. 101).

Importantly, outside the quota system, nearly one million displacees and refugees were admitted from Europe in the period from 1946-1962. But as

work ethic. So their adjustment to the U.S. labor market and to mainstream society was relatively easy. In all, the limited and relatively select immigration of that period was beneficial because America was entering an era of post-industrialism that valued quality of labor and the mobile nuclear family rather than quantity and extended-family obligations.

The 1965 amendments abolished quota favoritism for the culturally similar countries of western Europe and opened America to the world on an equal basis — or so it was believed. The amendments, effective in 1968, established a ceiling of 170,000 for the Eastern Hemisphere and per-country ceilings of 20,000 excepting immediate relatives. Revised preferences exempted 80 percent of ceiling immigrants from labor certification, including a 6 percent preference for refugees. Astonishingly, there was a 24 percent preference for brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens. Mexico and other New World nations were exempt from ceiling and preference policies until 1976.

Most importantly, the 1965 Act established this salient fact: *family-unity preferences became entrenched as the supreme priority of national immigration policy.*

As the author demonstrates, the 1965 reformers, obsessed with abolishing quota discrimination or racism, inadvertently revived mass immigration — the "fourth wave" from the kinfolk cultures of the overpopulated Third World. Also, after the "equalization" act, undocumented migration was mostly ignored. So Third World peoples poured into segmented labor markets and into agribusiness and inner-city poverty zones after 1968. Irony of ironies, the new folks were themselves mostly "disadvantaged minorities" (p. 105).

To be sure, there were other "fourth wave" factors. The book contains an excellent summary of permissive legislation and contradictory ad hoc administrative and parole decisions, as well as court interventions in the years from 1965-1990, that have fed mass migration and rising Third World ethnic claims on Mother America. Among many topics given special attention are: the privileged parole treatment for Cuban and Southeast Asian refugees; the Refugee Act of 1980 which promised order, equity and congressional control for refugee admissions, yet established a more generous

definition of deserving refugees; and the beginnings of a poorly defined asylee policy.

The author emphasizes how asylee policy — now involving court challenges, endless grants of extended-voluntary departure, work permits, and disappearing claimants — has become a separate admission track. In fact, asylee migration has "taken on a life of its own" (p. 143).

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All of the foregoing suggests that U.S. immigration policy is now many tracked and increasingly shaped by foreign policy, domestic politics, ethnic groups, doctrinaire liberals, religious ministries, court decisions, and the magic wand of the presidential parole power — but not by labor market considerations.

Due consideration is given to the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy (1979-1981) and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). To protect labor markets, sanctions were authorized on employers of illegal aliens. Yet the same act legalized the presence of hundreds of thousands of unskilled workers in the U.S. economy and invited more by failing to authorize a counterfeit-proof I.D. system. In the Briggs judgments, IRCA so far has been a "dismal" failure in terms of enforcement (pp. 162-163).

The omnibus Immigration Act of November 29, 1990 is carefully appraised. Although hailed as a great landmark in immigration history, it is doubtful, says the author, that any member of congress has read the whole thing: 277 rococo pages. No significant cutbacks were made in emotionally charged family unity migration. Instead, the global ceiling, set in 1980 at 270,000, plus immediate relatives and refugees, was raised by 35 percent for persons having needed skills or lacking family connections, and for a medley of smaller "deserving" groups, such as Tibetans, Hong Kong Chinese, and undocumented Irish bartenders. To accommodate all,

the global ceiling was raised to 750,000 for the years 1992-1994, and 675,000 thereafter, not including refugees. All this in the very teeth of a deepening recession.

The Act set up separate admission tracks for immediate relatives, family-connected preferences, employment-based immigrants, investors, and "diversity" immigrants from countries slighted by the kinfolk priorities of the 1965 Act. Supporters proclaimed that America would now have a greater proportion of work-related immigrants and, at last, a global cap.

"[The 1990 Immigration Act is] the very antithesis of the comprehensive national planning that Briggs and other distinguished labor economists believe is necessary for a post-industrial America..."

Dr. Briggs delivers a scathing critique of this Christmas-tree legislation. For example, only 20 percent would be admissions based on skills, the same percentage that prevailed prior to 1990. And the so-called cap can easily be punctured by a rising number of immediate relatives admitted under the cap. As for visa lotteries to compensate immigrants from certain countries, it "cheapens the immigration process" — the same for rich investors buying their way into America for a million dollars (p. 242). As for the new expression of the parole power called "temporary protected status" (with work permit) for undocumented Salvadorans, and for assorted visa overstays claiming adversity in the home country, this may be another track for unskilled migration.

Mass Immigration and the National Interest spotlights the mishmash 1990 Immigration Act as the very antithesis of a comprehensive national planning that Briggs and other distinguished labor economists believe is needed for a post-industrial America facing growing income, social, and racial divisions — and possibly economic decline. The point is elaborated in a chapter given to economic and social transformations that show comparatively small gains in manufacturing employment since the 1950s while America shifts towards a service-based economy requiring more extensive training and formal

education in most cases. So why a massive infusion of "fourth wave" people? America already has an immense surplus of unskilled and semiliterate labor.

The author holds that any alleged labor shortage could be met, if America, like other advanced industrial countries, placed greater emphasis on integrated national planning for human-resource development.

In the meantime, from FY 1971 through FY 1990, over 12 million immigrants were legally admitted, including ongoing amnesty recipients. Uncounted were several million undocumented. An estimated 85 percent of these people came from the Third World. Relatively few of these family-connected migrants return.

Attention is called to non-immigrant workers. In FY 1989, non-immigrants with work authorizations numbered 856,000, including students, industrial trainees, farm workers, and persons with special skills. About half were actually employed. In various ways, "temporaries" become permanent immigrants. In truth, employers find it hard to work with family-preference migration and America's failure to promote professional training.

The author's proposals for setting a new course for immigration policy include: adjustable ceilings; admissions tied to labor market needs and social conditions; a special executive agency to set numbers, or the return of administrative responsibility to the Department of Labor where it was until 1940; no nepotism; immediate relatives and refugees under ceilings; control of illegals; and a counterfeit-proof identification system.

For the benefit of legislators, editorialists and think-tank associates, the final chapter, containing an analysis of the 1990 Act and the author's recommendations, should be divided into two, especially to highlight his main proposals. In sum, this is a basic work on public policy, scholarly, measured, lucid, and with a consistent message throughout: the need for a responsible immigration policy. It is also a primer on the history of immigration policy since World War II. Other valuable features include well placed tables that state the case with statistical eloquence.

This is a book that should not be missed by citizens concerned with this important topic. ■

Robert McConnell disputes the author's contention that California has successfully managed water supplies. McConnell is an associate professor of Geology at Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, Virginia, and has his Ph.D. in Geology from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Who Gets the Water?

A Book Review by Robert McConnell

DIVIDING THE WATERS: GOVERNING GROUNDWATER IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By William Blomquist

San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies

413 pp., \$44.95 (hardcover)

\$14.95 (paperback)

William Blomquist has presented an informative story of the historical development of groundwater "management" strategies for eight groundwater basins in the Los Angeles metropolitan region of southern California. He attempts to demonstrate that local solutions by polycentric *ad hoc* organizations to water supply issues are feasible, more efficient and infinitely more workable than those imposed by central bureaucracies or "water czars."

The book seeks to explain how various and, importantly, *different* "solutions" to groundwater overdraft developed in each of the eight groundwater basins studied. Blomquist documents how the solutions were developed by consensus among the water users themselves (supervised closely by the courts) and were not imposed from Sacramento or Washington. He then cites them as examples of the success of local governance over central planning.

While conceding that roughly one in ten groundwater basins throughout the state is still in overdraft, he states "groundwater use had been brought under control in most of the area's major groundwater basins by 1980. How this happened, and the institutions and organizations created to bring about and sustain that control, are the subjects of this study."

In the book's preface, Robert B. Hawkins, Jr., president of the Institute for Contemporary Studies (the book's publisher), promotes these "solutions" as evidence that citizens who "have the opportunity to engage in self-governing, collective action" and who "are able to successfully address issues as complex and vexing as those surrounding groundwater [use]" can avoid "tragedies of the commons," and by inference can solve environmental and resource allocation

problems much more efficiently than large governmental entities devoted to centralized planning (such as EPA), which "now [prevail] in most areas of our lives."

The eight basins studied are: Raymond Basin, West Basin, Central Basin, Main San Gabriel Basin, San Fernando Valley, Mojave River, Chino Basin and Orange County.

It is also well to state at the beginning what the book does not do: it does not describe the specific detailed hydrological attributes of each basin, which unfortunately is critical to understanding why the management strategies "worked" in the various basins. Central to the "success" that each basin has achieved is high permeability coupled with low compactability of the shallow aquifers, which allow them to be used, as it were, as massive underground storage tanks to be overdrafted and refilled cyclically without suffering permanent damage. The author in fact interchanges incorrectly two important terms: *porosity* (a measure of the pore volume within media), and *permeability* (a measure of the rate of fluid flow through media). He also incorrectly interchanges *soils* and *sediment*. To be fair, Blomquist is a political scientist, not a hydrologist or geologist. And, to be sure, he provides a valuable discussion on the general behavior and characteristics of groundwater basins. Nor does the book consider issues of groundwater degradation in any significant detail.

The book does contain much valuable data: usable storage capacity of California groundwater basins is immense, 143 million acre-feet (1AF equals nearly 326,000 gallons), triple the capacity of surface impoundments; groundwater provides one-third of all the water used in southern California; there are nearly 450 discrete groundwater basins in the state; and so forth. Moreover, there is a very informative chapter describing characteristics of the state's four watersheds: San Gabriel River, Mojave River, Los Angeles River and Santa Ana River. The history of groundwater development, and incidentally the