
Nativism and the Environmental Movement

Demography drives human destiny.
—Meredith Burke, *Negative
Population Growth*.¹

The call of immigrants to America's shores is one of our country's most foundational stories. But if we are indeed a great melting pot, many of us have been burned along the way. Since at least the eighteenth century, every wave of people immigrating to the United States has had to deal with the antagonism of those who immigrated before. The result has been a vicious cycle of "quality-of-life" nativism, by the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant community in particular and by successive groups of European Americans in general.² This includes nativism directed at Austro-Hungarians, Chinese, Filipinos, Germans, Indian immigrants, the Irish, Italians, Japanese, Jews, Mexicans, Poles, Russians, Scandinavians, and people from all over Latin America and the Caribbean. Nativist movements today are not fundamentally different from those of the past. The claims of threats to "quality of life," "American culture," and the anxiety over "limited resources" continue to animate and motivate these groups, and the quest for environmental privilege has always fit nicely into that model of racism.³

If the peoples of America make up one half of our triumphant national saga, then the land itself is the other half. Ours is a country that glories in its majestic landscapes and great natural riches, “from sea to shining sea.” But that glory is not without its downside. Our environmentalist history does not just harbor strains of nativism here and there; rather nativism is embedded throughout.

As an effort to protect the finite resources of the earth, the idea of controlling the world’s population seems like an excellent one. Many who support the ideas of family planning and an awareness of our ecological impact are motivated by genuine concern for our planet. But there is also a dark side to such efforts. Many of the organizations and governments that have made attempts to control human reproduction have had other goals in mind.

The conquest of Native lands and peoples was supported by U.S. federal law and several Supreme Court decisions, all of which relied on the view that such actions were just and moral because of the inherent superiority of European American culture and people.⁴ Native peoples were viewed as foreigners in their own land and were judged incompetent stewards of nature.⁵ In the early twentieth century, many European American elites turned their sights on newcomers and identified immigrants as a primary cause of ecological woes in the cities. Specifically, immigrants were blamed for the rise in urban pollution, when in fact, these populations were associated with polluted spaces because they had to live and work in smoke-choked neighborhoods and occupationally hazardous factories and sweatshops.⁶ Many leaders of environmental preservationist groups at the time—including William Hornaday, Madison Grant, and Henry Fairfield Osborn—decried the influx of Jewish immigrants and other newcomers from Italy, China, and Japan as a threat to American values concerning the sanctity of wild places. In some locations, tensions arose between members of the upper classes who hunted for sport and trophies, while many Italian immigrants hunted for food sources. Prominent environmentalists in the early 1900s worked with the eugenics movement in the United States, viewing immigrants and people of color as naturally inferior to Anglos, and voicing approval of reproductive restrictions on these groups.⁷ In fact, the noted preservationist and eugenicist Madison Grant collaborated with Margaret Sanger, the early U.S. women’s movement leader and supporter of birth-control technologies, on parallel agendas, revealing how

gender and women's reproductive capacity underpin ideological battles over immigration and population growth.

Despite our enormous advances at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the power of racism continually presents itself in both environmentalist and nativist movements. At the 1987 Round River Rendezvous gathering of environmentalists, the EarthFirst! founder Dave Foreman and his fellow EF! activist and author Edward Abbey insulted the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean by describing them as backward and primitive.⁸ Abbey's 1988 book, *One Life at a Time, Please*, featured his favorite essay—"Immigration and Liberal Taboos." Abbey, who has inspired innumerable radical ecologists the world over, wrote in that essay that "it might be wise for us as American citizens to consider calling a halt to the mass influx of even more millions of hungry, ignorant, unskilled and culturally-morally-genetically impoverished people."⁹

There are many possible explanations for the persistence of nativist environmentalism. Historically, nativist scholars, politicians, and activists in the United States have often harbored concerns about the prospect of "race suicide" that might result from either a lack of white population growth or from being "overrun" and outpaced reproductively by non-whites.¹⁰ More recently, since the 2000 Census, several states now have "majority minority" populations (collectively, the African American, Latino, Arab, and Asian American populations in these cities are larger than the white populations), predictions that the United States as a nation will one day follow suit with a white minority have generated some anxiety. According to that Census, almost half of the one hundred largest cities in the United States are, for the first time, "majority minority" cities.¹¹ This is largely the result of white flight to the suburbs and increasing Latino and Asian immigration. California, Hawai'i, New Mexico, and Texas have already reached "majority minority" status, and more states are expected to join the ranks in the coming years. Reports of these demographic shifts have produced fear and worry among native-born whites concerned that it is not just "their jobs," but now "their *country*" that is in danger of being taken over by foreigners. This anxiety is directed mostly toward immigrants as whites and other citizens try to restrict access to education, health and social services, decent jobs, housing, and a broad range of environmental amenities. Those are long-standing and continuing nativist concerns.

Because the U.S. electorate is so deeply divided on the issue of undocumented immigration, none of the recent federal proposals to address “the immigration problem” is finding traction with the majority. One divide in this battle is between nativist conservatives who seek to increase “border security” and prevent “amnesty” for immigrants versus more liberal politicians who wish to allow some undocumented persons to eventually gain citizenship—but only after a stringent series of language, labor market, residential, financial, and other requirements are met. Another set of major players in this drama are leaders of the business community who seek lower wage labor in the context of a highly competitive global economy. Virtually none of the major proposals put forth in recent years addresses concerns over living wages, human, civil, and labor rights for immigrant workers who desire regularization. This debate will continue, and intensify, given the failure of NAFTA to alleviate migration pressures.¹²

These long-standing debates are now tinged with even greater consequences. The dangerous coupling of the nativist and environmental movements, what we term “nativist environmentalism,” is today all the more potent because our planet’s ecological systems are in peril and many conservationists believe that the vast interior spaces in the United States are relatively pristine and are capable of being “saved” from humankind’s ravages. The western European idea of the “virgin land” or “empty land” is also critical in this regard. This concept stems from a centuries-old doctrine concerning the protocols that early European explorers were directed to follow. The idea was that the only foreign lands that Europeans could morally and legally inhabit were those that were either devoid of people or where the existing natives entered into treaty-making and negotiations to allow such activity. Of course, there were few places on the planet where Europeans ventured that actually had no people, so colonizers produced a logic that placed these indigenous peoples outside of the realm of law and history. Since they were subhuman they had no rights to the territory on which they lived; thus, Europeans could rightfully and conveniently inhabit these lands after all.¹³ This myth of the virgin or empty land and the accompanying notion of European entitlement to foreign lands—indeed any lands they saw fit to explore and occupy—was operative in the founding and conquest of the Americas, Australia, and elsewhere.¹⁴ We contend, though, that the myth of the empty land is at the root of what undergirds nativist environmentalism in the United States today. It is what authorizes

European Americans to continue occupying Native American land, and it is precisely that which facilitates the exclusive access to spaces of environmental privilege throughout this country.

Too Many Brown People

The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) is the largest and most influential immigration control organization in the United States and one of the most active groups maintaining the links between immigration and environmental politics. Since 2003, FAIR has worked to intervene in the national debates over guest worker programs for undocumented persons. John Tanton, who served as a past president of the Sierra Club, founded FAIR in 1978. This organization claims that undocumented immigration is diminishing jobs and other critical resources for native-born U.S. citizens. One of the main forces behind the 1994 passage of California's Proposition 187, FAIR targeted undocumented immigrants in order to deny them public services.

The organization's leadership is a Who's Who of American eugenicists and respectable racists. The late Dr. Garrett Hardin was a founding board member. Hardin was a biologist who enjoyed fame for his 1968 essay "The Tragedy of the Commons," in which he argued against the idea of shared public resources and in favor of a Darwinian-Hobbesian struggle, a ringing endorsement of public policy organized around the idea of survival of the fittest. Hardin used a "lifeboat" metaphor to describe the relationship among the earth, its ecosystems, and human populations. On a lifeboat, there simply are "not enough resources for everyone to share," so some people will have to be thrown off.¹⁵ Hardin was a longtime supporter of eugenics and publicly opposed sending food relief to poor nations on the grounds that their populations were threatening the planet's "carrying capacity."¹⁶ Not surprisingly, he proposed population control via abortion, sterilization, and family size limitation, all of which have strong racial implications.¹⁷ Hardin was once quoted in a magazine interview arguing that "[I]t would be better to encourage the breeding of more intelligent people rather than the less intelligent."¹⁸ He was a Eugenics Society fellow in 1977 and went on to become a founding member of FAIR and Californians for

Population Stabilization (CAPS). Hardin and his wife, both of whom committed suicide in 2003, had their deaths memorialized by Linda Thom of the white nationalist group VDare (the name of this organization refers to Virginia Dare, the first white person born of English immigrants in the Virginia colony). Thom stated, "I have never met such environmentally conscious people."¹⁹

John Tanton became infamous for a memo, which he wrote to members of another organization he founded, that stated "As whites see their power and control over their lives declining, will they simply go quietly into the night? Or will there be an explosion?"²⁰ Tanton also owns a publishing house, the Social Contract Press, which has published such books as *Immigration Invasion* and many others by prominent nativists like Garrett Hardin, Roy Beck, Samuel Huntington, Richard Lamm (former Democratic governor of Colorado and former president of Zero Population Growth), and Michelle Malkin. The press's editor, Wayne Lutton, has been affiliated with the Council of Conservative Citizens (the contemporary successor to the White Citizens Councils of the 1950s and 1960s, which fought racial desegregation efforts), and refers to himself as a "right wing green."²¹ Tanton also helped found the U.S. English organization that spearheaded many "English only" campaigns attacking bilingual education programs around the nation (and counted former Labor Secretary Linda Chavez and legendary television broadcaster Walter Cronkite among its board members). This group has fought to pass laws that would mandate that English be the exclusive and official language used for communications in all U.S. institutions.²²

Tanton is also a past president of Zero Population Growth (ZPG), an organization whose mission statement declared "Overpopulation threatens the quality of life for people everywhere."²³ The organization officially changed its name to Population Connection in 2002. Taking a seemingly broader view on immigration, Population Connection states that they are a "national grassroots population organization that educates young people and advocates progressive action to stabilize world population at a level that can be sustained by Earth's resources."²⁴

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), organizations like FAIR and Population Connection "skirt the line between right-wing immigrant reform organizations and racist, nativist hate groups."²⁵ John Tanton also founded U.S. Inc., which serves as an umbrella

organization for many of these groups. With Tanton as its chairperson, U.S. Inc. “undertake[s] a variety of projects related to the conservation of natural resources, population, immigration, and language policy.”²⁶ Although primarily identified for his anti-immigration politics, Tanton has always been on record that he is first and foremost an environmentalist, which only underscores our contention that there has frequently been a convergence between nativism and environmentalism in this country.

The alleged scientific basis for most arguments that immigrants threaten “our” carrying capacity is derived from a mathematical formula (I=PAT), which Paul Ehrlich and John Holdren developed in the 1970s, and which Garrett Hardin and many respected academics have used for years. The formula states that the environmental *Impact* of human groups equals *Population* size, multiplied by *Affluence* (or the average volume of goods consumed per person), multiplied by *Technology* (or the pollution that results when goods are consumed). There are many problems with this model, such as its blind spot concerning the political and financial institutions that shape consumption patterns and that wealthy populations consume far more than do the poor. But that has not stopped some of the most distinguished scientists from using this model to declare doom and gloom at the hint of another immigrant crossing or, indeed, even giving birth.

Organizations like NumbersUSA and the Center for Immigration Studies have effectively taken the basic IPAT equation and translated it into language that is more accessible and digestible for the average person. Consider the text from an immigration control organization’s pamphlet: “Sick of the traffic sprawl and congestion? You can do something about it.” The pamphlet features a photo of a white man in his car in the middle of a traffic jam, wearing a suit and throwing up his hands in exasperation. The pamphlet goes on to state “The evidence is clear: sprawl cannot be tamed unless Congress stops forcing U.S. population growth!” This message is accompanied by a statement that reads “sprawl worsens dramatically the more a city grows in population.”²⁷

NumbersUSA is a Washington, DC–based organization that produces literature, statistics, and other data about the alleged impacts of current immigration numbers on “the American people.” Roy Beck, the director of NumbersUSA, is a tireless immigration control campaigner and has given countless presentations of his film *By the Numbers* to communities and

government bodies around the country. He often serves as the major consultant to municipalities crafting nativist legislation. Beck was credited as one of the primary influences behind the nativist environmental resolution passed in Aspen, Colorado in 1999.²⁸ Like some of the more respectable Beltway nativist lobbyists, Beck goes to great pains to convince people that he is not a racist and harbors no anti-immigrant sentiments.²⁹ Despite its solid budget and soaring membership, NumbersUSA practices the frugality that it preaches: the organization shares an office with the groups ProEnglish and Evangelicals for Immigration Reform.³⁰ Further evidence of the integration between nativism and environmentalism is that NumbersUSA receives most of its \$3 million budget from sources that strongly identify with environmental conservation.³¹

The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) produces reports, congressional testimonies, and op-eds that build on the same message. Steven Camarota is the CIS director of research and offered the following statement to a congressional committee:

[I]mmigration will add 76 million people to the population over the next fifty years [which] means that we will have to build something like 30 million more housing units than would otherwise have been necessary. . . . This must have some implications for worsening the problems of sprawl, congestion, and *loss of open spaces*, even if one makes optimistic assumptions about successful urban planning and “smart growth.” A nation simply cannot add nearly 80 million people to the population and not have to develop a *great deal of undeveloped land*.³²

The CIS proudly bills itself as “the nation’s only think tank devoted exclusively to research and policy analysis of the economic, social, demographic, fiscal, and other impacts of immigration on the United States.”³³ In a recent *Los Angeles Times* editorial, the CIS executive director Mark Krikorian says it all: “Fewer Migrants Mean More Benefits.”³⁴

NumbersUSA, CIS, and many other nativist groups contributed to the demise of the comprehensive immigration bill that George W. Bush proposed in June 2007. This bill was a difficult compromise, which created major hurdles to citizenship for undocumented persons and gave considerable influence to politicians anxious about threats of terrorists crossing the border. The bill would have offered legal status and a path to

citizenship to millions of undocumented immigrants and launched a new temporary worker program while building up militarized security measures on the Mexico–U.S. border. Conservative pundits and talk show hosts on AM radio stirred up millions of people, repeatedly referring to the bill as an “amnesty” proposal, and worked with nativist groups to bring the bill to a halt through a massive phone and Internet campaign. This successful effort garnered many new supporters for nativist-environmental organizations. Rosemary Jenks, a NumbersUSA staffer, reported that the group added seven thousand new members in a single day during the height of the debate.³⁵

Frank Sharry, the executive director of the National Immigration Forum (a pro-immigrant advocacy group) states “Roy Beck takes people who are upset about illegal immigration for different reasons, including hostility to Latino immigrants, and disciplines them so their message is based on policy rather than race-based arguments or xenophobia.”³⁶ This is a pattern we have noticed repeatedly among many contemporary nativist groups, especially those that are insiders in lobbying circles in the nation’s capital. They go to considerable lengths to declare that they are not racist and are only interested in “preserving a way of life.” Excluding others is simply a crude way of ensuring that goal. Other activists echo this “new racism” of kind words and harsh deeds. A former meatpackers’ union steward who opposed the 2007 immigration bill told a reporter “We are not racists, nor are we bigots. . . . We are not interested in doing anything other than preserving a way of life.”³⁷ That same year, a suburban, white, Michigan woman told a newspaper reporter, “These people came in the wrong way, so they don’t belong here, period. . . . This hit home with me because I knew it was taking away from our people. . . . What happened to taking care of our own people first?”³⁸ This language gives cause for concern because it is exactly what many white southerners (and whites everywhere) said when they opposed racial equality in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. To underscore this point, David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan leader, has been particularly active around the contemporary immigration debate.³⁹

Barbara Coe and Glenn Spencer are nativist organizers who enjoy a national following. They are often credited with authoring California’s Proposition 187 and are openly racist, unlike some Beltway activists. Spencer once commented that “the Mexican culture is based on deceit,” and he has never denied making this statement when confronted by pro-immigrant

activists or the media. Coe has described immigrants as “the people who take our jobs, trash our environment, rob, rape, and murder us and then demand we reward them for sharing their drugs and disease with us.”⁴⁰

Gender Politics

One cannot understand nativist-environmentalist politics without grasping how deeply certain ideas concerning gender permeate the movement, from the university and the cities to the rural communities and from Aspen to the U.S. Congress. Immigrant women are blamed for producing children who then become the public burden, the cultural contaminant, and the driving force of ecological decline.

The environmentalist slogan “Love Your Mother—Don’t Become One” deftly places accountability for ecological harm on women’s reproduction. This kind of ideological bent might be expected from right-wing nativist groups, but some EarthFirst! activists and other radical environmentalists have given voice to this framing of the problem for years. At the 2009 EarthFirst! Round River Rendezvous, a young Chicana told us that an activist friend of hers decided not to attend the event out of fear that she would be chastised for being a mother and therefore responsible for adding an additional ecological burden (i.e., a baby) to the planet with finite resources. It becomes evident then, that white racism and patriarchy work together to reinforce nativist-environmentalism. Sara Diamond, a critic of right-wing movements, notes that “Two staples of anti-immigrant literature are the obligatory photos of Mexican ‘illegal aliens’ running perilously from INS agents across traffic on San Diego freeways, and the requisite folklore about ‘legions’ of pregnant Mexican women arriving in Texas just in time to suck up free childbirth services and ‘instant citizenship’ for their newborns.”⁴¹

This linkage among gender, immigration, and population is central in the ideology that blames immigrant women’s fertility for the problems of global ecological degradation, for which corporations, militaries, and governments are arguably largely responsible, according to many progressive scholars.⁴² The feminist scholar Betsy Hartmann calls this the “degradation narrative” or the idea that poor women around the globe produce too

many children, which drives up population numbers, causing environmental harm and poverty. Under this model—which Hartmann rejects—the poor are to blame for their own poverty and for the environmental crisis that affects the rest of us, including the rich.⁴³

An example of the degradation narrative was a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*, paid for by the Population Institute. It reads: “Stop: Denying poor women protection from unintended pregnancies. Grinding Poverty, Hunger, Resource Depletion, Environmental Degradation. Civil Unrest.”⁴⁴ The photograph accompanying this message is of a group of women and children, presumably from South or Southeast Asia. The advertisement decries the Bush administration’s freezing of \$34 million that Congress had approved for the UN Population Fund that would go to family planning in the global South. The advertisement claims that U.S. funding for this work is now \$100 million less than what it was in the 1990s because of the right-wing anti-abortion agenda of the Bush regime. While that critique of the pro-life lobby is warranted, this advertisement is sponsored by an organization that encourages population control and could all too easily reinforce the agenda of eugenicists and population control advocates who care less about people and more about having fewer of them on their planet. Considering how powerfully destructive economic globalization is of ecosystems and how it consistently produces increasing economic inequalities, the degradation narrative reflects a selective viewpoint on environmental politics.

Nativist-Environmentalism and the American Way of Life

The desire to “preserve our way of life” and to protect “American” culture, language, borders, and jobs through restrictive immigration policies is also a desire to preserve environmental privilege; such policies mark certain spaces as the birthright for some groups and off-limits to others. At the forefront of promoting the immigration-environment nexus, FAIR’s website argues:

Protecting the environment requires opposing immigration-driven population growth. Reigning in American’s rapid population growth

is necessary for the sake of the environment and for the preservation of the quality of life for future generations. As a prime factor in the demand for new housing, construction, urban sprawl, and the consumption of natural resources, immigration must be significantly reduced.⁴⁵

Within this quote is a convenient amnesia that allows European Americans to ignore the fact that they were once immigrants to this land. A major difference between today's immigrants and the British migration of the seventeenth century is that the latter were part of a violent colonization and conquest of the land and its peoples. However, FAIR is not about to let history get in the way; they are more worried about their future. A similar pamphlet from NumbersUSA reads, "The environmental choice is yours: a sustainable future with a stabilizing U.S. population or never-ending U.S. population growth."⁴⁶

To the contrary, much of urban sprawl occurs because of "white flight" from urban centers to the edges of metropolitan areas, combined with the work of developers who build bedroom communities there, pushing these boundaries into previously rural and ecologically sensitive spaces.⁴⁷ This is nothing new. For instance, General Motors, Firestone, Mack Truck, Phillips Petroleum, and Standard Oil bought up and dismantled the electric trolley systems in Los Angeles and one hundred other cities during the 1930s and 1940s in order to create a consumer demand for the automobile, tires, and gasoline.⁴⁸ This action contributed immensely to the massive sprawl we see across the United States today. In other words, white residents, developers, the government, and corporations have contributed massively to environmental degradation in this country. And they did that with little help from immigrants from south of the border.

Border-crossing itself has become a controversial issue for ecologists who worry that migrants have a negative impact on natural habitats on the border. People have raised concerns that undocumented persons harm fragile and endangered plants during their journey from Mexico to the United States. Additionally, there are claims that migrants sometimes damage the nests of endangered birds and even eat their eggs.⁴⁹ This may all be true, but it misses the larger point that a focus on immigration ignores a host of other major causes of ecological decline in the United States and around the world.

Some nativist-environmentalists put forth a critique of American consumerism as a cause of environmental degradation. They argue that instead of reducing our own consumption here at home, we should simply keep immigrants out so that there will ultimately be fewer Americans voraciously consuming the planet's resources. The Carrying Capacity Network offers a typical example of this tortured logic:

[W]e need to recognize the simple fact that the last thing this world needs is more Americans. The world just cannot afford what Americans do to the earth, air, and water. And it does not matter whether these Americans are Americans by birth or by border crossing. It does not matter what color their skin is. It does not matter what language they speak or which God they worship. What matters is that they will live like Americans. We need to accept the fact that the environmental community's admirable efforts to reduce our consumption and pollution have largely failed.⁵⁰

According to this quote, environmentalism is dead, and we should surrender to nativist policies in order to "preserve *our* way of life," as problematic as it is. Certainly, Americans *do* consume more resources than most everybody else: "The United States is home to 5 percent of the world's population yet consumes 30 percent of the world's resources."⁵¹ Given this reality, it seems the targets of environmental initiatives should be the wealthiest communities. There is far greater benefit for everyone if the privileged few consume less. The position of the Carrying Capacity Network and other similar organizations works against environmentalism in their capitulation of gross unequal consumption as inevitable. We (the authors of this book), on the other hand, have a more optimistic view of the environmental movement and believe that social justice is still possible through the equitable care of global ecosystems. However, it seems the lure of nativist policies that favor anti-immigration legislation and population control is too powerful for many environmental organizations to ignore. It is far easier to target segments of vulnerable populations than to focus on the extremely privileged few.

Nativism was recently at the center of an intense debate within the nation's largest environmental organization—the Sierra Club. That struggle provides a useful lesson with regard not only to the ways these sensitive issues are approached by politically liberal organizations but also what the implications might be for environmental justice politics.

The Sierra Club Case

The Sierra Club recently published a pamphlet “Family Planning and Women’s Empowerment: Saving Lives and the Environment.” The publication contains photos of African and Latin American women and their children. The text declares “nearly 600,000 women die in pregnancy or child-birth each year” and continues with the following statement:

Many of these deaths could have been averted if women had access to reproductive health care. A growing population places pressure on the environment by depleting vital resources. Empowerment of women and universal access to family planning and reproductive health services are integral to curbing global population growth and improving the quality of life for families throughout the world. In 1994, 180 nations agreed to this approach, but since 1995 the United States has cut funding for family-planning programs and projects that empower women. Urge your senators to save women’s lives and protect the environment by increasing funds for these projects.

Under pressure from pro-life organizations that felt that women the world over should be shielded from the “sin” of abortion, President George W. Bush further cut funding for international family planning. Most women’s rights advocates condemned this action.⁵² The Sierra Club’s response, however, was a standard “degradation narrative” of white environmentalists from the United States seeking to “rescue” poor women in the global South—indeed saving these women from themselves. Bush’s policy was no more offensive than the thinly veiled conclusion in the Sierra Club pamphlet that one of the major environmental problems is the fertility and reproductive behavior of women of color around the globe. The environmental movement will fall short of its goals if it continues to blame women of color for the world’s ecological crises, and the Sierra Club pushes that unfortunate message just as much as any other group.

In the 1990s, the Sierra Club was the target of two attempted takeovers by nativists who wished to convert the nation’s largest environmental organization into a much more open advocate for immigration control. With a membership of more than 700,000 people and a budget hovering around

\$100,000,000, the organization is an attractive mark. The symbolic value of taking over the Sierra Club would be irresistible to “outside” forces seeking to influence the U.S. environmental movement.

Although the fireworks did not start until the mid-1990s, the Sierra Club takeover began in the 1980s. In 1986, in a series of strategy memos at the FAIR organization, mentions were made of a possible move against the club. In one such memo, John Tanton wrote, “The Sierra Club may not want to touch the immigration issue, but the immigration issue is going to touch the Sierra Club!” He also rhetorically asked in the memo, “Will the present majority peaceably hand over its political power to a group that is simply more fertile?”⁵³

Then in 1996 and 1998, the Sierra Club weathered attempts to put ballots to the membership that would embrace an explicitly anti-immigration stance. The 1998 measure received endorsements from Gaylord Nelson, the retired Wisconsin senator and Earth Day co-founder, the World Watch Institute co-founder Lester Brown, and the Harvard professor and sociobiologist E. O. Wilson. The measures were defeated, but they cost the club in public relations and in the high-profile defection of key supporters. Shortly afterward, the legendary environmentalist David Brower resigned from the board “with no regret and a bit of desperation.”⁵⁴ Brower belongs in the pantheon of ecologists in U.S. history, so his resignation was no small matter. He joined the organization back in 1933, served as its first executive director during the 1950s and 1960s, and brought the Sierra Club into the modern era. One of his stated reasons for leaving was the club’s leadership’s stance on immigration. He said, “the planet is being trashed, but the board has no real sense of urgency. . . . Overpopulation is perhaps the biggest problem facing us, and immigration is part of the problem. It has to be addressed.”⁵⁵

The battles of the 1990s raged on into the 2000s. On April 21, 2004, the Sierra Club’s membership voted in new board members. This event is not normally newsworthy to the public, but prior to the vote, the SPLC publicly announced word of an impending “hostile takeover” by openly nativist candidates. The candidates with anti-immigration agendas included Richard Lamm, Frank Morris, and David Pimentel, who, if voted into office, would give the existing nativist board members—Ben Zuckerman, Paul Watson, and Doug LaFollette—a majority vote on the club’s board of directors. Paul Watson declared, “I’m not here to represent people, people are well represented. . . . I don’t allow any human politics to influence my

decisions . . . I'm here to represent non-human species and ecosystems."⁵⁶ According to Watson, immigration brings too many people into the nation, threatening the species and environments he wishes to protect. Another insider—a club member, not a director—was Brenda Walker, who urged supporters of the VDare white nationalist group to join the club and vote for the new candidates. Walker had raised eyebrows in an earlier essay she had written on VDare's website in reference to Southeast Asian Hmong immigrants coming to the United States: "So will thousands of drug-addicted polygamists be welcomed into America in another escalation of multiculturalism against American values?"⁵⁷ The SPLC charged that this takeover was being orchestrated by FAIR, CIS, U.S. English, NumbersUSA, and CAPS, which allegedly sought to infiltrate the Sierra Club with a new board that would shift the mission to focus on anti-immigration concerns. The SPLC also pointed out that the founder and major supporter of those groups was John H. Tanton, a known nativist. The news created such an alarm that progressive members of the Sierra Club formed a group called Groundswell Sierra, which launched a publicity campaign and website aimed at defeating the "outsider" candidates.

Countering the Groundswell Sierra group, another new group formed within the Sierra Club, calling themselves Sierrans for U.S. Population Stabilization (SUSPS). In the run-up to the board election, SUSPS sent out a mass mailing to the entire Sierra Club membership and launched a website and publicity campaign supporting the anti-immigration initiative. In that mailing, they advocated a return to pre-1965 immigration levels established by the overtly racist Immigration Act of 1924, which imposed strict ethnic quotas to ensure that most immigrants allowed into the United States were from northern and western Europe.⁵⁸ The SUSPS website declared:

As a result of our country's immigration policies coupled with birth rates, the U.S. has the highest population growth of all developed countries. SUSPS demands that the Sierra Club stop placing political sensitivities ahead of the environment and begin addressing migration levels and birthrates in the U.S. . . . While we support the Sierra Club's current global policies designed to stabilize world population, we urge the Sierra Club to return to the roots of the environmental movement that encompass U.S. overpopulation—to also preserve and protect our own environment for the benefit of future generations.⁵⁹

This last statement is a quintessential example of the quest for white environmental privilege. Again, the responsibility for the global environmental crisis is placed squarely at the doorstep of the people of the global South while the United States is cast as the victim.

The fight got even uglier when it was alleged that David Gelbaum, a liberal wealthy donor, was heavily influencing the Sierra Club's policy on immigration. Gelbaum allegedly made it clear that he would not support the club financially if they adopted an anti-immigration policy. Gelbaum is a reclusive, retired mathematician and Wall Street whiz, and was uncommonly generous in his giving to environmental and social causes, including donations in support of the efforts to defeat Proposition 187. Gelbaum's wife is Mexican American and his grandfather was a Ukrainian Jewish immigrant, perhaps shaping his views of this issue. He stood firm in his opposition to nativist policies, and in a *Los Angeles Times* interview he stated for the record, "I did tell Carl Pope [the Sierra Club's executive director] in 1994 or 1995 that if they ever came out anti-immigration, they would never get a dollar from me."⁶⁰ After the club enacted its neutrality policy on immigration in 1996 and successfully opposed a referendum to overturn that policy in 1998, Gelbaum seemed to reward them. In 2000 and 2001 he gave the Sierra Club more than a whopping \$100 million in donations. Sierrans for U.S. Population Stabilization justifiably asked whether it was appropriate for the club's leadership to adopt certain policies based on a single "super rich" donor while much of its membership felt differently.⁶¹

Ultimately the 2004 "takeover" was stopped by a record voter turnout, but this stands out as yet another major wound the club will have to nurse. Moreover, it is unlikely that this issue will die anytime soon among the club's leadership or membership.

A Reality Check

The history of the Sierra Club's positions on immigration reveals that the situation is in fact much more complicated and less flattering than the progressives of the Groundswell Sierra group would have us believe. The Groundswell Sierra members like Carl Pope and Adam Werbach paint a portrait of the Sierra Club, which gives the sense that its core membership

and history are basically free of nativism and that they were the unfortunate victims of an attempted hostile takeover by outsiders. Our interpretation is otherwise. First, many of these takeover participants have currently or previously held leadership positions (or simply been members) in the club, so it is difficult and disingenuous to argue that these individuals are “outsiders.” Second, it would be incorrect and impossible to try to distinguish between the nativist or “anti-immigrant” faction and the rest of the club: the Sierra Club has a long-standing love for people-less nature, including its long-term relationship with photographer Ansel Adams. Adams sometimes deliberately removed people from the landscape scenes he photographed, and even the club’s founder, the Scottish immigrant John Muir, helped to create the national parks system, which required Indian removal. Therefore, the club’s roots were perhaps “pro-immigrant” only in the sense that the founder celebrated and facilitated the migration of *white* people onto Native land.

In addition, the Sierra Club’s population fixation has been present since at least the 1960s, and it remains today, with some modifications. Consider the following text from a resolution, adopted by its board of directors on March 13, 1965, just months before President Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act into law, abolishing the racist quotas codified by the National Origins Act of 1924:

The “population explosion” has severely disturbed the ecological relationships between human beings and the environment. It has caused an increasing scarcity of wilderness and wildlife and has impaired the beauty of whole regions, as well as *reducing the standards and the quality of living*. In recognition of the growing magnitude of this conservation issue, the Sierra Club supports a greatly increased program of education on the need for population control.⁶²

A year later, another resolution stated “The Sierra Club endorses the objectives of legislation to establish federal machinery to deal with the problems of rapid human population growth.”⁶³ Three years after that, in May 1969, the board of directors passed the following resolution:

The Sierra Club urges the people of the United States to abandon population growth as a pattern and goal; to commit themselves to limit the

total population of the United States in order to achieve balance between population and resources; and to achieve a stable population no later than the year 1990.⁶⁴

The following year, in June of 1970, another resolution stated, “The Sierra Club endorses [the following] resolution from the organization Zero Population Growth concerning measures to inhibit population growth. In essence, the resolution parallels an earlier Sierra Club statement of policy”⁶⁵ regarding a call for the United States to pass state and federal laws that would encourage limiting family size and birth control to reduce population size through humane and voluntary measures. We should not forget that ZPG was an organization that John Tanton led for many years (as did Richard Lamm, one of the so-called “outsiders” seeking to take over the club’s Board in 2004), so the connections to other nativist groups run much deeper than Groundswell Sierra Club leaders would like to admit.

At that time, the Sierra Club was largely divided between members who urged the organization to “actively involve itself in the conservation problems . . . of the urban poor and the ethnic minorities” (as the text of a 1971 referendum measure stated), and members who thought that social justice work would displace the more important goal of natural preservation.⁶⁶

Many other resolutions were debated and passed in the ensuing years and, when the issue became more heavily politicized in 1996, the board adopted a resolution that it “[would] take no position on immigration levels or on policies governing immigration into the United States.” The resolution astutely added, “The Club remains committed to environmental rights and protections for all within our borders, without discrimination based on immigration status.”⁶⁷ That resolution was adopted, after an amendment, by the membership in 1998 and, after amendment, by the board again in 2003.

After the 1998 battle, Carl Pope waxed eloquently while breathing a guarded sigh of relief at the vote’s outcome:

This Spring the members of the Sierra Club made a historic decision. On this year’s Club ballot, they were asked whether we should address the problem of overpopulation by limiting immigration or by dealing with its root causes. Six out of ten voted to defeat the immigration initiative. . . . Taking responsibility for their own resource use, they refused to blame newcomers to our country for our own overconsumption. . . .

Immigration restrictions don't solve environmental problems, they merely shift them elsewhere. Proponents of the immigration-restriction initiative argued that we need to protect our own backyard, or 'lifeboat,' in environmental philosopher Garrett Hardin's metaphor. . . . Instead of a lifeboat, the Sierra Club chose Buckminster Fuller's vision of "Spaceship Earth" . . . Rather than slamming the door, members directed the Club to devote its energies to global stewardship, to mitigating the conditions that drive people from their homes.⁶⁸

Given the 2004 battle over the same issue, Pope seems to have spoken too soon. Ultimately, this "takeover" attempt was, in large part, of the club's own making, given its history of supporting population control. We should not forget that perhaps the most influential book on population hysteria in U.S. history was Paul Erhlich's *Population Bomb*, published by the Sierra Club. The "victory" in which those coup attempts were stifled reveals the entrenchment of nativism in the U.S. environmental movement.

We cannot overstate the importance of the Sierra Club case. The club is not only the nation's largest and most influential environmental organization, it is also a group in which nativism and population control politics have run deep since its founding. This organization sets the tone and standard for the U.S. environmental movement and remains a space in which nativist-environmentalism exerts influence on the nation's civic culture.

Nativist Environmentalism

Colorado is a place where immigration and environmental politics have come to a head many times. From Aspen to Boulder and Denver, from the Eastern Slope to the Western Slope, the Rocky Mountain state has struggled with how to maintain its labor force for ecological wealth extraction and tourism, while protecting the ecosystems threatened by those industries.

This struggle is evident in public discourse among Roaring Fork Valley residents. One long-running argument evident in these debates is that the United States is the most generous nation in the world with regard to its immigration policy. Other debates focused on the risks that immigration posed to quality of life, public health, safety, and security.

The theme of America's beneficence and that anyone here should "love it or leave it" was prevalent in letters to valley newspaper editors. Mike McGarry, a vocal Roaring Fork Valley resident and leading nativist environmental activist, expressed these ideas in the following colorful language:

Editor: I just read your October 16 article ("English-only opponents gather") where one Mr. Juan Antonio Garcia, who recently "came from Mexico," was quoted as saying the motives of the supporters of Amendment 31 [the English-only ballot proposition] are "probably racist." Mr. Editor, can you imagine someone moving to Colorado from a junk country and retrograde culture and within two years of his being in the state he is badmouthing the people of Colorado while he leaches off their generousities? Señor Garcia, haul your arrogant, slanderous behind back to Crapville until you develop some gratitude and humility and until you are reminded just how much you already owe the citizens of the most tolerant society you will ever experience. And Mr. Editor, even more insulting, although expected, is that apparently not one of the losers at that Stepstone Center-sponsored, typically one-sided "forum" had enough self-respect to give Mr. Garcia—as I would have had I been there—the wedgie of that punk's piss-poor life.⁶⁹

We also find scores of letters to editors invoking the "quality of life" argument that we see articulated on a national scale. One resident wrote: "The regulatory power of our government was granted by us, the citizens . . . and we need to ensure that our standard of living does not decline further. The INS is a beneficial agency to our standard of living."⁷⁰

Health risks and the fear of epidemics have been a traditional concern among nativists and governments regarding foreigners entering the country. At Ellis and Angel Islands during earlier waves of migration, physicians were on hand to check each person coming off the boats for communicable diseases that could spread among the majority population. In recent years, U.S. consulate offices in other nations have handled this kind of health screening. These fears of contamination have periodically reached hysteria and have contributed to the perception that poor hygiene and disease are inherent in many immigrant populations.⁷¹ One Roaring Fork Valley resident wrote a letter to the newspaper editor:

I have issues with tuberculosis. I was exposed to that by an illegal alien who coughed near me and it required medical treatment. Remind me that eating out isn't worth the souvenir of hepatitis A either. . . . Hepatitis A is also spread by hand and mouth contact. And something all illegal aliens are not screened for.⁷²

Another letter-writer publicly supported the Aspen City Council's decision to pass the "population stabilization" resolution in December 1999. The writer referred to ecological threats from immigration as well: "I applaud Aspen City Council's passage of the resolution on immigration control . . . it's just not that much fun to live here anymore and our beauty is fast evaporating. My thanks to the Aspen City Council for speaking up."⁷³

The following letter was brutally honest in its contempt but also reveals how some valley residents view immigrants as a threat to the peace, security, and lives of Anglos in the community:

[B]ecause we can't make our own beds, do our own landscaping, wash our own dishes, and cook our own food, we'll trash a nice little town like Carbondale. We'll stuff it to the brim with illegals. We'll stand by as they jam fifteen or twenty men in a three-bedroom apartment. We'll tolerate gang graffiti, we'll listen to ultra-loud stereos, we'll wink as they deal drugs to our kids. We'll clean up bloodstained highways after they drive drunk with no driver's license, insurance, or registration. We'll pay the hospital bill for a *coyote* who crashes a van crowded with a dozen or more immigrants.⁷⁴

Complicating this debate is the fact that some Latinos also harbor strong anti-immigrant feelings for a range of reasons. Although these sentiments may reflect patriotism, a desire to be law abiding and to assimilate (as well as generational, class, and other divides between Latinos and Latin Americans), it ultimately also contributes to the maintenance of white supremacy.⁷⁵ Consider the following letter from a Latina:

If I read another illegal-alien sob story I am going to vomit! These illegal creeps give all Hispanics a bad name because Americans tend to believe that all Hispanics are cheering for this criminal invasion. . . . I may be Latina, but if it were up to me, every one of these illegal creeps would be the hell out of here. They are destroying the United States!⁷⁶

These strong nativist sentiments were supported and reinforced by individuals and groups involved in political organizing for immigration control across in the state of Colorado in the 1990s and 2000s. We also want to emphasize that the letters to editors we have quoted from were representative of the general nativist rhetoric and messages found regularly in the valley's newspapers during moments of heightened tension around immigration politics.

Organizing in Aspen

In June 1999 the Valley Alliance for Social and Environmental Responsibility formed, spearheaded by two Aspenites who have been vocal nativist environmentalists for many years.⁷⁷ Terry Paulson moved to Aspen in 1982 and has served on the city council since 1993. He is an outdoor enthusiast who loves downhill skiing, has taught cross-country skiing for many years, and is a licensed paraglider pilot. Paulson was instrumental in getting the Population Stabilization resolution passed in the Aspen City Council and at the Pitkin County Commission. Mike McGarry is the other driving force behind the Alliance. He has devoted considerable time and effort in fighting immigration as a member of a number of organizations including the Colorado Alliance for Immigration Reform (CAIR) and the Minuteman Project. He is a unique and boisterous man who lives in Aspen and works as a maintenance technician and custodian. In 1995 he filed a federal lawsuit charging that the Pitkin County government exercised bias in favor of people of color whom it hired for three different maintenance jobs instead of him. Challenging the county's affirmative action policy, McGarry (who is white) alleged that he had been the victim of "reverse discrimination," and he sued for what he claimed were lost wages. The case eventually made it to federal court and he won a \$50,000 settlement. He rightly took credit for being the impetus behind the county's elimination of its Equal Employment Opportunities policy. In 2001 McGarry joined the race for a city council seat (he lost), and as he filed his petition he stated, "If elected I will make it part of my every decision to consider the greater geographic and demographic picture."⁷⁸ Together, McGarry and Paulson have made immigration the number one villain of environmental sustainability in the valley—and they have support from high places.

The same week that the Valley Alliance was launched, the former Colorado governor Dick Lamm spoke at a Men's Club luncheon in Aspen. He warned his audience about the social and environmental degradation such as urban sprawl that he claimed results from continuing immigration into the United States. Lamm has a second home in Aspen and is adamant about wanting to protect Colorado's ecosystems from population growth and other threats.⁷⁹ Lamm considers Paulson and McGarry his colleagues and offered public support for their efforts. In fact, Mike McGarry joined Lamm during the luncheon presentation to offer his own thoughts on the matter. A Democrat, Lamm has been a longtime immigration critic. He became a populist environmental hero in Colorado in the 1970s when he was instrumental in preventing the Olympic Games from coming to the state on the grounds that it would produce an enormous negative ecological footprint. He has taken a stand on environmental issues ever since. He also stands firmly in the nativist camp. He is a board member of FAIR, and has written extensively on immigration and population growth as ecological threats. He was also one of the nativist candidates running for election to the Sierra Club board of directors in 2004.

During the 1960s Lamm and his wife spent time in India. That experience left a profound impact on his thinking about population growth. He recalled, "We came back from there really believing very strongly that the world ought to stabilize its population and so should the United States."⁸⁰ Later that same year (October 1999), Lamm returned to Aspen to deliver a keynote address at a Valley Alliance conference: "The Myth of Sustainable Growth: Population, Immigration, Environmental Degradation." Lamm proposed that the United States decrease legal immigration levels by 80 percent. Referring to this event, Mike McGarry declared, "Population is the No.1 factor in the encroachment of environmental degradation—immigration is the No. 1 factor contributing to population growth."⁸¹ All of this work was done prior to the December 1999 population stabilization resolution by the Aspen City Council, as part of an organizing campaign that eventually built up to that outcome. Lamm continued to work with the Alliance, using troubling metaphors to describe immigration's effect on the country: "Cheap foreign workers are like heroin: they're addictions, you get hooked on them."⁸²

The Valley Alliance also counts the outspoken nativist Republican congressman Tom Tancredo among its supporters.⁸³ Tancredo is virulently

anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, and pro-war.⁸⁴ He has repeatedly placed himself on the fringe of the Republican Party and has earned the respect of many racists across the country for his uncompromising stances on these issues. The Alliance is one of many well-networked nativist groups in the state of Colorado and in the Rocky Mountain Region and has friends and supporters in Congress, FAIR, NumbersUSA, and other nationally active nativist groups.⁸⁵

At the Myth of Sustainable Growth Conference held in Aspen in 1999, many nativist leaders spoke to a packed audience. Jonette Christian, the founder of Mainers for Immigration Reform, gave a speech at the conference that was very well received and got straight to the point from an unapologetic nativist perspective. Christian's presentation made two key nativist claims. The first is that the culture of the U.S. Anglo majority is superior to that of any other nation:

Culture is fundamental in understanding poverty and high growth. Authoritarian cultures, not surprisingly, produce authoritarian governments, and these nations are especially vulnerable to economic domination from outsiders. The ruling elites of Latin America have had little interest in protecting the welfare of their own people. But the problem lies within the culture. In Latin societies there is no code of conduct that calls for social responsibility or citizen activism outside of the family. It is not an accident that America has given the world the game plan for modern democracy and the example of a culture which continually works to improve itself.⁸⁶

This statement is a no-frills version of the racist American exceptionalism that runs through much of the rhetoric undergirding U.S. nativism. Dick Lamm seconded Christian's statement when he declared, "Our best course is to model sustainability for the rest of the world."⁸⁷ Considering how much pollution and hazardous waste the U.S. government, military, and businesses produce, and the enormous volume of ecological wealth these institutions consume, this idea is internally contradictory.

The second major claim Jonette Christian made is that immigrants are, in conjunction with rich corporations, making life hard for working people in the United States:

[W]e are seeing increasing disparity between rich and poor, and massive immigration is largely responsible. . . . In other words, our current immigration policy is making it increasingly difficult for our most vulnerable populations—blacks, minorities, recent immigrants, and the poor to earn a living wage. . . . Do we have an obligation to protect the living standard of unskilled workers in this country, or are we going to require them to compete with third world wages?⁸⁸

In the past decade, the Valley Alliance has continued to gather support for its cause; they found it in the form of nationally recognized and respected authors, activists, and foundations. Lester Brown, chair of the board of the World Watch Institute, attended a conference on sustainability in Aspen in 2004, and he has frequently appeared at many events sponsored by nativist and population-control organizations. Population has always been one of the key indicators of the global ecological crisis according to World Watch over the years. Brown spoke directly to many of the main concerns the Alliance shares with regard to the impact of population growth on ecosystems.⁸⁹ We would not describe Brown as a nativist environmentalist but his emphasis on Malthusian theories of population growth lends credibility to that perspective.⁹⁰

Members of our research team had a chance to sit down with the Alliance founders Terry Paulson and Mike McGarry. They spoke candidly and forthrightly. McGarry described the region's social problems in this way:

[O]ur problem is that we got this monster looming just outside the city limits. A population monster. Because this thing's going to bury us all. . . . You know if you just conceptualize no growth in the sense that you don't need growth if you're a person, you have an infrastructure called your anatomy, your physiology. You're not built to be 6'5", 500 pounds, you know? Herman Daly, our ecological economist, he would make the distinction between qualitative and quantitative development. You could continue to improve your body. But you don't necessarily have to grow the body.⁹¹

McGarry's analogy, like those used by many nativist environmentalists, draws on biological or "natural" models for much of its logic. On the sensitive subject of immigration, it becomes clear that, for many

nativists, there are desirable and undesirable immigrants. We asked about the numerous Australians and Europeans we have noticed in Aspen, working on the ski slopes and in upscale restaurants. Referring to the town's iconic resort, Paulson stated, "The Ski company has been lobbying pretty heavily in the Southern Hemisphere to get people to come up here when their off-season is, so we get people from Queenstown, New Zealand, Australia, Argentina, Chile." McGarry added, "It's their summer experience, it's great, it's great for everybody." These immigrants are viewed ethnically as white. Unfortunately, for McGarry and Paulson, these immigrants are in short supply in comparison to people from Mexico and Central America.

McGarry and Paulson located the origins of the current immigration "crisis" in the Roaring Fork Valley in part to earlier European immigrants who liked to call in sick on days when the skiing was good. So, according to Paulson, employers soon switched to recruiting non-European immigrants who had little interest in skiing, and who would also work for less money. Terry Paulson recalled:

I came here in '82. That time here, I thought I was in Sweden because there were a bunch of Swedes here [laughs]. They were washing dishes, skiing, you know, whatever. I think there was a business concern here about finding workers that were reliable and wouldn't call in sick on powder days. I really think that's what started the whole move to look for a work force that wasn't interested in the sports that we enjoy.

McGarry picked up the story from there:

[T]he people washing dishes in the restaurants [T] were more native people, people who have lived here, they were part of the Alpine culture too, they were skiers and backpackers and so forth. So we had a schedule that said whoever was there the longest, if they could find someone to replace them, they could go on out and go skiing on good days. So everyone adapted to the culture, so then we had people hired from out of the country because they were cheaper, they were not going to participate in the culture. They will work day and night no matter what. . . . So we get more and more dependent on these guys who will work for low wages. The employers rigged how all these things developed.

Here again we see the populist anti-corporate rhetoric combined with a soft racism of permanent cultural difference between people from European versus non-European nations and ethnic groups. Terry Paulson jumped in to say, “Also in terms of the cultural, I think Europeans in general have a sense of population and where they want their countries to be. Other parts of the world, I don’t think have that same concept of over population as Europeans.”

These two founders of the Valley Alliance spoke about the strength of ecological ethics and policies in the Aspen area. They both embraced a recent anniversary celebration of the Aspen Wilderness Workshop—a local environmental group—because, as Paulson claimed,

They’re one of the few environmental organizations that I admire that really goes out and does something. . . . They’ve taken the Aspen ski company on for various issues, making them be responsible. As a result, the ski company has been getting a lot of these green awards for recycling, they even started using a kind of diesel fuel that’s more ecological. As a corporation I think that they’re ahead of most. You know the sun-deck at the top of Aspen Mountain: it’s made of all recycled and biodegradable materials. It’s made out of plastic, basically. They didn’t have to do that, you know, but they decided that this is what they want to do and it’s costing them a lot more to do it.

McGarry proudly chimed in, “I have a lot of respect for them, as far as corporations go. I think that if we look at the big picture, Aspen is as environmentally-conscious and as conservation oriented and as aware as any town.” Like other towns, Aspen requires positive “mitigations” to offset development that might be ecologically harmful. In other words, projects that are intended to improve local ecosystems when other efforts cause harm. However, in Aspen, these development practices have a distinctive flair. Terry Paulson explained, “For instance if someone wants to put in a heated driveway . . . so you don’t have to shovel snow . . . he has to mitigate that somehow, he has to make small changes in his other plans.” We queried, “Did you just say a heated driveway?” McGarry stepped in, “They’re all over the place up here.”

Both men reported disgust with the federal government’s response to undocumented immigration from Mexico. When asked about the recent

fight over the INS's attempt to locate a detention facility in nearby Glenwood Springs, McGarry retorted:

They don't come here. They don't do on-sight raids, the INS. That location down there was strictly to deal with the I-70 traffic, you know the vanloads. There's no INS in Aspen. They go on the record all the time and they couldn't be more apologetic, going on profusely about [in a whiny voice] "we're not here to mess with the local businesses, we're only here to stop the trafficking on I-70." It's an addiction. It's turned into just an addiction like heroine. Cheap foreign labor. That's all they see and it's all they invest in. That's the revenue. We need to cold turkey these guys.⁹²

Near the end of the interview, two Latinas passed by us on the sidewalk, and Paulson and McGarry stopped talking and glared at them as they walked by.

Backlash against Immigrant Rights Groups

Not only did the Valley Alliance work to build up nativist-environmentalist sentiment against immigrants in the Roaring Fork Valley, they have also set out to target organizations that have provided support services and advocacy for these populations. This effort has had an impact on the public perception of these organizations as undeserving and as an additional indicator of the alleged drain on resources caused by immigration.

Roaring Fork Legal Services (RFLS) opened its offices in Aspen in 2001 with a \$3,000 grant from the city of Aspen. Created at the request of the local bar association, RFLS is a nonprofit organization that offers legal advice to immigrants—regardless of citizenship—on civil matters including divorce, landlord-tenant disputes, welfare law, and immigration law. This is a public service given to those who otherwise are unable to afford an attorney. The news of this group's founding created an uproar among local nativists. During one city council meeting, Mike McGarry and a colleague of his—a woman who refused to give her name—lambasted the council for supporting the organization. They demanded that RFLS require proof

of citizenship or residency for any Latin American clients they serve. When councilman Tony Hershey pointed out that asking someone from one ethnic group for identification would be racist and probably illegal, McGarry snapped, "Don't even bring up that race crap with me."⁹³

When word spread about RFLS, many locals linked that organization to the mission of other groups in the valley that advocate on behalf of immigrants. One particularly virulent letter to the *Aspen Times* called into question these organizations' tax-exempt status:

[T]heir defenders and heavily financed front organizations—Roaring Fork Legal Services, the Stepstone Center, and Latinos Unidos, race-based organizations with racist, race-based ends—are beneficiaries of tax exempt status as "educational" nonprofits, a status granted them by a U.S. government agency. Go figure. And yes, "criminals." People who invade our borders, against our law, forge and use forged documents to further their dishonest ends while they make up, hide behind, and perpetuate the preposterous (and humorous) charge of racism, a stylistic tactic right out of Joseph McCarthy's playbook, are criminals, and their apologists are subversive, multicultural hypocrites. People, unless you want to be forced to eat the worm at the bottom of the bottle, wake up and smell the tequila.⁹⁴

Again, the language some nativists use is overtly racist, yet they deny that racism. Instead, they claim reverse discrimination by stating that to acknowledge race at all is racist. This is a logical quagmire that has the effect (if not intent) of stopping all conversation and consideration of racial inequality while perpetuating it.

It is true that many organizations have sprung up across the valley to meet some of the needs of the area's growing Latino immigrant population. And yes, they do receive grants for their work. They include the Mountain Family Health Center, which offers subsidized health care to uninsured immigrant families. Catholic Charities of the Western Slope offers resources and advice to undocumented persons seeking citizenship. The activist-oriented Stepstone Center organizes around issues facing Latinos and the broader community to empower people at the grassroots level to confront corporate power, environmental injustices, and nativism. Additionally, the Aspen Valley Community Foundation developed a program for

grants around issues facing working Latino families.⁹⁵ The fact that none of these groups distinguishes between documented and undocumented persons raised more than a few eyebrows among local immigration critics.

These groups' success at keeping a planned INS facility out of the valley incensed many local Anglos, who let their feelings flow onto the written page. One Aspen resident wrote:

OK, Latinos, you've scored a coup and stopped a legal action by the U.S. government. The INS can't camp in your back yard. Congrats. Now why don't you address the real reason the community and our government likes you as individuals, but refuses to accept you as a group. Last week there were two stories in the paper—two more Latinos were arrested for peddling cocaine, and a fourteen-year-old girl was taken to the hospital for cocaine overdose. You and your people have proven you have time to protest against our government. How about taking time to form Good Latinos against Drugs, and protest against an activity we all know is evil? You got what you want, how about showing you care for someone other than yourselves?⁹⁶

The association between immigrants, people of color, and drug dealing runs deep in the American psyche, nurtured by news media and film and music industries, which push these images daily.⁹⁷

The evidence presented here leads us to two conclusions. First, the mainstream environmental movement in the United States is most definitely *not* a movement concerned with racial justice. Nor has it shown much willingness to fight for even the broader—and less controversial—goal of social justice. This is not only because it has often traditionally been reserved for middle – and upper-class populations but also because it has always been haunted—indeed fueled—by a strong thread of white supremacy and nativism.

The environmental movement's blind spots are unfortunate and tragic. Environmentalism could become a transformative force that embraces justice for all, considering that the one thing we all share is the global ecosystem. Instead, we have constructed political, economic, and social borders to protect only certain people's ecosystems and human communities: these borders are not only artificial, they are also the source of environmental devastation impacting everyone. The exclusive "protection" of the

backyard of the privileged is absolutely dependent upon the impoverishment of everyone else's common space. The volume of resources—both human and non-human—required to maintain the heavenly experience of the very few in Aspen is astounding. If environmentalists are truly committed to ecological sustainability, they must find ways of reducing ecological damage through an acknowledgement and alleviation of social inequality rather than fixating on immigrants and population control.

The second conclusion we draw is that nativist movements are also generally supported by a strong current of ideology, one that is not just about protecting one's economy, language, culture, or borders but also about protecting the land, air, and water: in other words, the environment. These issues are closely held together in nativist ideology. Nativist movements tend to be environmentalist in their outlook, which is why we see nativism and environmentalism as part of the same, broad continuum of movements. In fact, environmentalism functions to convey a level of legitimacy for some nativists who may seek to smooth over their sharp racist inclinations. Our view is that nativist movements are not just anti-immigrant in their approach to the world; they are racist and generally white supremacist.⁹⁸ Thus, nativism does nothing but function as a disservice to environmentalism. Rather than bolstering their membership with restrictionist fearmongers, environmental organizations might act as the mass movement that it could become and separate from and condemn nativist ideology as fundamentally anti-environmental.

One sign of hope is the transformation of the radical environmental movement network EarthFirst!⁹⁹ Begun in 1979 as a response to both the increased threats to ecosystems and the elite corporatization of the U.S. environmental movement, EF!'s actions "are tied to Deep Ecology, the spiritual and visceral recognition of the intrinsic, sacred value of every living thing."¹⁰⁰ EF!'s slogan is "No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth," something sorely needed in the mainstream environmentalist community, considering the cozy relationship between many of these groups and some of the world's major corporate polluters like Clorox, Shell, and BP!¹⁰¹ For example, the National Wildlife Federation and the Nature Conservancy have accepted money from large oil corporations and rewarded them with positive press coverage and awards for ecological stewardship. When it was revealed that IKEA was selling dining room sets made from wood taken from endangered forests, the World Wildlife Fund leapt to IKEA's defense,

claiming that the company could guarantee forest protection in the future. It was soon revealed that WWF was a recipient of money from IKEA at the time. In 2008 the Sierra Club agreed to a deal with Clorox Corporation, endorsing a new line of green products in exchange for a percentage of the sales.¹⁰² In response, the entire board of directors of the club's northern Michigan chapter resigned. Finally, there are countless examples of how large environmental organizations have partnered with extractive industries and governments to create "conservation" projects that expel indigenous peoples from their lands.¹⁰³ Grassroots and radical environmentalists associated with groups like EarthFirst! believed there had to be a better way forward.

Dave Foreman, the co-founder of EF!, was known for his radical approach to wilderness defense. But early on, Foreman and Edward Abbey (author of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*) became public advocates of nativist politics, pushing EarthFirst! in that direction. Abbey told a gathering of EF! activists in 1987 that U.S. cultural values were superior to those of Latin America. That same year, Foreman wrote an article in the EarthFirst! journal claiming that AIDS would ultimately be a good thing for the earth's ecological ills, since it would reduce the global population. Many EF!ers challenged this racism by abandoning the *EarthFirst! Journal* and creating a new 'zine called *Live Wild or Die*. At the same time, members of the Biotic Baking Brigade first appeared in an issue of the *EF! Journal* with a letter condemning Abbey and stating that he deserved a "frijoles" pie to the face to silence his racism. Not long afterward, Foreman left EF!, sensing that his bridges had been burned.¹⁰⁴ Another EF!er wrote, in response to this unsavory history:

Real bridging, which involves listening instead of recruiting, needs to be done due to ingrained racist sentiments of some of the environmental movement's spokespeople. EF! can't let industrialism, capitalism, racism, patriarchy, or privilege go unchecked. That is, not if we really mean it when we say, "No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth." EF!'s "deep" ecology has not been deep enough.¹⁰⁵

Since EF! ousted Abbey and Foreman, many of its leading voices have since declared their solidarity with immigrants in the United States. As one EarthFirster explained:

Over-emphasizing the role of population growth in environmental problems ignores who has control of production and consumption decisions. . . . Immigrants are essential allies and leaders of the movement for environmental protection and restoration. Immigrant communities suffer disproportionately from environmental degradation and poisoning, whether from exposure to pesticides in fields, toxic dumps in neighborhoods or solvents in factories. But immigrants have begun to fight back and are among the leaders of the environmental justice movement.¹⁰⁶

Another EarthFirster wrote that “racist ecology poses a danger to the movement as a whole and, ultimately, to life itself. We must confront white supremacy within the ecology movements as militantly as we would confront ExxonMobil or the U.S. Forest Service; the threat is just as great.”¹⁰⁷ Recently, many EF!ers have moved to deepen their deep ecological commitment into something that looks more like a radical approach to environmental justice. This is a great illustration of how a movement with strong nativist tendencies can begin transforming itself and rejecting problematic ideologies while becoming an even stronger force for justice.

Even so, many EF!ers remain firmly committed to stopping population growth and are dismissive of the politics of immigrant solidarity. And, like many grassroots movements, EarthFirst! continues to struggle with its finances to remain solvent. Without the deep pockets of mainstream organizations lined with nativist-tainted funds, EF!’s future may be tenuous.

Most of the major environmental organizations in the United States have (or have had) programs or campaigns focused on population analysis. This includes the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, the Audubon Society, and many others. This interest in population control extends beyond environmental and nativist groups to federal government agencies, international development organizations, and global philanthropies. Many federal agencies and large foundations in the United States determined, decades ago, that population control is one of the pillars of national and corporate security. Since the early 1950s, the Ford Foundation, John Rockefeller III’s Population Council, and other institutions began funding research at U.S. universities on the links between population and political stability. Funding from the federal government for population studies increased soon thereafter. By the mid 1960s, international food aid

programs became some of the key players in supporting family planning in the global South. By the 1990s, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) became the world's largest funder of population control initiatives in the global South.¹⁰⁸ This was troubling for women's rights advocates around the world who recalled USAID's troubling history of sterilization policies.¹⁰⁹ Population control efforts have often used the notion of conserving the earth's resources as a vehicle of exerting influence over the world's low-income and global South populations. Therefore, population control is actually very much in tune with nativist ideology.

However, history shows us that early on there was a glimmer of hope that the U.S. environmental movement might have taken a different path. In the early twentieth century, social reformers who advocated on behalf of immigrants working in sweatshops and living in America's slums could also be viewed as environmental justice leaders. They were, after all, critical of the power relations that relegated economically and politically marginal peoples to hazardous living and working environments. These far-sighted individuals included Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and Alice Hamilton, among others. Together they challenged the social forces that threatened the public health status of European immigrant communities in Chicago and elsewhere, places where men, women, and children were forced to work long hours for low wages, where lead poisoning was a way of life, and where garbage dumps came with the neighborhood.¹¹⁰ The mainstream environmental movement made a choice *not* to cast its lot with this brand of activists, and the movement suffered greatly in its lack of capacity for melding social justice with ecological protection. We believe that there are those in the movement who might one day challenge their colleagues to remember Addams, Kelley, and Hamilton and embrace a different path.