The Malthusian Delusion and the Origins of Population Control

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It is astonishing, what a propensity Mr. Malthus has to try experiments, if there is any mischief to be done by them. He has a perfect horror of experiments that are to be tried on the higher qualities of our nature, from which any great, unmixed, and general good is to be expected. But in proportion as the end is low, and the means base, he acquires confidence, his tremours forsake him and he approaches boldly to the task with nerves if iron.

William Hazlitt,

A Reply to the “Essay on Population” by the Rev. T. R. Malthus

The first population bomber of the modern age was, by profession at least, ill-suited to the task. The Rev. Thomas Malthus, Anglican clergyman, predicted in 1798 that there would be standing room only on this earth by the Year of Our Lord, 1890.

A London talk by Benjamin Franklin inflamed Malthus’ imagination. The American polymath had proudly proclaimed to his English audience that the population of their former colonies was growing at a rate of 3 percent a year. The good parson, who fancied himself something of a mathematician, knew that this meant that America’s population was doubling every 23 years or so. He pondered this remorseless geometric progression during the long walks he was accustomed to take in the English countryside, becoming increasingly concerned about the staggering numbers — 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64 — that would soon result. He imagined the boroughs filling up with people, until every available nook and cranney was choked with
human misery. And how could this coming hoard of humanity possibly be fed, he wondered? How could sufficient grain be grown in the green fields he was passing, even if every moor, hedgerow and woodland was brought under cultivation? An arithmetic increase in the food supply — 2, 4, 6, 8 — was the best that could be hoped for. But with men multiplying geometrically and food only arithmetically, the number of people would inevitably outstrip the food supply. It was perhaps the very simplicity of the parson’s notion that gave it such a strong grip on his mind. Better minds than his would soon fall prey to the same Malthusian delusion.

The First Population Bomb

Malthus published his speculations in 1798 in a tract called *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Despite its scholarly sounding title, this was the original “population bomb.” It contained no images of exploding ordinance (these would be reserved for our less genteel age), but like its latter-day imitators it aroused great public concern by painting a picture of imminent catastrophe brought on by the unchecked growth in human numbers. Such a fate, Malthus argued, could only be avoided by stern, even pitiless, measures. The problem, as he saw it, was that the death rate in England was in marked decline. Before the advent of modern means of sanitation and medicine roughly 40 out of every thousand people had died each year, But as the Industrial Revolution spread, it brought better housing and nutrition for the poor, and provided the means for public authorities to underwrite public health and sanitation measures. The death rate had dropped to 30 per thousand and was still falling. Malthus proposed to undo all this:
All children born, beyond what would be required to keep up the population to a desired level, must necessarily perish, unless room be made for them by the deaths of grown persons .... Therefore ... we should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavoring to impede, the operations of nature in producing this mortality; and if we dread the too frequent visitation of the horrid form of famine, we should sedulously encourage the other forms of destruction, which we compel nature to use. Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations. But above all, we should reprobate [i.e., reject] specific remedies for ravaging diseases; and restrain those benevolent, but much mistaken men, who have thought they were doing a service to mankind by projecting schemes for the total extirpation of particular disorders.

Strange Views

These were strange, almost diabolical, views for a member of the Christian clergy to hold. Did Malthus really mourn over baptisms, while celebrating funeral rites with a particular zest? His population control measures were denounced by many of his fellow Christians, who rejected them as an offense against charity, much less common sense. They were embraced, however, by members of the British upper class. An increasingly barren lot themselves, they feared that the poor were becoming too prolific, not to mention too powerful at the polls and in the marketplace. These Malthusians, as they came to be called, helped to ensure that their founder's Essay on Population was a commercial success,
appearing in no fewer than six editions from 1798 to 1826. Population horror stories have sold well ever since.

Lifespan lengthened and general health improved throughout the nineteenth century, but Charles Darwin gave the Malthusians something new to brood over. Not only were the poor too prolific, but by having all those children — most of whom, to make matters worse, now survived childhood — they were rapidly dumbing down the population. For the prosperous and privileged, who found themselves increasingly outnumbered by the great unwashed, this was the “survival of the fittest” in reverse. This view was given intellectual respectability by Francis Galton, a cousin of Darwin himself. In his Inquiries into *Human Faculty and Its Development*, Galton gave a pseudo-scientific gloss to what he saw as the declining genetic stock of the nation. To counter this “dysgenic” trend, he proposed an active policy of “eugenics,” a word he coined meaning “good births.” Eugenics would encourage more children from the fit, and fewer — or no — children from the unfit, with the ultimate goal of engineering the evolutionary ascent of man.

Such views were eagerly embraced by the secular humanists of the early twentieth century, who — as in our day — were busily thinking of ways to improve the natural man at the same time that they reduced his numbers. Malthus, in particular, proved a fit precursor to Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger, who also opposed helping the poor. Humanitarianism and philanthropy, she wrote following the good Reverend, merely “perpetuate constantly increasing numbers of defectives, delinquents, and dependents... . These dangers are inherent in the very idea of humanitarianism and altruism, dangers which have today produced their full harvest of human waste.” But while Malthus was content to wait for plague, pestilence, and putrification to check human numbers (he opposed contraception and abortion), Sanger, not one for half-measures, wanted to stop the “unfit” from conceiving children in the first place. She unabashedly called for the elimination of “human weeds,” for the “cessation of charity,” for the forced segregation of “morons, misfits, and the maladjusted,” and for the sterilization of “genetically inferior races.”

**American Birth Control League**

Setting up the American Birth Control League (the precursor to Planned Parenthood), Sanger sought to put her beliefs into action. To ensure “less children from the unfit,” she opened birth control clinics targeting “ill-favored” and “dysgenic races” such as “Blacks,
Hispanics, Amerinds, Fundamentalists, and Catholics.” Sensing a kindred spirit, southern public health officials wrote and asked her what could be done in their states. Her response was the infamous “Negro Project,” in which she asserted that the “mass of Negroes, particularly in the South, still breed carelessly and disastrously” and that the increase among the black community “is from that portion of the population least intelligent and fit.” In order to remedy this “dysgenic horror story,” the project aimed to hire “Colored Ministers, preferably with social service backgrounds, and with engaging personalities” to travel through the South preaching the virtues of population control.

The “fit,” on the other hand, would be strongly encouraged to have children. Sanger’s goal, in her own words, was “to create a race of thoroughbreds.” Although she failed in this venture, as Hitler would fail even more spectacularly after her, she did manage to round up quite a stable of wealthy supporters. These had names like Rockefeller, Duke, Scaife, Lasker, Sulzberger, and Dupont, and were easy marks for Sanger’s arguments because they had always thought themselves the product of superior bloodlines. In reality, most of Sanger’s “thoroughbreds” had no great natural gifts and, but for the accident of inherited wealth, would have had merely middle class prospects.

The Population Council

The Nazis took active measures to purify the bloodlines and improve the stock of the “superior” Aryan race that went well beyond anything envisioned by Sanger, even in her darkest moments. The entire eugenics project went into eclipse, its advocates heatedly denying that they had ever meant any such thing as Dachau, Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen. For all that, population “quality” remained a concern of the population control community and, carefully disguised, over time would creep back into their discourse. When John D. Rockefeller III drew up the draft charter of the Population Council in 1954, for example, he included a paragraph calling for the promotion of research so that “within every social and economic grouping, parents who are above the average in intelligence, quality of personality and affection, will tend to have larger than average families.” Thomas Parran, a former surgeon general and one of the few Catholics in Rockefeller’s circle, objected that “Frankly, the implications of this, while I know are intended to have a eugenic implication, could readily be misunderstood as a Nazi master race philosophy.” The paragraph was quietly dropped.

But while Rockefeller and others could easily be shamed into silence on the need to remodel
humanity, the horror of the Holocaust did not prevent them from talking publicly about the continuing need to reduce human numbers. After World War Two the U.S. and other developed countries had sent many medical and aid workers overseas, and these “benevolent, but much mistaken men,” as Malthus had scornfully called them, were successfully eliminating many of the infectious diseases which had long plagued the developing world. While birth rates remained high, mortality rates were falling. The populations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia were beginning a period of rapid growth. With the help of Rockefeller and other men of great wealth, controlling this growth was soon to be on the national agenda.

Controlling the Population

Population growth seems to arouse a primal fear in the wealthy, who somehow feel threatened by the poor in their numbers. How else to explain the epiphany experienced by John D. Rockefeller III, grandson of oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller and one of the wealthiest men in the world, when he encountered the impoverished masses of the developing world. A dilettante who had never held a steady job,¹⁰ he made extended journeys to Asia and Africa after the war. He came away convinced that Western efforts to check what he saw as runaway population growth must take precedence over economic development.¹¹ He had found the cause that would consume his life. His efforts to win over his fellow Rockefeller Foundation trustees to his new passion failed, however. The majority believed (correctly, as history would show) that Western technology, particularly American agricultural know-how, would enable the peoples of the world to continue to feed themselves. They rejected his controversial proposal to develop new birth control methods and export these to the developing world. Denied access to the family fortune, Rockefeller used his own money — a sure sign of the true believer — to set up the Population Council in 1952. The council posed as a neutral, scientific organization (it still does), but its purpose in Rockefeller’s mind was clear — to control global population growth. Although his brother Nelson worried about the negative impact that these fringe activities might have on his own political career, the family as a whole supported the Rockefeller scion’s efforts, although whether this was from shared conviction or simply to help him find himself is not clear. The family attorney opined that “My own feeling is that he [Rockefeller III] has the time to do it and that one of the things that he most needs is some activity which will occupy his full time five days a week. It seems to me that if he works at this conscientiously for a year or two he might make a consequential dent in the problem …”¹² In fact, he was to work as the President, later as
the Chairman, of the Population Council for the next quarter century. And as for the “dent” in humanity, it was considerable.

The Dilettante and the Huckster

Unlikely as it sounds, the dilettante threw himself into his new role as the world’s first population control technocrat with almost evangelical fervor. He gathered the best minds on the subject together, and trained more, building a global network of population experts who shared his anti-natal views. He funded research to find easier, more reliable and, above all, more permanent ways of contracepting and sterilizing the poor. He established regional centers for demographic training and research in Bombay (1957), Santiago (1958), and Cairo (1963), and national centers in many countries, understanding these as stepping stones to instituting full-scale population control programs. Such centers and the experts they produced, explained Frederick Osborn, his right-hand man at the Council, “stimulated recognition of the dangers of the too-rapid growth of local population.”

No doubt they did, since this was precisely why they were set up in the first place.

As time went on, Rockefeller got increasingly involved in “action programs” as well, providing grants for the purchase of contraceptives, as well as technical personnel to actually oversee their distribution in developing countries, He helped to set up national family planning programs in South Korea, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Ceylon, and elsewhere. But the most important thing that he did, using his own funds and those of like-minded super-rich, was to work quietly behind the scenes to help convince the U.S. federal government, with its bottomless pockets, to sign on to his agenda.

Rockefeller would not have succeeded without the help of a man, Hugh Moore, that he came to detest. The irrepressible Moore had money, too, but unlike the “old money” of the Rockefellers, he had made it himself, peddling the idea of a paper cup into a multimillion dollar manufacturing concern — the Dixie Cup Company — whose product was familiar to every American. And Moore’s epiphany on population did not come while on a Grand Tour to Asia, but in a distinctly pedestrian way — while reading a book.

Population Action Committee

The book was The Road to Survival, a hell-bent-for-leather account of the dangers of overpopulation written by Wiliam Vogt, the national director of the Planned Parenthood
As Moore read how population growth was “the basic cause of future wars” and “the spread of tyranny and communism,” alarm bells went off in his head. Moore credited Vogt “for really waking me up,” and then and there decided to make population his sole concern. He formed the Population Action Committee and called for immediate mobilization against the impending crisis. “Who among us,” he used to shout at meetings, “will come up with a plan for starting a CONFLAGRATION?” According to his biographer, Lawrence Lader, Moore’s “methods were often designed purposefully to stimulate controversy and thereby focus public attention. With time running out, people have to face raw facts ... A warning should be shouted from the rooftops.” Moore believed that people needed to be scared, really scared, in order to become aware of the disaster that loomed before them. And what better way to scare them than with an image of a bomb, and talk of an explosion.

The bomb had leveled Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By the early Fifties the Soviets had it too, and the Cold War was in full swing. America anguished over the thought of bombs — their explosive power no longer expressed in tons, but megatons — ready to lay waste to the world. Moore deliberately played on these fears with a pamphlet called The Population Bomb, which he mailed to 1,000 leaders in business and the professions. It declared that “Today the population bomb threatens to create an explosion as disruptive and dangerous as the explosion of the atom, and with as much influence on prospects for progress or disaster, war or peace.” The coming “population explosion” would be the mother of all calamities, leading to widespread famine and crushing tax rates, the spread of Communism and the scourge of war, plus every other imaginable environmental and social ill in between. All this was written in what Lader calls a “whiplash phraseology [that] stung a dormant public.” Eager to convince others of the correctness of his cause, Moore inflated future human numbers to justify his radical plan to restrict human fertility. The hype was nowhere more evident than on the booklet’s cover. It featured a drawing of a world teeming with humanity, with standing room only on all continents. (Africa, already the prime target of the population controllers, was front and center.) Coming out of the North Pole was a lit fuse. A pair of scissors with long, sharp blades were poised to cut it off. The scissors were labeled “population control.”

Population Bomb Myth Grows

The controversy sparked by the publication of the pamphlet delighted the huckster in Moore. Over the next decade and a half, he mailed, free of charge, hundreds of thousands of
copies of the booklet to every group of politicians, educators, officials, journalists, and people of influence he could think of. One and a half million copies later, this relentless promoter had made the “population bomb” the doomsday metaphor of choice. He had engraved the image of mushroom clouds of people, boiling up from the surface of the planet in an unconstrained frenzy of procreation, on the consciousness of most Americans. He had convinced many that “population control” would stop the spread of Communism. And he had captured the imagination of a young butterfly expert by the name of Paul Ehrlich, who later asked to borrow the title for his own book on the dangers of overpopulation.

Rockefeller was one of the first to receive a copy of *The Population Bomb*, along with a letter of explanation from Hugh Moore. “We are not primarily interested in the sociological or humanitarian aspects of birth control,” Moore wrote, “We are interested in the use which Communists make of hungry people in their drive to conquer the earth.”

Rockefeller and his circle were predictably offended by both Moore’s crude style and his alarmist rhetoric. Frederick Osborn worried that Moore’s “Madison Avenue technique’s” might “set the [population control] movement back ten years,” and urged that distribution of the pamphlet be halted.

Low-key and scientific-minded, Rockefeller fretted that phrases like “‘population explosion” and “population bomb” might create an atmosphere of panic. One can almost hear Moore chuckle, since panic was precisely what he was trying to provoke.

**A Media Blitz**

Although Rockefeller for some time had been convinced that the federal government needed to get involved in population control, it was the outspoken Moore who paved the way. When his old friend, William H. Draper, was appointed by President Eisenhower to chair a committee to study foreign aid, Moore seized his chance.

He saturated the Wall Street financier and other committee members with material on the dangers of overpopulation, arguing that economic aid was being nullified by population growth.

When the Draper Report appeared in 1959, it was the first official government report to endorse population control.

In 1961, as the U.S. Congress was considering a major foreign aid bill, Moore launched an advertising campaign in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and *Time* magazine. Among the earliest ads were two designed to put the nation’s first Catholic president, who had earlier rejected the Draper Report, “on the spot,” in Moore’s phrase. The full-page ads were headlined an “Appeal to President Kennedy,” and called for
the federal government to address the “population explosion.” Draper, at Moore’s urging, returned to Washington and undertook a one-man lobbying campaign for the cause. With Rockefeller and his colleagues also working behind the scenes to encourage federal intervention, these wealthy men were about to impose their will on the U.S. Congress. It would in turn impose its will on the world.

Applying the Economic Lash

The U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 represented a radical departure from previous notions of foreign aid, such as feeding the hungry or arming our allies, because it took population control as a fundamental aim:

> The Congress declares that the individual liberties, economic prosperity, and security of the people of the United States are best sustained and enhanced in a community of nations which ... work together to use wisely the world’s limited resources in an open and equitable international economic system ... Development assistance ... shall be concentrated in countries which make the most effective use of such assistance... the President shall assess the commitment and progress of countries ... by utilizing criteria, including... control of population growth ....

The effect of this language was to enshrine in U.S. law two core beliefs of the population control movement, namely, that population growth is a national security issue, and that foreign aid should be given chiefly to countries which control it. A subsequent provision of the bill is even more radical, for it enlists all U.S. aid programs, from education and health to rural development and disease control, into the war on people:
[A]ll appropriate activities proposed for financing under this chapter [Integration of Assistance Programs] shall be designed to build motivation for smaller families through modification of economic and social conditions supportive of the desire for large families, in programs such as education in and out of school, nutrition, disease control, maternal and child health services, improvements in the status and employment of women, agricultural production, rural development, and assistance to the urban poor, and through community-based development programs ....26

The Reason for Foreign Aid

Those who thought that U.S. foreign aid was principally intended to feed the hungry, reduce the incidence of disease, or promote economic development were mistaken. The proper end of all foreign aid, according to this and subsequent laws, was nothing other than fertility reduction. Governments which wanted access to U.S. foreign assistance had to not only agree to “control their population growth,” but also to accept programs consciously designed to shrink family size and reduce fertility rates. The 1961 bill was Maoist-style social engineering at its worst, but moderate and conservative American politicians mostly voted for it, convinced as they were by Moore, Draper and others that in stopping the birth of babies they were stopping the spread of Communism.27

The Dark Legacy of Dr. Reimert T. Ravenholt, Population Czar

Malthusianism, that “monstrous doctrine of unreason” as Paul Johnson has called it,28 was now official U.S. policy. The U.S. had made it its business to stop women in the developing world from having “too many” children. (We, not they, would define how many was “too many.”) To carry out this sweeping mandate, the Office of Population was set up within the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1966, and a doctor by the name of Reimert Thorolf Ravenholt was appointed as its first director.
Dr. Ravenholt had massive amounts of aid money at his disposal, the State Department at his beck and call and, of course, a mandate from Congress itself. No ordinary bureaucrat, he was to become a law unto himself. A Population Czar, if you will. By the end of his tenure in 1979, Ravenholt had put firmly in place the powerful interlocking directorate of U.S.-funded population control organizations that continues to assault people around the world today.

Who was Dr. Ravenholt? An epidemiologist by training, he apparently looked upon pregnancy as a disease, to be eradicated in the same way one eliminates smallpox or yellow fever. He was also, as it happened, a bellicose misanthrope.

He took to his work of contracepting, sterilizing, and aborting the women of the world with an aggressiveness that caused his younger colleagues to shrink back in disgust. His business cards were printed on condoms, and he delighted in handing them out to all comers. He talked incessantly about how to distribute greater quantities of birth control pills, and ensure that they were used. He advocated mass sterilization campaigns, once telling the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that one-quarter of all the fertile women in the world must be sterilized in order to meet U.S. goals of population control and to maintain “the normal operation of U.S. commercial interests around the world.” Such rigorous measures were required, Ravenholt explained, to contain the “population explosion” which would, if left unchecked, so reduce living standards abroad that revolutions would break out “against the strong U.S. commercial presence.”

**No Need for General Health Care**

Ravenholt denounced those at USAID and elsewhere who argued that the proper end of U.S. assistance was economic development or social reform, saying dismissively that “the one thing these people don’t seem to want to do is family planning.” He declared that “the biggest threat to mass population programs stems from ‘revisionist tendencies’ promulgated by those unduly concerned with ‘irrelevant’ issues of social policy or even general health care.”

His enemies responded that he had a “myopic” focus on population control and a “bellicose” personal style. Charming he was not. At a dinner for population researchers, Ravenholt strolled around the room making pumping motions with his fist as if he were operating a manual vacuum aspirator — a hand-held vacuum pump for performing abortions — to the horror of the other guests.
Like nearly all population controllers, he saw abortion as an essential element of his anti-
people strategy, human rights as secondary, and people of religious sentiment as opponents.
He condemned “religious opposition to birth control” for “greatly aggravat[ing] Africa’s 
population problems... Most harmful to Africa has been the Helms Amendment, authored by
Catholic zealots, blocking provision of much-needed abortion services.”
Also, religious 
fanatics in the Congress have further vitiated U.S. population program assistance. Access to 
abortion is important in every land to enable individual women to avoid bearing unwanted 
children; but Africa must now urgently choose between making abortion services generally 
available or accepting catastrophic increase in the killing fields.” In other words, if you 
don’t kill children in utero, they will kill each other after birth because of the stresses of 
“overpopulation.”

Birth Control and Public Safety

Ravenholt was an unapologetic Malthusian, who not only believed that birth control was the 
“key to public safety, freedom from hunger, and development,” but argued against 
“interventionist” medical programs to save the lives of infants and children. The birth rate 
must be driven down first, or at least simultaneously. He offers the following summary of his 
point of view:
The main admonition to be made to those persons and organizations in advanced nations wishing to help the Africans is ... Beware! Do not harm the communities and nations you seek to help with public health programs! Unfortunately, that admonition has often been neglected by those seeking to help the Africans. A main case in point, is the powerful interventionist prevention of infant and child mortality by the many means our society now readily offers: grants of food, potable water, antibiotics, immunization, etc. How could these be harmful? Quite simply, they are enormously harmful to African societies when the deaths prevented thereby are not balanced by prevention of a roughly equal number of births. It is the population excesses resulting from well-intentioned but population-unbalancing interventionist activities which are largely driving today’s killing fields in Africa. Many infants and children rescued from preventable disease deaths by interventionist programs during the 1970s and 1980s have become machete-wielding killers... public health interventionists for Africa must learn that the benefit or harm of every proposed health interventionist program is inescapably dependent upon whether it aggravates or improves the population [situation] ... they must not blithely assume that if their interventionist program “only increases the child population by 10 percent” it does no harm.38 [italics in original]

As the U.S. Population Czar, Ravenholt did not set out to organize a huge in-house population control bureaucracy to achieve his goal of eliminating excess people. Rather, after the American fashion, he collaborated with existing organizations, like the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the Population Council, the Association for Voluntary Sterilization (AVS, more recently, Engender Health) to carry out family
planning programs in countries overseas. He selected smaller organizations to play specific, highly specialized, roles, providing them with grants that were often 10 times or more their previous annual budgets. The structure set up by Ravenholt thus resembles a conglomerate, with headquarters, USAID, directing its various subsidiaries in different steps in the manufacture, testing, marketing, and delivery of its wide array of anti-natal products.

Once the pipeline was in place, Ravenholt quickly became the largest purveyor of condoms, birth controls pills, and other contraceptives in the world. The sheer number of devices he and his successors have shipped over time is staggering. From 1968 to 1995 the Office of Population shipped more than 10.5 billion condoms, over 2 billion cycles of abortifacient birth control pills, more than 73 million abortifacient IUDs, and over 116 million vaginal foaming tablets to the “undeveloped countries of the Third World.” In the nineties, the abortifaciants Norplant and Depo-Provera were added to the arsenal, and by 1995 nearly a quarter of a million units of Norplant, and almost 4 million doses of Depo-Provera had been shipped. With the exception of Norplant, all of these devices are sourced in the U.S., which USAID has not hesitated to point out to Congressmen skeptical of the merit of the program.

How the Money was Spent

From 1968 to 1995 the Office of Population spent more than $1.5 billion to buy, test, store, ship and deliver contraceptive and abortifacient devices. Less than a third of this actually went to purchase condoms, pills, and injectables. The rest of the money went for shipping, testing and, above all, marketing them. USAID currently uses Panalpina, an international shipping firm, to provide for “the warehousing of contraceptives worldwide,” as well as for shipping. (Container-loads of condoms and other contraceptives deteriorate quickly in the tropical heat and humidity, so USAID has been paying closer attention to storage in recent years.) For its services, Panalpina received almost $24 million from 1992–97. Contraceptives are tested by a North-Carolina firm, Family Health International (FHI), which is under contract to “verify[y] that the quality of contraceptive products, such as condoms and pills, shipped by USAID to other countries meets strict standards.”

Marketing Contraception

But the real challenge for Ravenholt was in “marketing” these devices to wary Third World
couples. Contrary to population control propaganda about a huge “unmet need” for contraception among the world’s people, the actual demand for these drugs and devices is quite low.43 The poor, of course, do have real “unmet needs” — for practically everything else besides contraceptives. But lest the devices languish in run-down warehouses until their expiration date and have to be thrown away (a not-uncommon fate), the Population Czar developed highly sophisticated distribution, promotional, and advertising campaigns—still in use today — to push them onto the local population.

Physician-dominated health programs were the favored approach, but these often failed to increase “contraceptive prevalence” — the percentage of couples contraceptive — in countries where doctor visits were a rarity, or where most physicians refused to collaborate. If this happened, Ravenholt would turn to community-based programs, where hired “facilitators” would be paid a bounty for finding “acceptors.” At the same time, social marketing programs would be brought in, where street vendors and shop keepers of all kinds were trained to hand out contraceptives with other purchases. Massive programs of “contraceptive social marketing” are still used today to motivate people in places like Kenya and Nigeria to accept and use the great quantities of contraceptives that Ravenholt’s successors at USAID think that they “need.”

Other programs relied upon advertising and entertainment. USAID’s chief condom pusher, for example, an organization called Population Services International (PSI), uses aggressive and ubiquitous advertising campaigns to flood the media with a pro-condom message. These campaigns involve, to use PSI’s own martial language, a constant “barrage of radio spots and films shown on television, in cinema halls, and on [PSI’s] fleet of mobile film vans,” all extolling the virtues and benefits of condom usage.44 Like the loudspeakers that bleated the Thought of Chairman Mao all day long in Chinese communes, there would seem to be no escape from these forced feedings of anti-natal propaganda. Radio soap operas and traveling puppet shows are also utilized to spread the word. In Bangladesh, according to PSI, the “audience turnout among the entertainment-starved rural population is enormous, averaging between 3,500 and 4,000 viewers per show. On some occasions, as many as 10,000 [people] have been known to turn out.”45 To further drive home the message, during the intermission break, the contraceptive promoter passes out party favors, “sample products such as oral contraceptive pills ... or condoms.”
Throughout his long tenure in office, Ravenholt maintained his single-minded focus on controlling population growth by contracepting, sterilizing, and aborting as many women as possible. He was impressed by China’s “startling success” in population control, saw it as an expression of “the collective will of the people“, and claimed that it had been brought about by “peer pressure.”

He considered himself to be above the law, and would not take no for an answer. If democratically elected governments refused family planning assistance, Ravenholt did an end-run around them, funding non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in their countries to carry out population control activities, or quietly funding organizations to come in from abroad.

If staff members went to a country that forbid contraceptives, sterilizations, or abortions, they were expected to smuggle in as much contraband as they could.

Although he left office in 1979, two decades later his dark legacy lives on, as the Population Reference Bureau recently confirmed: “Ravenholt began a program that has devoted $8 billion to population and reproductive health ... While today’s program differs from his, especially in its emphasis on reproductive health [which itself is largely a fig leaf for family planning], its programmatic underpinnings remain Ravenholt’s.”

Ravenholt himself concurs with this assessment: “During the last two decades dedicated believers in the USAID mission of providing assistance for curbing excess fertility and population growth in the less developed world have worked to keep alive as much as possible of the powerful population program we created at USAID during the 1970s.”

Read more excerpts from Population Control: Real Costs, Illusory Benefits.

Endnotes


8 Sanger, p. 126. Quoted in Grant, p. 66.


10 He occupied his time serving as a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Rockefeller institute, and 35 other boards or committees. He joined the navy a year after Pearl Harbor, at a time when almost all young men of his age were already in service, only to be assigned as a special assistant to the Undersecretary of the Navy. See Critchlow, p. 20.

11 Visiting Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1963, Rockefeller and his party passed through narrow, dusty streets cluttered with people and animals of all descriptions, smelling of “bad meat, urine, and sweat.” The party came to “the west bank of the river at dusk .... the sand swarmed with people. Rockefeller said nothing for at least twenty minutes. He stood beside an over-turned oil drum, confronted by the chaos so remote from the orderly presentations on the 56th floor of the R.C.A. building. Here at last was what he had come to see, the plain reality of the so-called “population explosion.” ... “The numbers,” he said, “the sheer numbers of it ... the quality, you see, goes down.” From John Enson Harr and Peter J.

12 Quoted in Donald Crichtlow, Intended Consequences, p. 22.

13 Quoted in Crichtlow, p. 28.


16 Lawrence Lader, Breeding Ourselves to Death, with a Foreward by Dr. Paul R. Ehrlich (Ballantine Books: New York, 1971), p. 3.

17 Ibid., p. 3.


20 Quoted in Crichtlow, p. 32. See also, Lader, p. 3.

21 The full name of the committee, which was established in 1958, was the Committee to Study the United States Military Assistance Program. It was intended to study the effectiveness of U.S. foreign aid in countries where we had mutual-assistance pacts.

22 “The climax was a seven-page telegram from Moore,” Draper later recalled, “making it clear that if the committee didn’t deal with the population issue we’d be derelict in our duty.” Quoted in Lader, Breeding Ourselves to Death (Ballentine Books: New York, 1971)

23 Eisenhower would later publicly distance himself from the Draper Report, saying at a press conference about American family planning assistance that “I cannot imagine anything more emphatically a subject that is no a proper political or governmental activity or function or responsibility.” The U.S. government, he stated, should not “interfere with the internal affairs of any government.” Quoted in Crichtlow, p. 44.


Ibid., p. 28.

This language was repeated in the International Development and Food Assistance Act of 1978, section 104(d) of which provides that American foreign aid “shall be administered so as to give particular attention to ... the impact of all programs, projects, and activities on population growth. All ... activities proposed for financing ... shall be designed to build motivation for smaller families ... in programs such as education ... nutrition, disease control, maternal and child health services, improvements in the status and employment of women, agricultural production, rural development, and assistance to the urban poor.” In its Section 102 on “Development Assistance Policy” the act says U.S. aid would be “concentrated” in countries that demonstrate their “commitment and progress” by their control of population growth.” An explanatory footnote in the Report on Population And Development Assistance by the House Select Committee on Population states that “the whole of AID’s development assistance effort” was intended to be included within the population-control provisions of Section 104. 22 U.S. Code, sec. 2151-1; 22 U.S. Code, sec. 2151(b). House Select Committee on Population, Report, Population and Development Assistance”, 95th Congress., 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 111. Quoted in Kasun, pp. 103–104.


Ravenholt’s views include the following: “Although American blacks still heap incessant blame upon contemporary white populations because earlier white populations owned black slaves, this is an inappropriate onus; rather, American blacks should thank their lucky stars that the institution of slavery did exist in earlier centuries: if not, these American blacks would not exist: their ancestors would have been killed by their black enemies, instead of being sold as slaves. The only way Africans were then able to get to America was in slave ships: and because their ancestors were transported here as slaves, many millions of blacks are living far better in America than are their cousins in Africa where starvation and the
killing fields prevail.” R. T. Ravenholt, “Africa’s Population-Driven Catastrophe Worsens,” unpublished paper dated June 2000 available at www.ravenholt.com. There are so many problems with this paragraph it is difficult to know where to begin. Suffice to say that it is better to die a free man than to live in chains.


31 St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 22 April 1977.

32 Berelson to files, 31 October 1973, Berelson Files, Population Council Papers (unprocessed), RA.


34 Ibid.

35 Quoted in Kasun, p. 105.

36 The Helms Amendment, authored by Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, forbids U.S. funds from being spent directly on abortions. It has not prevented USAID, under the direction of Ravenholt’s successor, from giving funds to organizations who then turn around and promote or perform abortions themselves. This is why the Mexico City policy, which forbids such sleight-of-hand, was necessary.


38 Ibid.

39 Similarly, family planning programs in the U.S. were set up using existing organizations like Planned Parenthood Federation of America. While people like Bernard Berelson of the Population Council wanted to set up a “Federal Department of Population and Environment ... with the power to take whatever stops are necessary to establish a reasonable population size” for the U.S., reorganizing the various agencies that were hitherto involved, this approach was rejected. See Donald Crichtlow, Intended Consequences (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1999). Berelson’s proposal appeared in “Beyond Family Planning,” Studies in Family Planning 38 (February 1968), pp.1-16. While these organizations call themselves
“non-governmental”, many of them receive upwards of 90 percent of their funding from the federal trough, and it would be more accurate to call them quasi-government organizations, or QNGOs (pronounced Kwang-goes). Without the regular and generous subsidies they receive from the government, most QNGOs would shortly cease to exist in any recognizable form.

40 In the fall of 1989, USAID’s quarterly newsletter, USAID Highlights 6:4, boasted that, “Since 1968, USAID has purchased $567.7 million worth of contraceptives for distribution to 75 [undeveloped] countries — 6.9 billion condoms, 1.6 billion cycles of oral contraceptives, 49.7 million intrauterine devices (IUDs), and 16.5 million vaginal foaming tablets. To this must be added shipments from 1990-95 of 3.6 billion condoms, over 400 million cycles of birth control pills, more than 23 million IUDs, over 100 million vaginal foaming tablets, nearly a quarter of a million units of Norplant, and almost 4 million doses of Depo-Provera. See Contracts and Grants and Cooperative Agreements with Universities, Firms and Non-Profit Institutions Active During the Period October 1, 1994–September 30, 1995, popularly known as The Yellow Book, 1995, USAID, Washington. D.C.

41 Panalpina provided USAID with warehousing and shipping services. Under one contract (CCP-3057-C-00-2019-00), covering the period 22 June 1992 to 1 January 1997, USAID’s requirements for “freight forwarding and warehousing of contraceptives worldwide” were being handled by Panalpina at a cost of $23,909,166.

42 FHI promotional brochure, undated. This connection with USAID is particularly ironic since Stephen Mumford, one of FHI’s leading lights, has been associated with the unregulated sterilization of thousands of women with quinacrine hydrochloride, a strong acid. See David Morrison, “Burn, Baby, Burn,” PRI Review (September-October 1996), p. 1.


44 PSI Special Reports, Report No. 2/1993, p. 11.


presented to the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, 27 April 1979.


48 Ibid. Gillespie reports that “If you went to a country that forbade contraceptives, you were to carry two suitcases — one for clothes, the other for contraceptives.”
