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How a network of conservationists and population control activists created the contemporary US anti-immigration movement

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Continuing historical narratives of the early twentieth century nexus of conservationism, eugenics, and nativism (exemplified by Madison Grant), this paper traces the history of the contemporary US anti-immigration movement's roots in environmentalism and global population control activism, through an exploration of the thoughts and activities of the activist, John Tanton, who has been called ''the most influential unknown man in America.'' We explore the ''neo-Malthusian'' ideas that sparked a seminal moment for population control advocacy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, leading to the creation of Zero Population Growth (ZPG). After rising to the presidency of ZPG, Tanton, and ZPG spun off the Federation for American Immigration Reform. After leaving ZPG's leadership, Tanton created additional anti-immigration advocacy groups and built up connections with existing organizations such as the Pioneer Fund. We trace Tanton's increasingly radical conservative network of anti-immigration advocates, conservationists, and population control activists to the present day. Tanton's archived papers illustrate, among other things, his interactions with collaborators such as ecologist Garrett Hardin (author of the famous ''Tragedy of the Commons'') and his documented interest in reviving eugenics. We contend that this history of Tanton's network provides key insights into understanding how there came to be an overlap between the ideologies and activist communities of immigration restrictionism, population control, conservationism and eugenics.

> "The modern US immigration reform movement started with the formation of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) in January of 1979."[a]

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[a] Memo by John Tanton: "The Social Contract: A Review of the First Year," 10 November, 1991, Box 15, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

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Introduction

John Tanton, born in Detroit in 1934 and a long-time resident of the scenic resort town Petoskey, MI, is a retired ophthalmologist, nature enthusiast and activist [1]. In the words of his website, he is a "visionary—futurist, environmental activist, pro-immigrant spokesperson for population stabilization and immigration reduction," and "founder of the modern immigration network [2]." Beginning with his presidency of Zero Population Growth (ZPG) in 1975–1977, he helped lay the foundation for a new era in the long history of US anti-immigration activism [2]. He used this position to push for immigration restriction as a population control issue following the 1968 publication of Paul Ehrlich's *Population Bomb*, and proceeded to spin off the still-powerful Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) in 1979, coinciding with the birth of the Reagan-era New Right [3]. In subsequent years, he laid the foundations of a handful of related anti-immigration organizations, such as US English, the "oldest, largest citizens' action group dedicated to preserving the unifying role of the English language in the United States [4]."

This network of organizations and activists led, organized, inspired, or created by Tanton—the Tanton network—has been at the forefront of the anti-immigration movement for decades. In just the twenty-first century, it led efforts to defeat George W. Bush's moderate immigration reform proposal, rallied opposition to defeat the DREAM Act's proposal to provide legal immigration opportunities for undocumented children who entered the US as minors, and helped to write the Arizona law (nicknamed the "show-me-your-papers law") broadening police powers to investigate suspected undocumented immigrants [5].

Despite the enormous influence of Tanton's network in shaping contemporary immigration policy debates, its roots in conservationism, population control and neo-eugenics remain partially buried. This paper unearths these roots, showing how a series of concepts became entangled in US policy: conservationism, population

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Image 1. President Lyndon Johnson signing the Immigration Act, LBJ Library photo by Yoichi Okamoto.

restrictionism, nativism, and eugenics. We demonstrate the interactions of these concepts in the Tanton network, showing the resulting influence on US society. This project builds upon previous work on eugenics in the context of recent and contemporary immigration and population policy (see [6–10]); the history of demography and the transition from the eugenics era through the 1960s [11]; and the early twentieth century intersections between conservationism and eugenics [10,12]. More particularly, this work extends similar themes from 1968 through the present day. It also builds on earlier academic research on the conservationist and population restrictionist origins of the contemporary anti-immigration movement [6,13,14] and non-academic research by the Southern Poverty Law Center [15] and journalists [16].

Environment, population, and immigration

Immigration policy reached a transition period when, in 1965, Congress eliminated the "national origins" quota system in place since the Johnson-Reed Act passed in 1924, with the assistance of the Eugenics Record Office [17,18], p. 97. Image 1 is a photo of president Lyndon Johnson signing the bill beneath the Statue of Liberty. The Johnson-Reed Act emerged in a US political climate preoccupied with immigration issues, a period infused with nativism, racism and the influence of eugenic ideas.[b] After the 1965 law was passed, overpopulation fears were stoked by the publication of *The Population Bomb* in 1968. Soon afterward, the first Earth Day brought new mainstream recognition to the US environmental movement [19]. Out of this context emerged Tanton: motivated by environmental conservation, certain that overpopulation would destroy the environment, and dedicated to immigration control as a means of preventing overpopulation.

Huang [7] and Hultgren [6] help illustrate the legal, political, and philosophical legacies of the Tanton network. Both authors warn a new wave of anti-immigrant population restrictionism is emerging, with certain subsets of environmental goals and activists playing key roles. Huang points to the "double-standard" in contemporary American conservatism: revulsion at immigrant women's pregnancies (e.g., panic over "anchor babies") as burdensome additions to the population size, while simultaneously embracing predominantly White conservative Christian sects that advocate for large family sizes (e.g., the Quiverfull movement) [7]. Hultgren sees the early stages of a "'Third-Wave' Restrictionism," wherein environmentally-motivated immigration restrictionist policies are presented in terms of "eco-communitarianism," relying on "apparently 'liberal' commitments such as opposition to unrestrained economic globalization (2014, p. 74)."

Hultgren sees Tanton as an exemplar of "eco-nativism," but our paper argues he is better understood as a leader and organizer at the nexus of individuals and groups with many different goals and ideologies. Hultgren identifies three ideologies of environmentally motivated immigration restrictionism: (1) "social nativism" (seeking to protect the "Anglo-European" US identity from onslaughts of dissimilar immigrants), (2) "eco-nativism" (seeking to protect the US from population growth), and (3) the aforementioned "eco-communitarian" (2014, p. 65). Tanton is indeed ideologically rooted in eco-nativism as Hultgren describes, but has been a leader in all three ideological variants. Roy

[b] On anti-immigration and eugenics see Higham [57], Nelkin [59], Varma [9], Ludmerer [8]. On nativism see Bennett [60].

Beck is one of Hultgren's exemplars of an eco-communitarian, but is deeply embedded in Tanton's network as a former editor of *The Social Contract* (Tanton's radical publication, described in 2004–2012: Racism and Radicalization Section) and formed his NumbersUSA organization under Tanton's "umbrella organization, U.S. Inc. [5]." Peter Brimelow, a Hultgren exemplar of "social nativism," was a friend and ally of Tanton, as indicated in Allying with Extremists Section examples of Tanton's correspondence with Brimelow.

The most influential unknown man

The Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled Tanton the "puppeteer" of the "nativist lobby" [15]. In a 2011 *New York Times* article, Linda Chavez, a former presidential aide during the Reagan administration, called Tanton "the most influential unknown man in America," and the same article traced his evolution "from apostle of centrist restraint to ally of angry populists [. . .] who increasingly saw immigration through a racial lens" [5]. Though his aforementioned website now proudly advertises him as "founder of the modern immigration network" [2], after the article was published Tanton responded in a letter to the *New York Times*, insisting "my role in pushing one of the stickiest issues of our time into public debate was far more modest than [the] article implies [20]." Nevertheless, the article's author insists, "rarely has one person done so much to structure a major cause, or done it so far from the public eye [5]." To understand the origins of Tanton's ideas and the movement he formed, we need to go back to a seminal year for the mid-century revival of ideas about population control, what Holtgren (2014) calls the "neo-Malthusian emergence": 1968.

1968: The ''neo-Malthusian emergence''

> "Malthusian concerns gained momentum during the 1950s and took a central place on the public agenda in the late 1960s. During the formative years for the postwar environmental movement—between Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and the first Earth Day in 1970—scores of books, articles, and even movies appeared, warning of population growth. Perhaps the most famous, Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968), is packed with stories about India and reads as a primer on U.S. relations with the 'third world'." ([21], pp. xiii–xiv)

1968 was the archetypal year of revolution. From Paris and Prague to the streets of Chicago, the spirit of revolution first witnessed on US college campuses in the early 1960s had become a worldwide phenomenon. Running parallel to this revolutionary fervor and social upheaval was a sincere desire for reform and social transformation, accompanied by bitter dispute about which methods to use [22]. For most, a distrust of the establishment and authority fueled the desire for change.[c] In this milieu, advocates of a new iteration of Thomas Malthus's population growth concerns (sometimes called "populationists" [13]) sought their own radical change, even though they were also members of the social elite. They sought population control.

1968 was a watershed year in the science and advocacy of population control. It saw the publication of Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (coauthored with his wife, Anne, who did not receive authorship credit—see [23]) and Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons." These became essential texts for a variety of academic and lay audiences, making dire predictions about the fate of the environment and planet in light of a growing human population. The two texts differed in tone and ideology, but shared a common concern about the emerging risk of overpopulation. Ehrlich's book had the largest immediate impact, inspiring national dialog and the development of a new advocacy organization: Zero Population Growth. ZPG was very much a direct response to *Population Bomb*, and echoed Ehrlich's worldview by focusing on raising awareness of the link between population growth and environmental degradation. Within 7 months of the book's release, Richard Bowers, a Connecticut attorney, had met with Ehrlich and other interested organizers and incorporated the new organization [24]. By 1970, the group had earned a cover story in *Life* magazine and by 1972 had quickly reached an estimated peak size of roughly 32,000–35,000 members [24,25]. ZPG has since renamed itself Population Connection.

Of course, population growth had been viewed as a problem before. The classic text on the subject is *An Essay on the Principle of Population*[58] by Thomas Malthus (pictured in Image 2), famously arguing that population growth inevitably exceeds the resources needed to sustain it, which a ZPG 30-year anniversary retrospective cites alongside *Population Bomb* as the two landmark texts on overpopulation [25].

Image 2. Thomas Robert Malthus, Wellcome Library, London.

[c] "What was unique about 1968 was that people were rebelling over disparate issues and had in common only that desire to rebel, ideas about how to do it, a sense of alienation from the established order, and a profound distaste for authoritarianism in any form" ([61], p. xvii).

Ehrlich and Hardin: two populationist paths

> "We must have population control at home, hopefully through a set of incentives and penalties, but by compulsion if voluntary methods fail." ([26], xi–xii)

Ehrlich and the population bomb

Ehrlich envisioned *The Population Bomb* as a text that would refine his argument, already being made in the media, that environmentalists should seriously consider the population issue ([23], p. 6). *The Population Bomb* became an instant success, eventually selling more than two million copies ([21], p. 2). It made Ehrlich something of a celebrity; he even appeared as a guest with Johnny Carson on *The Tonight Show* in 1970.

US population management programs had a precedent in the eugenics era (ca. 1910–1940), from involuntary sterilization of the intellectually disabled to immigration reform, focused on improving the population quality of the United States.[d] By contrast, *The Population Bomb* refocused population advocacy on a new issue: population size and growth per se. Thus there was a shift in discourse from an emphasis on quality in the early twentieth century toward a greater focus on quantity in the post-1960s context.

Trained as an entomologist, Ehrlich agreed with other early environmentalists and conservation activists of the 1960s who saw unchecked population growth as a possible doomsday scenario. This was something he understood before the appearance of *The Population Bomb*:

> In 1967, a year before he published *The Population Bomb*, Ehrlich articulated a variant of this rejection of biological progress in an article on the 'balance of nature.' Citing population crashes, he wrote, 'The notion that nature is in some sort of 'balance' with respect to population size or that populations in general show relatively little fluctuation in size is demonstrably false.' Catastrophe was just as likely an outcome of change as progress. ([21], p. 130; see also [27])

Unlike some other populationists, Tanton and Hardin foremost among them, Ehrlich's perspective was not founded upon nativist and racial biases.[e] In other words, he never made the shift from a focus on quantity to quality and had long insisted that race was an "unfortunate" and "useless" category ([21], p. 131). Regardless, he certainly held clear *cultural* biases, witnessed in his differing domestic and foreign strategies for dealing with population growth, as outlined in *The Population Bomb*. According to Robertson: "internationally, he pulled few punches, endorsing scaled-back food aid for the starving, and even forced sterilization" ([21], p. 126).

Hardin, ''The Tragedy of the Commons'' and the concept of ''carrying capacity''

Hardin is best know for his "Tragedy of the Commons" article, which had high visibility by virtue of its publication in *Science*. In 2003, after Hardin's death, the magazine devoted a special issue to revisiting the article, and in 2009 Elinor Ostrom shared the Nobel Prize for economics for her empirical work reevaluating Hardin's view of the commons [28]. Highlighting Hardin's and FAIR's roles in promoting the notion of immigrants as an ecologically destabilizing force, Reich laments "that nativists so readily couple ecological arguments with cultural prejudices (1995, p. 1584)." Unlike the Ehrlichs, who seem to have had limited social contact and ideological overlap with Tanton, Garrett Hardin was a close ally. Hardin was a board member of Tanton's nativist FAIR [14] and was a frequent contributor to Tanton's periodical *The Social Contract*, discussed below. Tanton, in turn, was a co-founder of the Garrett Hardin Society [29].

Tanton's combination of population limitation and immigration restriction goals draws heavily on some variety of a crucial concept, which Garrett Hardin termed "carrying capacity," a central feature of the "Tragedy" paper:

> The tragedy of the commons develops in this way. Picture a pasture open to all. It is to be expected that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons. Such an arrangement may work reasonably satisfactorily for centuries because tribal wars, poaching, and disease keep the numbers of both man and beast well below the carrying capacity of the land. Finally, however, comes the day when the long-desired goal of social stability becomes a reality. At this point, the inherent logic of the commons remorselessly generates a tragedy. ([30], p. 1244)

Hardin elaborates that this is because each herdsman has an interest in continuing to increase the size of his herd; the growing herds exceed the commons' carrying capacity and all of the herdsmen suffer when it collapses.

Hardin emerges as a latter-day Malthus, making grim predictions about the unfettered growth in population and its inevitably dire environmental consequences. Hardin even deals explicitly with the history of this problem and Malthus' role in it in an article in *The Social Contract* entitled "The Feast of Malthus." Therein he defends Malthus' legacy and suggests that individual rights will need to be "curtailed" in order to achieve our needed population control [31].

In Image 3, Tanton provides Hardin with a sketch of a potential logo for the Environmental Fund, an organization that Hardin managed and for which Tanton served as a board member. In the letter, Tanton describes how he woke abruptly one morning and hastily sketched an image representing the US as a balance scale, with resources (food, water, etc.) on one side and population on the other (increased by births and immigration), while the balance's

[d] The classic is history of eugenics in the US and UK is Kevles [17]. Histories of eugenics in other national contexts are too numerous to mention, but a good example is Stern [62]. For a comparative history of several national contexts see Adams [63]. For general reference see Bashford and Levine [64], which contains extensive bibliographies of various aspects of the history of eugenics worldwide and Dikkotter [65] for a helpful review essay.

[e] By contrast, Reich [14] includes Ehrlich in the nativist camp, citing Ehrlich's endorsement of FAIR in his 1979 book on immigration. However, in the same year as Reich's paper, Paul and Anne Ehrlich were co-authors on a paper counseling that harsh legal population controls and immigration restrictions run the risk of being unethical and impractical means of protecting the environment [66].

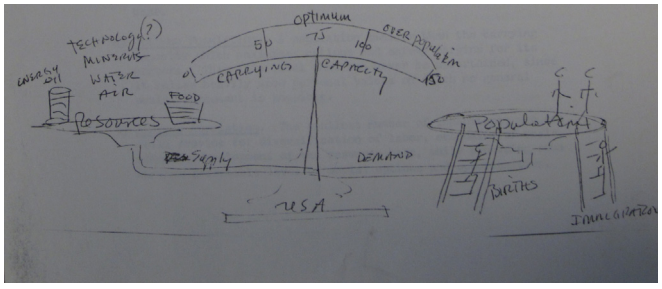

Image 3. John Tanton to Garrett Hardin and Staff, 12 November 1980, Box 4, Folder ''Correspondence 1977–1980,'' Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

indicator needle showed whether the balance is at, above or below carrying capacity.[f]

''Lifeboat ethics'' and global population as a series of national problems

Hardin was committed to a narrow statist framing of a species-wide ecological problem (population growth), made explicit in his "lifeboat ethics":

> Metaphorically, each rich nation amounts to a lifeboat full of comparatively rich people. The poor of the world are in other, much more crowded lifeboats. Continuously, so to speak, the poor fall out of their lifeboats and swim for a while in the water outside, hoping to be admitted to a rich lifeboat, or in some other way to benefit from the "goodies" on board. What should the passengers on a rich lifeboat do? This is the central problem of "the ethics of a lifeboat." ([32], p. 561)

This constitutes quite a strong methodological, philosophical, and ideological commitment for an ecologist. In fact, it is almost anti-ecological, insofar as it runs counter to any holistic perspective on the worldwide environmental problems related to population growth (see also, [33]). Rather, the "world" is descriptively and normatively divided into a series of nations as units, and "every nation has a limited carrying capacity ([32], p. 561)." This is made explicit in the essay "Living on a Lifeboat," in which Hardin offers the lifeboat metaphor as a replacement for the "Spaceship Earth" metaphor ([32], p. 561). He sees the spaceship paradigm as problematic when it comes to immigration too: "the image of a spaceship is also used to promote measures that are suicidal. One of these is a generous immigration policy" ([32], p. 561). The "lifeboat" approach has the theoretical and practical effect of resolving by fiat many of the global collective-action challenges of conservationism. The American boat, at sea with no land in sight, is morally obligated to protect itself from the encroachment of swimmers invading from other boats. Its carrying capacity is calculated in isolation. The global resource and population crisis is reduced to a series of national crises, prompting national-level solutions. Hardin's framing of the population problem provides a crucial underpinning to the efforts of ZPG, FAIR, and other related neo-nativist projects in the Tanton network.

While they spent less time defending the statist ideological perspective, the early twentieth century eugenics movement took an analogous approach. The American Breeders' Association, home to one of the earliest eugenics organizations in the US, was named "The Committee to Study and Report on the Best Practical Means of Cutting off the Defective Germ-Plasm in the American Population" ([34], p. 80). Germ plasm, used in this sense, is a population-level phenomenon. But, as with environmental resources or the human population, it is odd to reduce a continuous global phenomenon, germ plasm (or the "gene pool" to use the contemporary colloquialism), to national lines. In the eugenicists' case, the tacit assumption was that one could conceive of a biologically coherent "American population," an ontology that justifies the nationalist (rather than globalist) methods pursued by US eugenicists. It is one thing to recognize that, practically, nations can only address certain matters within their borders. It is quite another matter to conceive of the problem itself as following national borders.

Hardin's championing of the concept of "carrying capacity" was echoed in Zero Population Growth's statement of goals, which like its eugenics antecedents, presumed that a "scientistic," fully rational and dispassionate analysis of complex human circumstances is possible.[g] A ZPG mission statement begins: "the long term survival of the human species is dependent upon the establishment of an equilibrium between human demands and the carrying capacity of nature".[h] ZPG then was committed to a view of natural resources as not only finite, but mathematically calculable: "the number of human beings that the earth can support is a function of per capita demands of those individuals."[i]

Zero population growth, FAIR, and Tanton: from ideals to ideology

> "All citizens stand by. This is an edict from WorldGov. In the interest of balancing the population, and preserving the food supply, the birth of any baby is forbidden for the next thirty years."
>
> (Max Ehrlich [35], p. 11)

Zero Population Growth began in 1968 with the goal of reducing population size, a goal largely motivated by a concern for a population's environmental impacts. As indicated above, the organization had its heyday in the early 1970s. There was even a science fiction movie titled *Z.P.G.* released in 1972, inspired by Ehrlich's *Population Bomb* and a novel, *The Edict*, written by (coincidentally

[f] John Tanton to Garrett Hardin and Staff, 12 November 1980, Box 4, Folder "Correspondence 1977–1980," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[g] As Garland Allen says about Madison Grant and Charles M. Goethe, two prominent early twentieth century eugenicists: "They were part of the move away from unbridled *laissez-faire* to what was often referred to as 'managed capitalism'—that it, 'rational' or 'scientific' management of economic, social and political processes and institutions, carried out by highly trained experts—of which scientists were starting to become the most prominent examples ([10], p. 36)."

[h] "A Statement of the Goals of Zero Population Growth, Inc." Box 2, "Goals Statement," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Note here that this is in contrast to Ehrlich, skeptical a "Balance of Nature" can ever exist. See Ehrlich and Birch [27].

[i] "A Statement of the Goals of Zero Population Growth, Inc." Box 2, "Goals Statement,' John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

named) Max Simon Ehrlich in 1971. However, as Tanton took control of the organization, his favored means of achieving population control, immigration restriction, gradually became the overwhelming focus of his network's efforts.

One cannot begin to understand the Tanton network's most prominent entity, FAIR, without first understanding that FAIR began as a 1979 offshoot of Zero Population Growth's Immigration Committee, following ZPG approval of the proposal in 1978. This was a prudent move by Tanton, since not only could a narrow immigration-restriction organization benefit from greater focus, but moreover:

> there are likely sources of funding available to a separate immigration organization which are closed to ZPG. There are also problems of trying to get other organizations to support positions which ZPG has put forth.[j]

With FAIR in place, Tanton drifted away from ZPG, spending subsequent years expanding his network of anti-immigration organizations and alliances. Though his methods were guided by pragmatism, an underlying ideology emerges when examining Tanton's correspondence and behind-the-scenes work.

FAIR and the fundamentals of immigration restrictionism: anti-immigration and eugenics

The overlapping issues of population control, immigration restriction and reproductive rights made strange bedfellows beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, but it comes as less of a surprise for those acquainted with the curious combination of ideological alliances and divisions that existed historically within the Anglo-American eugenics movement. Individuals from across the political spectrum were drawn to eugenics as a solution to early twentieth century social problems. Lucassen [36] has reviewed the different levels of support for liberal eugenics policies in six European countries during the twentieth century, concluding that a particular variant of socialism, "communitarian-organic," is most conducive to eugenics policies because it categorizes citizens as productive or unproductive members of the state's organic whole. Diane Paul's "Eugenics and the Left" explores this issue in the US and UK contexts [37]. She cites a 1909 exclamation by Fabian socialist, Sidney Webb, "no consistent eugenist can be a 'Laissez Faire' individualist unless he throws up the game in despair. He must interfere, interfere, interfere! ([38], p. 237)" Paul points to this broad sentiment in her argument that eugenic policies are often more consistent with leftist ideologies than rightist ones (a greater role for the welfare state, etc.). The ideological and political confluence seen in Tanton, Hardin, et al. is initially similarly heterogeneous and confusing. It does, however, clearly drift to the right (the flirtations with statist solutions notwithstanding) and exhibits a more conservative and even reactionary thrust as time goes on. In addition to the rightward political drift of the Tanton network, Tanton's papers also illustrate his long-standing interest in a new eugenics.

Tanton's eugenics, 1975 and 1996–1997

Inside the Tanton Papers is a four-page draft manuscript, dated 1975: "The Case for Passive Eugenics."[k] The paper is built up from a distinction between "active eugenics" and "passive eugenics." For this purpose, Tanton uses a medical ethics distinction, between "active euthanasia" (killing; directly intervening) and "passive euthanasia" (letting die; withholding life-saving measures), as a model.[l] Tanton's attempt to lay out a passive eugenics program, however, is muddled and in the end fails to be analogous to the euthanasia example. The crux of Tanton's distinction is that passive eugenics refers to "working with natural forces to improve the genetic character of children within any specific family," as opposed to the active eugenics method of choosing which families are fit/unfit and then promoting/restricting reproduction accordingly. He gives the example of women refraining from reproducing outside of the "years of maximum reproductive efficiency, between the ages of 20 and 35," reducing the risk of Down's syndrome, etc. This appears to be an argument for broadly promoting genetic health, much as the March of Dimes and other medical genetics pioneers were doing at the time [17]. However, Tanton's draft text evaded the obvious questions of consent and coercion.

Tanton's explicit flirtation with eugenics complicates the conventional story of the late 1960s and early-mid 1970s as a time of rapidly emerging liberalization of sexual norms and of the concept of reproductive freedom. In fact, Tanton was extensively involved with the pro-choice movement through Planned Parenthood [5]. Hardin was similarly pro-choice [39]. There is a certain internal logic to their view given the concerns they long expressed about overpopulation and its supposed stress on limited natural resources.

Tanton's interest in eugenics reappeared in 1996 when he co-founded the short-lived Society for Genetic Education (SAGE). The group, which had the underlying goal of laying the groundwork for future eugenic policy recommendations, was primarily created by Tanton, Robert Graham and Carl Bajema. Their chief output was a website (now defunct). Graham, the wealthy inventor of shatterproof eyeglass lenses, had achieved some notoriety for creating the Repository for Germinal Choice, the so-called "genius sperm bank," which he designed to promote positive eugenics through providing, first, only Nobel Prize winners' sperm and, later, sperm from a larger group of intellectual elites ([17], p. 263). Bajema was a "key figure" in the American Eugenics Society while the organization was under the leadership of his coauthor, and neo-eugenics pioneer, Frederick Osborn ([11], p. 402).

The trio had an odd set of overlapping backgrounds: two were Michigan residents (Tanton and Bajema) and the other was born in Michigan (Graham); in a further

[j] Funding Proposal from John Tanton to ZPG Foundation: "Initial Funding for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, 6 October 1978, Box 2, "Equilibrium Fund," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[k] "The Case for Passive Eugenics", April 24, 1975, Box 3, "Writing," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. The text is annotated with various corrections, though it is unclear whether Tanton is the author of the corrections.

[l] "The Case for Passive Eugenics", April 24, 1975, Box 3, "Writing," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. This is made clear in a typographical error, inserting "euthanasia" in place of "eugenics."

convergence, two of the men (Tanton and Graham) made their early careers in ophthalmology but became public figures due to their later activist ventures. Bajema also had a connection to Hardin, having written a paper celebrating his 75th birthday [40], but Hardin had no connection to SAGE. However, while SAGE was developing, Hardin and Tanton were simultaneously corresponding about Hardin's work with Tanton's anti-immigration organization, FAIR.[m]

The three men met in San Diego in 1996, accompanied by a handful of other colleagues, and created the group. Later that year, Tanton declined to take up the leadership of the fledgling organization, saying that he was already committed to other tasks, such as being chairman of FAIR.[n] It appears that the group gradually dissolved following Graham's death in 1997.[o] While the organization was a flop, the documents surrounding its creation shed light on the discourses and ideologies in the Tanton network.

In a letter to Graham, Tanton warns of the challenge of trying to promote reproduction by the intelligent (consistent with earlier eugenics efforts, it is simply assumed that the intelligent deserve to reproduce more than the less intelligent). The challenge, as he presents it, is that a voluntary and education-based means of promoting eugenics is unlikely to reach those who most need to be convinced to change their reproductive behavior:

> Do we leave it to individuals to decide that **they** are the intelligent ones who should have more kids ("positive" eugenics)? And more troublesome, what about the less intelligent, who logically should have less ("negative" eugenics)? Who is going to break the bad news to them, and how will it be implemented? Without this step, the more intelligent are simply in a breeding race with those less well endowed, and we can guess how that will turn out! This qualitative shift has to be worked out within the context of the quantitative reality of the population problem, and should not add to human numbers [emphasis in original].[p]

Later in the same letter, Tanton demonstrates his characteristic political savvy, caution and pragmatism about how best to present difficult subjects to a skeptical, or even hostile, public. While Tanton's experience was mostly in the presentation of immigration and population control issues, he showed a similar self-consciousness in his attempts to broach the topic of eugenics. Tanton reminds Graham:

> [We] have emphasized mankind's use of eugenic principles on plants and the lower animals as a way to condition the public to the idea of genetic manipulation, and raise the question of its application to the human race. In fact, we report on ways the last named is currently being done, but under the term genetics rather than eugenics.[q]

Tanton's two flirtations with eugenics, once in a paper draft in 1975 and again in 1996–1997, show a large degree of ideological consistency (the desire to radically alter human reproductive behavior and social norms), while also demonstrating increasing political skill and awareness of cultural context. While in 1975 he boldly toyed with the maligned term, eugenics, in the 1990s he was more circumspect and avoided using the term when he could still achieve the same goals without it.

The shift to the right

> "What benefit do Americans derive from having Muslims settle here? The costs have far outweighed any benefits in terms of terrorism, violent crime and other social costs. What evidence is there that Muslim 'integration' is possible? It seems clear to us that it is (past) time to halt Muslim immigration to the United States." [41]

So argues a 2010 editorial in *The Social Contract*, by Wayne Lutton, a longtime Tanton collaborator and a co-founder (with Tanton) of the Garrett Hardin Society [29]. Jerry Kammer, a journalist defender of Tanton, notes that critics have seized upon Lutton's connection to the Council of Conservative Citizens as a reason for some condemnations of Tanton, citing the CCC's historical connection to the pro-segregation White Citizens' Council ([42], p. 17; see also [43]). Interestingly, Kammer does not mention that the CCC also "oppose[s] all efforts to mix the races of mankind") [44]. *The Social Contract*, where Tanton was once editor and is still publisher, and its attached literary press, together serve as the nexus for the Tanton network's publishing arm. *The Social Contract* is a big tent organization in the sense that it publishes anti-immigration screeds from many authors who would normally be bitter enemies. Its pages feature dozens of articles on environmentalism and sustainability, along with several articles by climate change denialist Pat Buchanan. Early signs of the Tanton network's radicalization in the direction of neo-nativism can be witnessed in ideological battles and schisms going back to the 1980s.

1988–1994: the network faces scrutiny

While FAIR was accustomed to heated debate because of its subject matter, the group began facing public scrutiny and subsequent backlash due to the ideology of its members and allies beginning in 1988. In October of that year, the *Arizona Republic* revealed the contents of a 1986 internal memo from Tanton, preparing the anti-immigration conference's Witan group for their upcoming meeting [45]. This group, a collection of FAIR leaders, was rather theatrically named after the Anglo Saxon councils

[m] John Tanton to Garrett Hardin, June 14, 1996, Box 16, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[n] John Tanton to Robert K. Graham, 14 June 1996, Box 16, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[o] Ibid.

[p] John Tanton to Robert K. Graham, September 19, 1996, Box 16, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Hardin had made a nearly identical point in a 1992 interview, explaining that he "saw ZPG headed for failure" because its message was primarily embraced by the intelligent and educated, when instead "it would be better to encourage the breeding of more intelligent people rather than the less intelligent [39]."

[q] John Tanton to Robert K. Graham, September 19, 1996, Box 16, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

of sages from the middle ages.[r] In the memo, Tanton's penchant for multi-directional approaches to problems works against him, as he mixes economic concerns about immigration's effects on "innovation" in the marketplace, with candid statements of concern about the "educability" of Hispanics and predictions of Apartheid-like social organization in California's future [45]. Shortly after the memo was revealed, Linda Chavez, the president of Tanton's US English organization and former aide to president Reagan, resigned in protest of the "anti-Catholic and anti-Hispanic bias" demonstrated in the memo, while Tanton resigned from his role as chairman in an attempt to limit the political damage to three "official English" ballot initiatives supported by US English in upcoming elections [46].[s]

At roughly the same time as his neo-eugenics conversations with the SAGE group, Tanton was continuing independent conversations developing his connections with more radical elements of his network. In March of 1997 Tanton wrote a letter to Peter Brimelow and his wife describing in great detail the most scenic routes for traveling to visit Tanton in Petoskey, MI.[t] Brimelow has made a name for himself as the editor of VDARE.com, "a white nationalist webzine named after Virginia Dare, allegedly the first European child born in the new world" [6], p. 8. Two weeks after the letter to Brimelow, Tanton wrote a letter to Richard Lynn, complimenting Lynn's book, *Dysgenics: Genetic Deterioration in Modern Populations*, which had received funding from the infamous pro-eugenics Pioneer Fund under Harry Weyher's leadership ([47], p. vii). FAIR had also received Pioneer funding [5]. In November of 1996, Tanton had sent some material by Joseph Fallon to Weyher, noting that Fallon had done the research for Brimelow's recent anti-immigration book. Tanton assured Weyher that Fallon was "very much on side with all of our concerns."[u] Tanton already had a friendly relationship with this community of far-right scientists and activists, and he soon took things a step further in 1998 by hiring the aforementioned Wayne Lutton as editor of *The Social Contract*.

1995–2004: the Sierra Club split

The Tanton network's drift from non-partisan and issues-based alliance to idiosyncratic conservative alliance was accelerated by a bitter internal fight within the Sierra Club in the 1990s, resulting in the club's decision to downplay immigration restriction in its activities. The strategic wisdom of that choice is rather clear—environmental activism is hard enough without simultaneously embroiling an organization in immigration debates. Whether or not the decision was merely pragmatic, it was nevertheless seen as an act of betrayal by immigration restrictionists. A 1998 article quotes Executive Director Carl Pope's rationale for rejecting the shift, and of the inherently political nature of disputing border policy:

> "We can talk about making national boundaries the framework for a policy dialogue, but that's a political question, not an environmental one [...] and if it's political, why should the club be involved in it? Many of our chapter leaders are upset that outside groups got involved in our internal process, and we're going to try and minimize that in the future." [48]

Pope's statement identifies a deep philosophical disagreement—a schism in the discourse—between immigration restrictionist conservationists and their non-restrictionist counterparts. While Hardin and similar conservation-motivated population restrictionists saw nations as lifeboats in need of protection, Pope and likeminded environmentalists saw political borders as artifacts, incidental obstacles to solving ecological problems that transcended them.

In a parallel conflict, Tanton wrote a 1997 letter to Peter Kostmayer, then president of ZPG, pleading for ZPG to "re-examine its stance on immigration." ZPG had abandoned its focus on immigration control in the years since Tanton left the presidency of the group in 1977, and then its board in 1978, to found FAIR in 1979.[v] Tanton cited support from his longtime ally and former Democratic governor of Colorado (who later left the Democratic party), Richard Lamm. Lamm had also served as a president of ZPG [49].

Between the Sierra Club and ZPG, it seemed clear by the late 1990s that Tanton's two former organizational allies had abandoned the immigration restrictionist cause. Tanton and his allies, however, did not entirely give up hope of changing the organizations' minds and influencing their policies. In 1996, the height of tensions between Sierra and the Tanton network, Tanton wrote a short letter to Lamm, likening Lamm to the prophet Jonah.

> The successful prophet is not one whose predictions come true, but rather whose predictions do not materialize because people change their ways in view of an undesirable future, as was the case with Jonah of Old Testament days.[w]

The wounds from the 1996 schism were reopened in 2004 when Lamm led a failed effort to get immigration restrictionists on the Sierra Club board of directors, assisted by an ally's VDARE.com article urging readers to join the club and vote for the candidates [50].

2004–2012: racism and radicalization

> "And yet, let us not forget the lesson of the redwood tree, which is called *sempervirens* because, as we know, even after being struck by lightning and

[r] That there are echoes here of racialist Anglo-Saxon or Nordic nativism in a modern group like FAIR is no surprise. Historically there are deep links between eugenic thought, anti-immigration movements and Nordic racism. The classic example of this is Madison Grant and his influential book, *The Passing of the Great Race* [56]. Nativism's influence on the early twentieth century eugenics movement has been well-documented. See: Field [67], Fairchild [68], Tucker [69], Spiro [51], Allen [10].

[s] For a broad narrative on Tanton's network, focusing on his interest in the fertility of immigrants see Gutiérriez [70].

[t] John Tanton to Mr. and Mrs. Peter Brimelow, March 6, 1997, Box 16, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[u] John Tanton to Harry C. Weyher, November 15, 1996, Box 16, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[v] John Tanton to Peter Kostmayer, June 6, 1997, Box 16, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[w] John Tanton to Richard D. Lamm, June 12, 1996, Box 16, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

> crashing to the ground dead, it is only a matter of days before it begins to regenerate itself and new saplings pop up through the forest floor. And so it is with the theories of Madison Grant. The universal revulsion at the Holocaust supposedly destroyed his teachings forever, but they keep reappearing. *The Passing of the Great Race*, for instance, is promulgated on the websites of numerous white-power groups, right-wing militias, and neo-Nazi organizations—often alongside Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. In recent years, Grant's ideas (and his actual words) have been continually regurgitated by the proponents of stricter immigration laws. Indeed, important segments of the modern anti-immigration movement are financed by groups with ties to the Pioneer Fund, Planned Parenthood, and other groups whose origins can be traced back to Grant and the eugenics movement." ([51], pp. 389–390)

Allying with extremists

The writings in *The Social Contract* demonstrate the drastic partisan drift of the Tanton network, perhaps most strikingly in that ethnocentrism sometimes even outbalances its core issue, immigration restrictionism. For example, a 1992/1993 issue of *The Social Contract* includes a book review by Denis McCormack, an Australian activist and one of the journal's reporters. In this immigration restrictionist piece, McCormack vigorously defends the massive British immigration to Australia (through colonization) while condemning the native Aboriginal peoples as "tribal, cannibalistic, internally disunited, and hostile ([52], p. 125)." It appears some immigrants are exempt from *The Social Contract*'s restrictionist ideology. In reply to those who point out that the US is "a nation of immigrants," Tanton asserts, "all nations are nations of immigrants at some point in their history. The United States is not special in this regard. The Statue of Liberty stands not for immigration but for the rule of law and 'Liberty Enlightening the World'" [53]. In 1996, *The Social Contract* ran an article by John Patrick Zmirak, in an issue devoted to "Straight Thinking on Immigration." The author deflects the apparent hypocrisy of an immigrant's grandchild condemning immigration: "I would show little gratitude now if I took the fact of my immigrant heritage as warrant for wantonly destroying the very country that was kind enough to allow my grandfather to share its bounty [54]."

Tanton's strongest defense (as seen in his 2011 letter to the *New York Times*) has always been that limited alliances with ideologically diverse parties (in his case, white nationalists and other bigots) are a pragmatic necessity of political life. This defense is partly honest; he even expresses that view in his private correspondence, including an uncharacteristically candid and passionate 1997 letter to the United Way. The local United Way office had recently withdrawn grant support from the Planned Parenthood branch that Tanton and his wife had once cofounded. In his letter, rather than criticizing the United Way for ideological failings, Tanton instead chastises them for not making their decisions in the sprit of rational community debate and respect for "the fragile fabric of the community." Echoing his journal title, *The Social Contract*, Tanton concludes by saying that this spirit of rational community debate "is what the Enlightenment philosophers called 'The Social Contract'. It is what keeps the jungle at bay. We undermine community solidarity at our peril."[x] While this pluralistic position seems in tension with his anti-immigration advocacy efforts, it is actually quite consistent. Immigrants and their differentness threaten his notion of the "fragile" status quo of the community. From Tanton's perspective, they also undermine an Anglo-American culture rooted in putatively Enlightenment values and virtues. With their high rates of reproduction and their divergent cultures and languages—to use Hardin's metaphor—they rock the lifeboat.

A fragile network

Remarkably, Tanton and his allies have been capable of holding together a coalition despite the rather deep ideological divisions within their ranks. The tensions that arise in the Tanton network's discourse are on display when Brimelow (Tanton's erstwhile houseguest, discussed above) writes an introduction to a VDARE article by Otis Graham, a FAIR board member:

> The movement for patriotic immigration reform is a coalition, and many VDARE.com readers will not agree with Graham's emphasis on population control and other liberal causes. Nevertheless, it takes all sorts to make a revolution, and Graham is right to suggest that he and his fellow reformers will one day be regarded as "prophets and heroes"—hopefully, not when they are "long ago dead," as he stoically expects. [55]

Brimelow is tactfully silent on his own relationship with Tanton, the quintessential "population control" advocate.

When he founded *The Social Contract*, Tanton was clearly optimistic about the journal's prospects for bipartisan support. In a 1998 contract that Tanton produced during the handover of the editorship from Tanton to Lutton, the first item listed in the document is a requirement of "maintaining editorial balance between liberal and conservative, Republican and Democrat."[y] Attempting to end immigration by Muslims, however, is not a promising means of gaining bipartisan balance in a periodical.

Conclusion

The Tanton network's idiosyncratic history and ideology offers important insights into the nature of contemporary American political ideologies. Historically, it illustrates that a brashly scientistic approach to the 1960s' apparently most looming social problems led to linked policy proposals in conservationism, population control and immigration control. Those understandings of social problems have left their mark on contemporary America. Most notably, today's immigration restrictionist network was built and led by—and in some cases is still led by—a

[x] John Tanton to United Way of Emmet County, June 12, 1996, Box 16, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[y] John Tanton to Wayne Lutton, June 16, 1998, Box 16, "Correspondence," John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan."

network of conservationists and population control activists. While these activists' ideas seem idiosyncratic or even fringe today (e.g., blending 1960s ecology and neo-eugenics) their influence remains.

The Tanton papers show a network of actors pursuing radical social policy reforms cloaked in the garb of objectivity and reason. The surprising feature of the history here is not that the US saw the emergence of a new mainstream anti-immigration advocacy movement in the latter half of the twentieth century. Rather, the surprise is that this advocacy movement had its ideological roots in population restrictionism, eugenics and conservationism, with the Tanton network playing a central role, often behind the scenes.

Previous scholars have shown that understanding contemporary US immigration policy debates requires understanding the roles of environmentalism and population restrictionism (see [6,7,13]). Our paper contends that one cannot understand the roles played by conservationism/environmentalism and population restrictionism without understanding the Tanton network. It is a network that extends across eras and ideologies. It ties together individuals, groups and ideologies that few people who would think to see as related, both mainstream (FAIR) and fringe (*The Social Contract*).

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