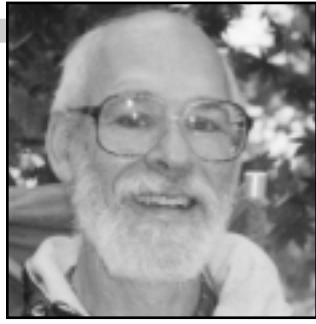


# Editorial Environmental Impact of Western Civilization

by Dick Colby (dick.colby@stockton.edu)



In its Jan. 25 Survey of the Internet Society, the London *Economist*, a magazine I admire as the best newsweekly in English, predicts major changes in society in the next few decades, and offers a tongue-in-cheek taste of family life in 2033. I'm not convinced that the ubiquity of data-connections will make that much difference.

The BIG advances in civilization, that make life in 2003 dramatically different from life, say, in 2003 BC, include the printing press (which essentially ended the peasantry as a social underclass, not to mention autocratic forms of government), the technologies of metals and now plastics, electricity, internal (and external) combustion engines (which enabled suburban sprawl, destroying the community life characteristic of towns), antibiotics (and sanitation), TV (which destroyed much local culture) and, most recently, the curious change in the status of women (and children) that took them out of the home, especially at dinnertime. Feel free to send me a message if you think I'm overlooking anything major! Even computers didn't make much difference to daily lives; as someone who lived through the entire computer age, I think I can speak with authority. Nor did telephones.

I recommend a comparison of modern life with and without many of the "advances" just mentioned: just take a trek into the countryside of Nepal, uphill from either of the two cities there. But that's another story.

Of all the advances listed in my second paragraph, I suspect antibiotics have had

the largest environmental impact, especially in New Jersey. They are most responsible for sustained human population growth, which has led to habitat destruction, sewage, solid waste, and other pollutants. Without antibiotics the human population would be controlled more like other animal species are controlled - by disease epidemics (the influenza epidemic of 1918 killed more than 1% of all Americans), natural disasters and starvation.

Second on my list is the internal combustion engine (i.e. the automobile), primarily responsible for the post-World War II shift of Americans from cities and towns to suburbs. Again habitat destruction, in this case out of proportion to numerical population growth. Suburban homes average five times more water usage than urban homes.

Finally the technology of metal- and plastic-making, and of electricity: the organic and non-organic wastes spewed out by mines and factories of all sorts have had a devastating impact on the environment, polluting vast areas of land and subsoil aquifers, the oceans, and the atmosphere. Global warming (from carbon dioxide emissions) threatens millions if not billions of coastal homes in the next hundred years.

For better or worse, the technological urge is honored by modern society with fame and riches, and the imposition of environmental controls doesn't figure in the free-enterprise equation. Our duty as environmentalists is to demand such impositions. ☞

# Chair's Message HOMAGE

by Sunil Somalwar, Chapter Chair



Fast forward to a not-so-distant future. The Total Information Awareness Program, in the White House, has become operational. Mr. John Poindexter, the program honcho, is transfixed by the goings-on at 40 Marilyn Street in North Haledon, New Jersey. This house is occupied by only a husband and a wife, but the lights are on pretty much round the clock and a vast number of e-mail messages come in and go out all the time, not to mention phone calls, faxes and who knows what else. At the other end of these communication lines are thousands of recipients in New Jersey and across the Nation.

Mr. Poindexter's snooping software notices that the e-mails emanating from this house do not offer little blue pills (without prescription) or to augment various body parts (with or without surgery). Thus, **strike one:** In these times of national crisis, this couple is not doing its part to increase the national gross Domestic Product. **Strike two:** There's not even one SUV in the garage. **Strike three:** Periodically, the couple drops completely out of communication and disappears into the woods for days to weeks.

Mr. Poindexter gets up from his armchair and twists a few arms. Questioning only a handful of people, he learns that an army of thousands gets its marching orders and critical timely information from 40 Marilyn Street. The messages are full of sinister code phrases like horseshoe crabs, caribou, open space, bears, melting icesheets, Bengal tigers, receding glaciers, wetlands, tropical wood and so on. These obvious renegades want to subjugate this free Nation under the "Kyoto Protocol", whatever that is. "Toxic chemicals" and "drinking water" appear frequently in the same sentence, and the US Army Corps of Engineers seems to be a clear target. The

final piece of the puzzle falls into place when Mr. Poindexter makes a chronological list of all the Nation's wars and realizes that he is dealing with enemy combatants in the Bush administration's very first war, the War on the Environment.

The couple also seems to have evangelical zeal. It turns out that the wife, for the past four years, has been leading an army numbering about 23,000 people in New Jersey. She squirrels land away from New Jersey's construction industry in her day job and spends evenings and weekends cajoling her followers to protect the environment. She is constantly encouraging new recruits and making them feel at home. She even bakes brownies to make the new recruits feel welcome during meetings. She has been building up this ragtag group into a formidable army.

We leave Mr. Poindexter now, as he marches off to see Mr. Ashcroft, and rewind back to the present. We live in exceedingly difficult times for the environment. While glaciers melt and oceans rise, I sometimes have a strange urge to explain to New Jersey's Jane and John Doe how much they and their children owe to **Tina and Dennis Schvejda**, the occupants of 40 Marilyn Street. For now, I will stop preaching to the choir and dedicate this, my first Chair's column, to New Jersey's first family of conservation, the Schvejda family. It is not going to be easy to fill Tina's shoes. The good news is that I can count on multitudes of dedicated volunteers and staff in this wonderful Sierra Club Chapter. Want to become more active? We are only a phone call or an e-mail away! ☞

## POPULATION REPORT: LEGISLATIVE DAY

by Bonnie Tillery, our Population Issues Coordinator



The Sierra Club works for a woman's right to decide how many children she will have and when she will have them. When given a choice, women choose smaller families, creating less demand on environmental resources. To this end, contraceptive coverage is an important step.

Population activists from around New Jersey recently met in Trenton to participate in a Legislative Day, which included discussion of how contraceptive coverage can be extended. The standing-room-only crowd included several youths from Newark who are involved in peer education and who will be directly affected by any legislation that is passed. It was affirming to see their involvement; to see the idea instilled in them, through this experience, that they can bring about change.

Contraceptive coverage legislation would ensure that health insurance plans that cover the costs of preventive healthcare medications would also cover the costs of contraceptive medications and devices. Currently, insurance companies will pay for medications to prevent high blood pressure, and even Viagra, but not contraceptives.

The Legislative Day discussions revolved around the refusal or "conscience" clause. This clause, which a religious (or other) organization might request, would allow exemption from a legal obligation. Such a clause does not question religious beliefs, but makes sure those beliefs are not imposed on others. The goal is a contraceptive coverage bill that gives the widest possible coverage, such as the one passed in California. This bill would allow a group to be excluded from contraceptive coverage if it: (1) exists primarily for religious reasons, (2) serves primarily people of its own religious beliefs, and (3) employs primarily people of the same religious belief.

Several legislators participated or looked in on the sessions, and we look for their support in the coming months — to see strong legislation passed so that women in New Jersey do not have to continue to pay 68% more out-of-pocket for health care than men. Many of those expenses are for non-covered contraceptive needs.

I will continue to keep you informed as work progresses. ☞

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### Acknowledgment:

The photographs on page 8 of the last issue were taken by Ellen Pepin.



Occupants of 40 Marilyn Street

Photo submitted by Tina Schvejda

### Sign Up Here to Make a Difference!

The **Planned Parenthood Action Network** allows you to automatically communicate with state and federal legislators when you receive an email action alert on such issues as family planning, reproductive health, judicial appointments and other population issues.

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