

## Of Limits and Growth: The Rise of Global Sustainable Development in the Twentieth Century

**Stephen J. Macekura**

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015 (333 pages)

Stephen Macekura tells us that President Richard Nixon advanced programs for environmental protection at home and abroad as a seemingly popular humanitarian cause to take the attention of his critics off his handling of the Vietnam war. Nixon soon learned, however, that he had stumbled into perhaps “the most dangerous political issue” in the world, one that pitted the developed world against the developing world in an environmental cold war. The economic aspirations of national leaders in the developing world were being stymied by the environmental NGOs (non-governmental organizations) of the developed world. *Of Limits and Growth* explains that the term “sustainable development” was crafted by environmental NGOs of the developed world in an attempt to bridge this gap by infusing environmental principles into economic development.

Macekura notes that Julian Huxley, a British biologist, eugenicist, and founder of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Russell Train, a US Tax Court judge and founder of the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation (AWLF), and Maurice Strong, a Canadian oil and gas executive and chairman of the UN Rio Earth Summit, all found East Africa (its flora and fauna, big game hunting, sightseeing, and bird watching) enthralling as young men. Each of them—individually and oftentimes networking together—set out to preserve East Africa and eventually the whole earth from the ecological predations of their local human populations and national governments. Acting on behalf of humanity in order to save exotic landscapes, plants, and animals from destruction, they felt justified to ignore the protests of the national leaders of developing countries.

In 1974, environmental NGOs from the developed world set out to save the Murchison Falls in Uganda from being dammed for hydroelectric power. The chairman of the Ugandan Electric Board expressed his frustration with environmental NGOs meddling with Uganda’s development loan for the hydroelectric dam project: “To hell with animals and to hell with tourists, to hell with Murchison Falls!” The leaders of African nations emerging from colonial rule wanted to modernize, industrialize, and develop rapidly. In order to do so, as sovereign nations, they expected to be able to use all the resources of their country, including world-class waterfalls, as they saw fit.

Environmental NGOs, meeting with strenuous local resistance to their plans for preserving large tracts of land in the developing world as game reserves and national parks, turned their efforts upstream, so to speak, to primary international lending institutions such as USAID and World Bank. Environmental NGOs brought political pressure to bear on developmental lending institutions to require loan applicants from the developing world to first file environmental impact statements concerning any major negative impact on native ecosystems. Second, applicants had to submit an environmental assessment plan

showing how they would ameliorate any negative ecological impact. Third, this process allowed environmental NGOs to then act as enforcement watchdogs, filing strategic lawsuits against these lending institutions if they granted a loan that failed to uphold rigorous environmental standards.

The Murchison Falls were never dammed. However, Macekura points out that thirty years later the native population in that part of Uganda continued to languish in poverty, while much of the rest of Uganda had prospered. Just as Uganda's national leaders had predicted, electricity from a hydroelectric dam in this region of Uganda was necessary to fuel its economic growth.

*Of Limits and Growth* takes an objective stance in weighing the pros and cons of sustainable development. Macekura lays out nicely the ambiguity of this term. Originally, as employed by environmental NGOs, it called for planned national economies in the developing world based on the top/down predictions of environmental NGO experts. Soon afterward, under President George H.W. Bush, a free-market approach to "sustainable development" was implemented by the US government that required market-based incentives, technological advances, and local bottom-up planning as the way to address each developing nation's unique economic and environmental concerns. Today the term *sustainable development* is normative but there is no real agreement on its definition.

Macekura barely touches on the joint efforts of environmental NGOs and population control NGOs from the developed world to crash the total fertility rate of the developing world as a means to lessen their need for rapid industrialization, resource extraction, and environmental degradation, as well as to preserve the political and economic hegemony of the developed world. For instance, Macekura considers the political calculations of President Nixon and his National Security Council director, Henry Kissinger, to advance US interests in the developing world. However, he fails to mention the United States National Security Memorandum, NSSM 200 (1974) that recommended the imposition of birth control measures on the developing world in order to secure vital US interests. Macekura ends his account of the growth and limits of environmental NGO influence with a detailed report on the UN Rio Earth Summit conference (1992). However, the following two major UN conferences—the Cairo Conference on Population and Development (1994) and the Beijing Conference on the Status of Women (1995)—both advanced "sexual and reproductive rights" (contraception, sterilization, and abortion) as a necessary means for achieving sustainable development and for women's empowerment.

Despite this omission, I highly recommend *Of Limits and Growth*. It traces the long march of wealthy American and European environmental NGOs through the corridors of power, placing considerations of fauna and flora over and above those of poor people in the developing world. It provides background and context for the debates surrounding the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also elucidates the fundamental tensions between the Global North and South and sheds light on current attempts to articulate sound principles for "integral and

sustainable development” such as that expressed by Pope Francis: “What is needed ... is an agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of so-called ‘global commons’” (*Laudato Si’* [2015], no. 174).

—D. Brian Scarnecchia (e-mail: [bscarnecchia@avemarialaw.edu](mailto:bscarnecchia@avemarialaw.edu))  
*Ave Maria School of Law, Florida*

## The Fractured Republic: Renewing America’s Social Contract in the Age of Individualism

**Yuval Levin**

New York: Basic Books, 2016 (272 pages)

Public policy debates begin in the realm of morals and ideals and policy can affect the ability of people to act morally, but rarely do those debates explicitly acknowledge that they are based on fundamentally conflicting views of a good life. Yuval Levin takes on this task in *The Fractured Republic*, in which he argues less for specific policy solutions than for an approach that relies on the humility of policymakers.

Levin is editor of the journal *National Affairs*, a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, and a leading voice for reform of the conservative political movement. As such, he is more fluent in the conservative political case for humility than in the progressive case. He acknowledges this, even as he argues for a broader political movement for economic competition and flourishing subcultures.

Modern politics is less a clash of ideas than of nostalgias for the childhood of white Baby Boomers, according to Levin. America had a unified culture defined by an established elite in the 1950s. Families were stronger and church attendance was higher. Employers provided more secure benefits to employees who stayed for their entire career in unionized jobs. This idyllic scene of the immediate postwar period resulted from decades of struggle as first companies, then government, expanded to inhuman proportions regulated by nameless, faceless bureaucrats in gray flannel suits. American companies lacked global competitors as Western Europe and Japanese industries rebuilt and the Soviet Union unintentionally hobbled Eastern European economies. This idyllic scene was upset by more open cultural norms in the 1960s and 1970s, then more open economic competition in the 1980s and 1990s.

As one would expect from a hundred-year history that spans just seventy pages, it misses a great deal and is not always subtle or nuanced, but the story is cohesive and accurate enough to form a reasonable basis for the second half of the book. Rather than try to return to a lost Eden that left large segments of the population in the wilderness, Levin argues, the task ahead of us is to embrace diversity and decentralization, which means a market in economic interactions and subsidiarity in social interactions.

Subsidiarity means learning to love the small platoons of daily life. Levin quotes Friedrich Hayek and Ronald Reagan in the footnotes on the importance of small-scale solutions. Hayek noted that “liberty in practice depends on very prosaic matters.” Recognizing