



## Matthew Yglesias Makes the Case for A Billion Americans, and A Great Argument for Immigration Reduction

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Podcaster and Vox newsplainer Matthew Yglesias has a book out today entitled *One Billion Americans: The Case for Thinking Bigger*. An excerpt from the book appeared on the [Intelligencer](#) website of *New York* magazine (published by Vox Media) on August 31. Yglesias also did a [podcast with Tyler Cowen](#) on September 9. Both are very revealing.

The book also was reviewed pre-release. (We will have more to say once we wade through it. [Leon Kolankiewicz](#) posted a [blog](#) last week reacting to the excerpt.) Razib Khan at [National Review](#) probably states it up best. “Like Yglesias himself, the book is a synthesis of stylistic bluster and moderate banality.” And that’s Khan being nice.

Khan gives Yglesias credit for sometimes going where his fellow progressives won’t, but when it comes to tripling the U.S. population Yglesias is going where virtually no one else will go — because it’s an chuckleheaded idea. Khan notes the “sections on immigration could have been drafted by a Cato Institute intern.” That tells you all you need to know about the intellectual level at which Yglesias is operating.

[The New Republic](#)’s Jacob Bacharach writes:

Matthew Yglesias’s latest, *One Billion Americans: The Case for Thinking Bigger*, is...a book-length collection of thoughts and proposals loosely arrayed around the endearingly crackpot idea that there should be one billion Americans by some undefined point in the future. Why one billion? The author is surprisingly hazy on this point, except to note that the aggregate economic output of China’s and India’s billion-plus people will inevitably exceed our own (and China’s may already have).

That is a pretty good summation of Yglesias’ overall argument. China has more people than the United States, and it may eventually have a larger GDP. That can never happen. Why? Because GDP is the measure of a nation’s “worth.” Why? Because.

How will the United States handle an additional 630 million people (we're at 330 million now)?  
Technology.

See, it's that easy, Yglesias tells us as much. **"It's worth emphasizing that while 1 billion Americans may be impossible and absurd, there's actually nothing hard about it."**

Got it? Accommodating one million people in the United States may be impossible, but it's not hard.

Yglesias tops this line of reasoning, if that is possible, by arguing that the United States is "empty" What is his reasoning as to why the U.S. is empty? Because it's not full.

These are not caricatures of Yglesias' arguments.

Kurt Cobb at [Resilience](#) pointed out the obvious effects on the environment of tripling U.S. population, highlighting one of the most pressing concerns the country is *already* facing.

But there is one little problem: America is not like a big family room filled with endless snack bowls for guests. America is an ecological territory just like every other square foot of the planet. There are vast areas of America that are desert or classified as arid, especially in the West. That's one reason those areas are not "full." There simply isn't enough water.

But no worries. Yglesias has that covered, as he [tweeted on September 8](#) "the substantive discussion of whether ONE BILLION AMERICANS would overtax the US supply of fresh water is on pages 254-255." Substantive indeed!

Here's a substantive discussion of population density by Yglesias. He gives great weight to the argument that the United States, being empty with only 93 people per square mile, needs to drastically increase its density, which certainly will happen with a billion residents. In fact, the "need" for greater density comes in a close second to the "need" to have a GDP greater than China's.

However:

People will sometimes say to me, 'Well, it's easy for you to say this stuff. You live in this big city.' Blah, blah, blah. But I happened to have grown up in Manhattan, the densest place in the United States by far. I don't like it there that much. I've moved to a smaller-scale place. I like it better. Anytime I visit a small town, I think, 'Eh, I like this.'

I could go on all day like this, but I'll leave it here for now. As Yglesias continues to promote his book they'll be plenty of opportunities to mock (gently) his utter cluelessness.

I'll end with this.

A long-time environmental activist who seeks to stabilize the U.S. population suggested to me that Yglesias isn't really serious. He is saying shocking and preposterous things to draw attention to himself in order to boost book sales.

No one doubts Yglesias wants to increase immigration because that's the default position of the political set to which he belongs; and immigration has benefited the upper class, both financially and politically, of which Yglesias is a member. There's nothing notable about restating what your in-group already reflexively and unreflectively believes, so Yglesias must become a carnival barker braying ONE BILLION AMERICANS!!!

I'm not sure I agree with the assessment that Yglesias is not in earnest, that he doesn't really believe that America can not be great unless hundreds of millions more immigrants make it so. I'll take him at his word, at least for now. If he is not really serious, if arguing for a billion Americans is a ruse designed only to move merchandise, he should admit as much. It would reveal a cynicism and duplicity behind this whole nonsense, but at least it would demonstrate him capable of coherent thought.