

Books & the Arts.



NASA/GSC/JEFFERSON BECK

Calving front of an ice shelf in West Antarctica photographed during NASA's Operation IceBridge in 2012

Endgame?

by REBECCA TUHUS-DUBROW

If a single book has haunted the environmental movement, it's *The Population Bomb*, by Stanford biologist Paul Ehrlich. Published in 1968 by Ballantine, the work is remembered for a handful of striking passages: its opening description of seething crowds in Delhi; its prediction that in the 1970s hundreds of millions of people would succumb to famine; its endorsement of policies, such as taxes on childbearing, that have, to say the least, gone out of style.

The sensationalism of the book's argu-

ment was modest compared to its marketing. Gracing the cover of the paperback edition was an image of a bomb with a burning fuse and the tagline "Population Control or Race to Oblivion?" Another line added, "While you are reading these words four people will have died from starvation. Most of them children." The book sold 2 million copies in two years. Ehrlich became a celebrity speaker and a frequent guest on popular television shows.

Ever since the famines failed to arrive on schedule, the book has been attacked with glee by conservatives and held to epitomize environmentalism's folly. For their part,

Ehrlich and his wife, Anne (who co-authored the book without attribution), stand by their conviction that population growth is wreaking horrific damage, and they take credit for raising awareness about the planet's limited resources. They have a point: their book is, on the whole, more measured than its notorious bits and screaming cover would suggest. And the final chapter is titled "What If I'm Wrong?" Among environmentalists, the book has been not so much renounced as met with a sort of embarrassed silence—at least until recently. Environmental writer Alan Weisman, in his new book on population, *Count-*

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