

BONUS EPISODE ▷▷ One Child To Rule Them All ▷▷ June 26th, 2020

Hey everybody! Rose here, and this is the bonus podcast for the episode One Child To Rule Them All. Just a quick programming note, these bonus episodes are now going to go out on FRIDAYS, just to synch up with the Time Traveler Dispatch bonus episodes from the membership program. This is a new workflow for me, and I'm still figuring out exactly how to do this in the most efficient way, but the actual content of this bonus podcast, and the Time Traveler Dispatch bonus episodes, will overlap a lot, so I'm trying to do them at the same time.

Okay, before we get into any of the actual content, one other programming note: I'm working on figuring out a way to provide transcripts for these episodes. I do transcripts for all the main episodes of both Flash Forward and Advice for and from the Future, and put those up on the website. So, every time there's an episode, there's a blog post, obviously that goes with it, with all the show notes and links and stuff. And then at the bottom of that, you'll find the transcript.

The question I've always kind of struggled with for these bonus episodes is where to actually PUT the transcripts. I don't want to post them publicly, obviously, since these bonus episodes are a perk for Patrons and members, so figuring out where to actually put the transcripts so that they're easy to find, for folks who might want them, has been a bit of stumbling block. Obviously I could make a new post for each bonus episode, on Patreon, with the transcript of the bonus podcast. Which is what I'll do for now, but let me know if that's annoying to you folks to get these posts in their feeds? Or if you'd prefer a different way of accessing transcripts if you do want them? I'm all ears.

Okay, now onto the actual content. This week's episode, One Child to Rule Them All, about a one child policy, was kind of a heavy one. It was kind of intense to report and think about. But like I said in the episode, I wanted to do it because I get asked this question a lot. And I think that it's something that a lot of people who are my age are thinking about, and talking about, a lot. I know a lot of friends of mine have struggle with this question. And I don't think that most of the people who ask this question are bad people, or eco-fascists, or whatever, I think that they just don't realize that this question comes from a very specific place. So, I really wanted to help make those links for people and reveal that history, and some of those connection to literal fascism and racism, which is obviously bad stuff. So, I hope that was helpful. I do hope that it helps people who are struggling with these kinds of questions, to maybe feel slightly less pressure, or less freaked out about it, or maybe just help you understand, perhaps, why this question feels extra fraught and complicated. Hopefully it was useful for people.

A few things that I didn't include in the episode, just for time, just because it was already really long, and I really try to keep episodes under an hour. It's sort of an arbitrary thing, but for me, as a listener, if I look at my podcast app and I see that there's an episode, and it's over sixty minutes, I'm just like, "ugh, who has time for that?" I know that other shows, that are amazing,

go over an hour, but for some reason, that's sort of in my head that every episode should be under an hour. This one was cutting it very close; with the ads, some of you may have seen more than an hour, depending on which ads you got served. And so, I hope that it wasn't a deterrent for listening. But, yeah, there was a lot of stuff that I didn't include because we were already very close to my limit.

The first thing that I want to talk about a little bit is about the book *Population Bomb*, by Paul Ehrlich. That book was actually written by Paul and his wife Anne. They cowrote it. It was not only written by Paul. And, in fact, they even submitted it to the publisher together. The publisher knew that they were writing it together, it had both their names on it when they submitted it. But... the publisher decided there should only be one name on the book... for some reason and ... would you look at that, I know you're probably shocked that wound up being the man's name on the book, Paul! So today he's usually credited as the author, even though they both wrote the book. Here's Paul talking about that in 2018, for the podcast *Climate One*.

Interviewer: You wrote it with your wife, Anne, but the publisher insisted on a single author. Tell us why, and do you regret that?

Paul Ehrlich: Well, Ian Valentine, who was then the inventor of Pocketbooks, and Dave Brower, who everybody in the Bay Area knows is one of the great original environmentalists, came to me and said, "Look, if you and Anne can write this down quickly, we'll publish it." This was in early, it would have been '68. "We'll publish it and maybe we can influence the election." Which shows, of course, how naïve they were, just like me. But then, when the book was finished, they said, "Look, for publicity purposes, for getting it around, for getting the word out it should only have one author." And I'm ashamed to admit that I folded on it, and said "Go ahead. Don't worry about it." And I still worry about it, because it was a good example of male chauvinism back in those days, which I collaborated with

Rose: So, I will say that I don't necessarily recommend reading the book, *Population Bomb*. It starts, right off the bat. The first thing that you read in the book is a very racist anecdote about a trip that Paul and his wife Anne took to India.

Jade: He and his family, they're in a taxi, in India. I believe it was in New Delhi. It's on a hot, sweltering night. They're driving through town, and they're in a community, you know, that was densely populated. And he just talks about his visceral reaction to all of these brown bodies everywhere. And it was a reaction of overwhelming fear. And it's hard not to understand that through a lens of racism, and especially right now, I think we're all aware of what racist fears of other people and other bodies can do.

Rose: That's Jade Sasser, who you heard on the episode.

Now, weirdly, at the same time, back in the United States, Paul was actually trying to ally himself specifically with the Black community.

Jade: Ehrlich was at great pains to declare himself not racist, and in fact, anti-racist. So after putting out this book, and getting a very negative response from communities of color, he really reached out to black leaders, at the time. He argued that he wanted to invite them to meetings and get them on board with the environmentalist agenda. And he went to great pains to reassure communities of color that he was not, in fact, advocating for racialized population control in the United States. That, in fact, his focus was on Middle-Class White Communities, getting them to control their population growth, to have fewer children, and mainly to stop consuming so many resources. But it's very clear. He makes a very clear distinction between the ways that he talks about populations in the U.S., and out of the US. In the U.S., he's targeting Middle-Class White people, getting them to exercise self induced restraint. Outside of the US. It is very colonialist and yes, quite racist.

Rose: The other thing to say about the book, that I did not get into in the episode, is the prediction that we'd have these global famines in the 70's and 80's didn't happen. And they didn't happen for a lot of reasons, but one of the reasons that they didn't happen is that there was something called the Green Revolution, also sometimes called the Third Agricultural Revolution. The green revolution really started in the 1950's, with a series of new technologies that made food production way more efficient. But even when Paul and Anne wrote the book, in 1968, it wasn't totally clear yet how impactful those technologies were going to be. Today we know that, in fact, there is plenty of food for the human population. This idea that food production is always going to be outpaced by population we know to be not true. That's not the issue. Even Paul admits that. Here he is again on Climate One:

Interviewer: Isn't that fair to say? That you underestimated the world's capacity to generate a lot more food with new technology?

Paul: It's fair and unfair. Because, first of all, the estimates we took and cited were from agricultural economists. And I think the general mistake, which I certainly shared, because I didn't know anything about it; I was talking to people that we cited, that knew. I'm no agricultural economist. I'm more of one now than I used to be. But the technology was clear, what we were worried about, more than anything else, was how rapidly it could spread. And what was underestimated was the brilliance of many subsistence farmers, who knew a lot more about what they could do on their land than a lot of the people who had industrial agriculture. But its certainly... there are a bunch of mistakes in The Population Bomb.

I did not really have time to get into the Green Revolution, in part because it's a very large topic, and a very long story. And its, sort of, a can of worms to start talking about, because there's lots and lots of questions, and complications, and nuance to that whole thing. So I just didn't want to get into it. But I just want you to know that I do know that it happened, I guess? So, that was something that I thought about including in the episode, but did not, because that's a whole other episode, basically.

Okay, moving on from Population Bomb, another thing that I mentioned in the episode, but that I didn't have time to get into is this rabbit hole that I fell into around sex disparity at birth. So, you might expect, like I said in the episode, that you'd have a completely even distribution of male babies and female babies born, because 50-50, right? That is not the case! That's not what happens. Setting aside the fact that even biological sex is a spectrum, and there are not only male and female babies, scientists still see a disparity in the number of male to females born. Like Leslie said, it's something like 105 male babies to 100 female babies. The question is: why?

The short answer is that we don't actually know. There are a bunch of theories, and maybe more than one of them can be true at the same time, I think. Some demographers have speculated that males are more likely to die early on — either because of health complications as babies, or from risky behaviors as kids and teens, so by the time you get to adulthood the ratio evens out to about 50-50. Other scientists have theorized that male sperm might have a slight swimming advantage over female sperm to reach the egg first, which seems to sometimes be true during certain parts of a person's cycle, but isn't always true. It's sort of unclear. There's also some research that suggests that females are more likely to be lost in the womb than male fetuses. So, you're more likely to have female stillbirths, for example. But really, we don't actually know what is going on here, or why. Which is really interesting, right? It seems like a pretty simple thing, and it's actually quite complicated and hard to figure out.

One other interesting thing I learned in researching this is that some people actually think that that climate change might impact this ratio. One study looked at births in Japan, and found that when there are extreme weather events -- which we think are going to become more common because of climate change -- the ratio of male and female babies born after those extreme weather events actually evens out. They specifically looked at 2010 and 2011 in Japan, which were this really hot summer, followed by an unusually cold winter. And nine months later, they found a decrease in the number of male babies born, to kind of even out that ratio. Now, not everybody agrees with this research. Other studies show that there's no effect with weather or temperature. Other studies show that warmer temperatures might increase the ratio. So it's actually very unclear, still. We just don't know.

Okay, the last thing I'll say is just a bit more about Leslie's book, which talks about adoption and China and soft power. I definitely recommend the book. Actually, both Jade and Leslie's books are totally readable. I read a lot of academic books for Flash Forward, and some of them are really dense, and clearly written for an academic audience, and hard to get through, as a lay person. Whereas these two books, I would say, are really readable. If you're interested in these topics, I definitely do recommend picking up these books. Both Jade's book and Leslie's book are actually totally fascinating, and very readable for academic books. So, I definitely recommend them. So, in Leslie's book, she argues that opening China up to foreign adopters is this political move. We don't really like to think about babies -- and particularly orphan babies -- as being political pawns, but they totally were. And so, China decides to allow Americans mostly, western, wealthy nations to adopt babies. And that's a very specific, strategic, decision.

Some places in the world do not allow American's to adopt babies. Russia, very famously, closed its doors to American adoptions back in 2012. And that was pretty clearly linked to sociopolitical tensions between the two countries, right? So, these children do end up getting caught in between political powers. But, so, China does decide to let Americans in. I just wanted to play you a little bit of tape of Leslie talking more about that, and about her book, just so you can get a better sense for it:

Leslie: I basically talk about how, you know, like a lot of places, social services and care for children in China has been one of those realism that's been heavily under-invested. While the government has focused so much on building up the infrastructure and the economy, things like funding child care and elder care -- especially for children who've been abandoned, who often have disabilities, cast out of their families, they're really kind of on the bottom of the social hierarchy. And so, very little government money has actually gone to them. And one way of kind of dealing with that was to reach out to Western countries, and to American parents in particular, and have them bring financial resources with them. So, you know, adopting from China -- adopting from any country -- is expensive. China is not more expensive than other places, but it has a very long running program., right? So at this point, I think that the price is probably about twenty five to thirty thousand dollars, like the entire process. And parents had to bring thousands of dollars, in cash, in their suitcases and hand it over as a mandatory orphanage donation when they picked up their children. And they also had to go to China and stay there for sometimes 10 days, two weeks, and they would travel, and be tourists and adopt their kids. An entire industry really popped up around it. And then the orphanages that were involved with international adoption got a huge influx of resources. And so, those resources have really helped make these places much, much better, in terms of conditions for the children who are still there. But it's also been a way for some people to make money. And so, I basically argue that that's one of those things that, you know -- international adoption really opened up this flood of resources coming into China. And not just through adopting kids out, but also by allowing Western volunteers, or NGOs, to come into Chinese orphanages and use their own resources to care for the kids who are still there. So, in many ways, it was kind of a good deal for the Chinese government.

Rose: Again, if you want more, I definitely recommend her book. I will link to it in the show notes for this bonus podcast episode, so you can go read it if you want to. It's super, super, interesting.

Okay! That's everything that I cut from the episode or didn't include for time. It was already a big thorny topic and I hope it was useful for people. I hope it was interesting. I hope that you checked out some of the resources on reproductive justice . If you want more of the advice side of the thing, about whether you, personally, should have a child, again you can check out Tuesday's episode of the advice show! It includes a little bit more of Meehan, and also an audio essay that I wrote about parenthood, and what that might be like. And it includes some really interesting archival audio from the UK, from many years ago. So, hopefully you'll check that out.

The last thing is that on the production side of things -- behind the scenes, what I'm doing day to day -- I'm just trying to stay on top of everything! I'm hoping to really get on a schedule for both these shows. So now that I'm doing two shows -- which basically means that I'm making an episode a week instead of an episode every other week -- I'm trying to really stay on. I made myself an editorial calendar, and I'm trying to really stick to it, so I can avoid being behind. But also -- and this is the big goal -- is that I'm hoping to hire a part time audio editor soon, to take some of the pressure off of me in terms of assembling rough cuts and doing some of the more basic audio tasks that I can do but might not be the best use of my time. So, when that happens -- when I have a job posting up for that -- I'll be sure to tell you and link to the job. And this is a paid position. I get a lot of emails offering to help for free, and that's so kind and I really appreciate that. But I don't believe in unpaid internships. I think that those are exploitative, and tend to skew the industry towards people who can afford to do unpaid internships, which is not everybody. So, I'm excited to be in a place now where I can pay for someone, and hire people, and make sure that they're getting paid market rate for their work. So, when that job posting is up, I will let you know.

Okay! Thanks for listening! Bye!