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To help ease the country's fiscal woes, Senator Charles Percy of Illinois has suggested that what America needs to do is hold a garage sale. Among the items Percy has recommended selling on the open market are some of the nation's public lands.

"These properties are in the attic and we're going to move them down to the garage and conduct a garage sale," the senator declared last winter. Percy and others of the garage-sale set believe that receipts from the sale of federal lands and buildings would substantially reduce the trillion-dollar national debt. A far more certain outcome is that a massive disposition would further reduce our one invaluable national asset—the land.

The land. Displayed at a "garage sale." The nation's land, discussed as though it ought to be dismantled and strewn across suburban lawns for weekend bargain hunters to rifle through. Following a long tradition, the present administration and its supporters are appraising the nation's real estate in terms, as well as deeds, that diminish it.

Percy's thinking was embodied in Senate Resolution 231, introduced last fall. In the House it was matched by Resolution 265, sponsored by Kansas Republican Larry Winn, and enthusiastically supported by Colorado Republican Ken Kramer. New legislation is imminent. President Reagan also drew up a plan to balance the budget by selling off large tracts of federal land. Last February he issued Executive Order 12348, establishing a high-level Property Review Board to oversee such transactions. The board requires each federal agency to "identify and report properties that can be specifically targeted for disposition." To comply with this request, twenty-seven federal agencies have been drawing up lists of lands and buildings that are "underutilized" so that they can be sold. A few of those agencies, among them the Army Corps of Engineers and the Defense Department, completed a preliminary list early in July of this year. The list included 307 parcels amounting to sixty thousand acres.

The composition of Reagan's Property Review Board suggests that this task of unloading federal land is not one the president takes lightly.

# Public Lands and Private Longing

DYAN ZASLOWSKY

*"It was all prices to them: they never looked at it:  
why should they look at the land?  
they were Empire Builders:  
it was all in the bid and the asked and the ink on their books. . . ."*

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH, 1933 From "Wildwest"

Among those making the decisions about what should be sold were Edwin Meese, counselor to the president, David Stockman, director of the Office of Management and Budget, and Murray Weidenbaum, former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers. No representatives of any federal land management agencies were asked to join. The administration would like to sell \$2 billion in surplus properties in fiscal year 1983. By selling about thirty-five million acres, or up to 5 percent of the total federal lands each year after that, another \$4 billion in sales is projected every year through 1987.

"The mission of the board will be to initiate an active disposition program designed to identify federal holdings which are not being put to the highest and best use and to expedite disposal of these properties," said David Stockman the day the Property Review Board was announced. "Our general direction will be to achieve the objectives of reversing the past decade's policy of federal [land] acquisition." Support for the administration's intentions comes from predictable places. Nevada Senator Paul Laxalt, a relentless warrior against federal land management, was no doubt gleeful to note, "We're talking about selling off a lot of Bureau of Land Management lands. . . ." In some accounts Laxalt has stated that he would like to start by selling about one hundred million acres of BLM lands containing oil, gas, and hard-rock minerals. Then there is the National Association of Realtors, which designed its Release of Essential and Excessive Property program specifically to encourage the use of the brokerage, sales, appraisal, and management skills of its 640,000 members to identify hot federal properties. Appropriately, the NAR calls this program REEP, for short.

More hesitant, but still approving, is the leading "Sagebrush Rebel," Nevada rancher Dean Rhoads. "We've shifted positions drastically," he acknowledged of the Rebels' former clamor for federal lands to be turned over gratis to the states in which they lie. "We had to face the hard fact that the federal government was not going to give one-third of America to the states for nothing in return." Rhoads said the full support of the Sagebrush Rebels depends on whether traditional users of the land, such as ranchers, will be protected from wealthier buyers, such as oil

companies and Arabs.

Not all those in the West, where most of the federal land is, are pleased with this opportunity. In a speech he gave to law students, Colorado's Governor Richard Lamm labeled the sale of public land to balance the federal budget "a shocking proposal." And Wyoming Governor Ed Herschler, reacting to exuberant claims that massive land sales would reduce the deficit, lower interest rates, curtail bureaucratic abuse, and spur community expansion, observed that "the all inclusive nature of this proposal should cause a rational man to step back, take a breath, and count both his money and his fingers."

Last spring, when the Honorable Ken Kramer, congressman from Colorado, testified in favor of a "full-scale disposal program" before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, he derived support for his position by recalling some American history. In the past, he said, the federal government had disposed of excess property "quite successfully," and that if it hadn't been for a series of Indian wars the national debt of President Andrew Jackson's time would have been nearly paid off. But Congressman Kramer did not read our history fully. If he had, he would realize that much of the public domain, chiefly the lands attached to the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the purchase of Alaska in 1867, were bought from nations desperate for a quick fix of cash. Neither Napoleon nor Czarist Russia retained its majesty for long after those sales. Their emergency real estate transactions did not keep them solvent. Such hand-to-mouth measures are indicative of tottering powers in any age.

Moreover, the government's disposition plan was successful insofar as it gave land away, but that success crumpled when there was nothing good left to give. Even when the sale of land for revenue was the chief goal of the new, struggling United States of America, a mere pittance came in. Between 1796 and 1820, when the government's need for money was particularly severe, only about \$28 million was raised. At their height, land sales accounted for less than 10 percent of the nation's revenue. "Sale of land for

revenue, though a major national issue at various times, simply never was a major source of national revenue in the period when it was most strongly advocated," wrote former BLM director Marion Clawson in his book, *Uncle Sam's Acres*.

The history of America's attempts to sell itself goes back to the beginning of the country, to a time of vigorous debate between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson envisioned a nation comprising many small landowners who tilled their own soil, soil granted to them by the federal government for little or nothing. Hamilton, on the other hand, felt the government should sell its unsettled lands. These were the territories won from the British at the time of independence, by "common blood and treasury of the thirteen states," and acquired through subsequent purchases, Indian treaties, and wars. The early government was broke. Hamilton easily won the debate. In 1785, when the original thirteen states had ceded nearly all their western frontiers to the central government, the Northwest Ordinance specified that land could be sold in units of 640 acres at a one-dollar minimum per acre, at public auction, and to the highest bidder. These were outrageous amounts for the times. The prices were so unreasonable that only the wealthiest men, many of them congressmen, could afford to buy land—which they did, selling it in turn to their countrymen at even higher prices. Quickly priced out of the open market, poorer men, who saw there was ample land and felt they deserved some too, simply settled or squatted, illegally, on unsurveyed tracts. Jefferson's prediction in 1776 came true. America's poor would "settle the land in spite of everybody." And so began the struggle between the squatter and the speculator.

The conflict between the two sides was inadequately refereed by the General Land Office, established in 1812 as an office of the Treasury Department. Land offices were opened wherever there was land to sell, but the poorly trained and often corrupt officials could not evict illegal settlers or control speculators. By selling what they did not fully own at prices nobody could afford to pay cash for, speculators were blamed for the financial panics of 1819 and 1837. A frontier newspaper at that time observed that "to such an extent had the hateful spirit of inordinate

speculation in lands proceeded that it had corrupted the fountains of legislation and the courts of justice, as well as the body politic. The rapacious spirit of accumulating large bodies of land pervaded the state of the Union and menaced the existence of the Union itself."

Opinions of this sort were so numerous, and financial failures among speculators so common, that Congress was moved in 1841 to pass the Preemption Law. This law, for the first time, placed settlers on an equal footing with investors. The Preemption Law allowed settlers to obtain legal title to land they homesteaded at a fixed price of \$1.25 an acre, for a minimum of 160 acres. The law is important because it signifies that, while Congress continued to misread the land, it had begun to recognize that efforts to sell America to the highest bidder had failed. And although the land could be a terrific outlet for economic expansion, the opportunities it afforded did nothing to help the country out of its depressions. The government was moving toward mass disposition of real estate merely by giving it away—to states for schools and roads, to railroads for tracks and stations, and finally, in 1862, to settlers for their toil.

The Homestead Act of 1862 finally shifted the intent of the government from sale to settlement and development. Under the Homestead Act any citizen over twenty-one could acquire 160 acres of land. He was given five years to "improve" the land by farming it and building a home on it, after which time title to the property would be securely his. More than three million homesteads were created, and possibly two million of those were successful within the five-year limit, resulting in the disposal of almost three hundred million acres to settlers. In all, close to 80 percent of the public domain, or more than a billion acres, was given to settlers, states, railroads, and others.

The goal of plentiful homesteads consisting of 160 tillable acres began to break down as settlers crossed the one hundredth meridian looking for their land. Land on which more than twenty inches of rain fell every year petered out. Deserts and semi-deserts prevailed. Anyone who



attempted conventional farming with inadequate water soon saw his patch of earth dry up and blow away, dust in the hard winds.

Disposition of the public domain became a "modern miracle of the loaves and fishes," according to Clawson. "In each decade we gave away or sold the best land available, but that which was left at the end of the decade was as valuable, acre for acre, as that available at the beginning of the decade." As long as some frontier existed, there was always land at the margin of acceptability. But in short time the marginal lands, put to misapplied husbandry, turned worse. The forces of settlement became more monopolistic. Big business in the form of corporations and cattle empires moved into areas reserved by law for homesteaders. The census of 1880 revealed this startling fact to a nation that considered itself a democracy composed of small landowners. About 26 percent of America's farmers were not owners, but tenants of the land they worked. Landlords, most of them absent from the land, dictated the course of settlement. With its different climate and geography, production in the West depended on vast lands and complex irrigation schemes. Large tracts of land were needed to ensure a profit, and the astonishing growth of technological inventions favored those with enough capital to put them to use.

In the West, failures continued to exceed successes, and land held by railroads or illegally by stockmen often reverted to the federal government, in far worse condition than it had been before. "Conviction that the federal government had been all too generous in its disposition of favors during the period between 1850 and 1870 produced a reaction in the form of an anti-monopoly movement which demanded legislation to restore the public domain," wrote historian Roy M. Robbins. In 1872, the National Park System was created. Congress still continued to pass laws that were unsuitable to the West, but in the General Revision Act of 1891, a fortuitous provision slipped through. This provision enabled the president to set aside forest reserves without going to Congress for approval. Here was a seedling of the idea of retention of resources for the future. Under Theodore Roosevelt (who may have angered more people than he pleased by wielding his powers of reservation),

the National Forest System flourished and grew to contain more than 150 million acres of federally managed timber.

Another 140 million acres of depleted grasslands were rounded up and branded with federal management under the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, referred to as the Magna Carta of conservation. These were the lands that nobody had wanted to buy or care for, but everybody wanted to use as long as grass grew on them. The Taylor Grazing Act is probably the first act in which Congress openly acknowledged that portions of the country did not submit well to settlement or unsupervised use. The agency that came to oversee the Taylor grazing lands is today's Bureau of Land Management, a child of the old General Land Office and the subsequent Grazing Service.

"The day on which the president signed the Taylor Act," wrote historian Rexford G. Tugwell in *Scribner's* magazine, "[he] virtually closed the public domain to further settlement and laid in its grave a land policy which had long since been dead and which walked abroad only as a troublesome ghost within the living world." The passage of the Taylor Grazing Act should also be celebrated as the day when enormous chunks of the public domain would no longer be turned over to private enterprise; not for a price, and certainly not for free.

In 1949, when the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act was passed, the government acquired the means to dispose of those federal property holdings which agencies no longer needed to support their programs. Under this act the General Services Administration can prescribe procedures for designating property as surplus, and it can dispose of this property outside the federal government. The only other agency with considerable statutory authority to transfer land out of the federal sector is the BLM, but this authority has never been interpreted as one which would turn an agency of land management into one of land sales. Nor has the motivation behind any such sales been first and foremost for profit.

Reagan's Property Review Board is, to be sure, far more interested in the market value of public

lands than in their aesthetic or spiritual importance to the communities they touch. For the benefit of this board, then, the estimated market value of the Legacy of Parks lands, for instance, is \$383 million. And what, according to this board, would be the "highest and best use" of these lands? To treat them as though they were part of a business. "We're going to have to do something to get the nation back on a firm financial footing," said Senator Paul Laxalt. "You can make the analogy to business. When business gets in trouble it sells off excess capital. Some of the public lands are excess capital." Laxalt's affinity to the business notion is suspect, because he has advocated defederalizing public lands in the past for numerous superficial reasons. But among many in the Reagan administration, the business analogy looms larger than anything, and more fixed. Edwin Meese declared that the sale of land would have the "practical effect of reducing the deficit." But to make it work, the Property Review Board would have to "change the basic laws governing entitlement property," that is, property now donated to states and governments for public benefit.

**A**nd David Stockman asserted that "in the hands of the private sector, the land could be fully developed and put to optimal economic use." An example of such use is the replacement of a government office building with a high rise on a lot now owned by the federal government in lower Manhattan. In this location it is possible that another skyscraper would be an optimum use of the land, but this is not a certainty, as Stockman maintained. If the space is now being filled by a smaller building, perhaps it is also providing some desperately needed breathing space in that dense, gray section of the city.

Another example cited by Stockman is a five-hundred-acre parcel near Washington, D.C., which the GAS turned over to the Department of the Interior for a wildlife refuge. Stockman reflected that the land, and more vacant or "underutilized" land surrounding it, could fetch a fine price.

As businessmen reviewing their prospects for profits, Reagan's assemblage of property evalua-

tors can see nothing but numbers; Congressman Kramer enthuses over the "billions and billions" of dollars that can be raised by selling "millions and millions" of acres of land. Indeed, some projections of land sales approach \$200 billion. While the restoration of free enterprise is also heralded, this reasoning can fall apart, as Laxalt discovered when his traditional backers in the West got leery of a straight market approach to the lands. In return for their favors, Laxalt suggested that perhaps in the case of such traditional users as stockmen a break could be given, still guaranteeing the government an "enormous" twenty dollars an acre for the grazing lands.

To harp on the idea that government should act as a business is to grossly misunderstand the unique character of each pursuit. Business and the federal government differ, according to Clawson, because "government must be conducted under constant multitudinous public scrutiny . . . because our system of democracy stresses checks and balances. . . ." And, according to Governor Richard Lamm in his speech last winter, when "decisions of rate, pace, and location of development are ceded to the private sector, public resource goals such as conservation, multiple use, and environmental protection are similarly left to the market place."

And as in business there are more ways than one to juggle the books. As Chicago Tribune Correspondent Raymond Coffey pointed out, "any farmer knows that if he has to sell off 40 acres of land to pay his bills this year, he can't plow and plant those acres again next year or any year. And if he has enough years like that, he's going to wind up in town sitting in front of the TV set." The most ominous aspect of the Property Review Board's current "mission" is that it threatens to erase years of lessons learned about the public lands: the lesson of managing for multiple use and sustained yield, rather than for maximum, short-term profits; the lesson of protecting watersheds, which private enterprise has repeatedly ignored; the lesson of wildlife conservation.

The GSA is charged by the Property Review Board with orchestrating the dispositions once sales inventories are completed. On its own, the GSA has identified 498 parcels around the country that it feels should be sold at an estimated

market value of \$1.3 billion. At least 186 parcels have been on the market for more than two years, which suggests they are not really wanted. Since the GSA already has the statutory authority to sell these properties, perhaps its energy should be spent in selling them rather than in drawing up lists of more properties that ought to be sold. No one is saying that federal real estate management can't be improved. But it can't be improved if the federal agencies in charge of these matters are instructed not to manage, but to sell. Often, when properties have been transferred, the government chalks up a poor record. A 1978 survey by the General Accounting Office looked at sixty-two pieces of property donated for the public benefit. Of these, twenty-seven had not been developed as intended by the grant, and thirty-one had been only partially completed as prescribed.

The Air Force, for example, donated four thousand acres to the town of Sparks, Nevada for a public park. The site now contains a J.C. Penney's catalog outlet, a warehouse, and an industrial park. The answer, it seems, is not to get rid of more land, but to charge "a fair price for public resources," as California's Secretary of Resources Huey D. Johnson suggested. "The solution is clear and obvious. Hold public lands in trust for the future. Meanwhile, lease the lands' resources at a fair market price. Let's end the subsidies to water developers, cattlemen, and loggers," said Johnson. "Let's end the virtual giveaway of our energy resources. The public deserves a fair return and a trust in the land to be shared with the future," he said. Furthermore, it wouldn't be necessary to "bail out a mismanaged federal budget if the public were receiving a fair value from the public resource wealth of these lands," he concluded. An indication of what these lands are capable of yielding under proper management is given in figures supplied by the BLM for fiscal 1981. Gross receipts from the sale, lease, and use of BLM lands came to \$13 billion, of which more than \$10 billion was returned to the United States Treasury. The remainder was divided among state treasuries for payments in lieu of taxes, reclamation funds, and the land management agencies. For every dollar appropriated for land management, according to bureau statistics, twenty-three dollars were collected from users.

With the Property Review Board's emphasis on the market value of lands to be sold, and the simultaneous operation of Interior Secretary James Watt's Good Neighbor giveaway program for the states, the Reagan administration is in a peculiar spot. Land management agencies will have trouble deciding what should be given to friends and what should be sold. In fact, some of the abuses in land transfers were discovered during a recent audit of Watt's selected Good Neighbor lands. But one of the biggest obstacles faced by Reagan's and Percy's land sales proposals is a deep sense of public mistrust, all of it deserved. In speeches by advocates of large-scale property sales, lip service was paid to the sanctity of wilderness areas, national parks, and wildlife refuges. Senator Percy emphasized that the first pieces of real estate to be sold would be mostly unused office buildings and small lots in eastern urban areas. But less frequently mentioned are the orders that have gone out to the National Forest Service, the BLM, and other federal agencies to inventory their own stock for possible disposition. Government documents obtained by California's Huey Johnson contradict the public pronouncements. In one memo he quoted from during Senate hearings last spring, officials also expect "a review of the existing National Forest System, the National Park System, Wildlife Refuge System, Wild and Scenic Rivers [System], Wilderness Areas, and Bureau of Land Management lands to determine if all elements of a system should be treated similarly and if different systems should have different criteria for disposal."

In a speech last February, Stockman spoke of the Property Review Board's mission in terms of land more often than in terms of buildings and scrawny urban lots. Referring to Forest Service and BLM lands, he called the situation "complex," but said, "We are proposing that this phase of the initiative not be introduced until fiscal year 1984. We do believe a substantial array of properties should be considered for sale." And in Denver, Secretary Watt spoke of his hope to "liquidate, sell, or privatize" considerable amounts of land.

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On orders from the top, the federal land management agencies have not been terribly forthcoming in describing their inventory procedures. BLM Director Robert Burford instructed his field personnel to give a brief prepared statement on the subject when asked about it by the press or public. "The data contained in the current inventory must be treated as internal information," he wrote in an April 27 memo. "In effect, it is essentially raw data and wide dissemination now would only tend to feed rumors or create premature judgments," the memo read.

**R**espect for existing laws aside, there are some interesting logistical problems involved in any attempt to dismember much of the remaining federal land. In his eagerness to get on with the disposal idea, Congressman Kramer a year ago asked the General Accounting Office to study the consequences of large-scale sales. The GAO concluded that a disposal program would require extensive staff and considerable time—up to ten or twelve years in some cases. "A change of policy to a large-scale and quick disposal program would create a markedly different real estate market in many areas," the study said, "not only for federal property, but for private property as well. If large amounts of federal land were to suddenly become available for private purchase, the private lands' values could drop and the value the government would receive for its land could also be less than the value estimates based on a policy of federal retention of most properties."

The government could also have difficulty finding qualified buyers for many properties because, according to the GAO report, it currently "disposes of property on a cash basis and does not finance its sales." It also pointed out that the government is not in the habit of selling mineral rights along with surface rights, which would also affect the price of the land. And buyers might be "unable to obtain financing on vacant land with any lending institutions under present cash liquidity problems, even if interest rates were much lower." Which brings up another point: interest rates are so high now that the housing and real

estate sector is one of the most depressed in the economy. Where are all these people going to come up with the money to buy land if they can't even purchase a single home or lot these days? The answer is that "people" won't come up with it; corporations, and big ones, will.

This, primarily, is the fear that tugs at the West, the possibility that the rugged individualists, those who want the land given to them for nothing, must face. One rancher on the Wyoming-Montana border allowed as how he and other ranchers would "like to get a chance to bid on grazing lands if they're sold," but he speculated that big industry could pay more. "It doesn't make a whole lot of difference," the rancher said, "but I don't want to see industry owning the land."

The governor of that state, Ed Herschler, conceded that some land dispositions are necessary, and that red tape could be cut considerably to make it possible. "But I am opposed to using the reduction of the federal deficit as the preeminent criteria for public interest determinations," he said during a Senate hearing last spring. "The last thing an old rancher wants to do is sell the ranch. The next to last thing is to have to go through a New York banker while having a Philadelphia lawyer draw up the deed."

One of the besetting sins of the Reagan administration is that it wants to affix a price to everything. But how does one determine the value of a resource not yet discovered? The nation does not know the value of its lands other than that it is inestimable when considering future needs. To speak in terms the current administration might understand, the land also could be considered this country's best, and last, defense. But instead of recognizing it as such, President Reagan asks for more military spending, while much of what there is to defend could be sold out from under us. In these moral times, it seems wise to consult a higher authority on the subject. The Book of Leviticus should do: "The land shall not be sold forever, for the land is Mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me." □

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rational in my approach to these things then some of the rest of you. I am a writer and fundamentally just a writer, not really a scholar. I'm interested in what can be done to preserve, improve—to make legitimate and undamaging use of ordinary land.

I want to ask a question. I have a feeling, and this is going to come out a little bit silly, but if anything is going to be done for the overall benefit of the land, it has to proceed from an almost religious feeling. Respect is the only basis. Pragmatics are fine, but I don't believe any real preservation or wise use is going to be achieved except on a basis of, well, you have to call it reverence. And I don't use that kind of word very much. What I haven't found in talking to any of you—and we've had some wonderful talks—is a sense of *past* reverence of this kind. Bromfield didn't just pop up. Bromfield was a link in a chain of Midwestern, almost mystical feeling about the land. I'm not a scholar of the subject, but I'm aware of these people. That old bunch from Cornell including Liberty Hyde Bailey and those old agronomists. There are some wonderful 19th century, early 20th century books, that are imbued with this feeling. Usually from a farming standpoint. Sara Ebenreck and I were talking about this in terms of Rodale's field of interest. They maintain what they call a farmer's bookshelf. They keep in print things like *Farmers of Forty Centuries*. That book is fifty or sixty years old, and it's about the Chinese going back 4,000 years and the immensely sustainable use of the land that they made through accumulated wisdom. We're not starting from scratch. I don't know how you're going to sell all this to the hugely urban audience we now have—the NAACP man is an example. Urban people have other concerns, or think they do. But if we are going to persuade people about the land, it would probably be on the basis of individuals like Bromfield. He's a phenomenon because all of a sudden out of this mystical Midwestern heartland tradition of the land, here popped a voice which everybody wanted to listen to. Maybe new people can speak to this vast urban preponderance that we've got right now, but in order for them to do so, a sense of this tradition, this wholeness, is going to have to be with us. We tend always in this country to think we're starting from scratch. We don't start from scratch. Every writer knows you don't start from scratch. Whether you ever read Shakespeare or not, you write vastly differently because he existed. You're a hell of a lot better off if you *have* read him, too.

SCHEFFEY: I haven't thought for a long time about Liberty Hyde Bailey and country life movement. He sort of ended up being disillusioned, though.

GRAVES: Anybody who fools with this subject does.

RON KROESE: I direct a project for the National Farmer's Union that will only exist for three more weeks because our National Endowment funding ends. We picked young farm couples from around the country, to expose them to their own historical backgrounds and humanistic traditions. They were trained to go out in their own communities to hold meetings and expose their friends and neighbors to these same things. One thing to come out of the project are several fine couples who now are faced with a terrible dilemma. The dilemma is that they now want to be good stewards of the land, and they can't be because they can't afford to be. That's what I run into everywhere. We have to somehow make the people in the

rest of the country understand that there are a lot of good farmers out there who want to be good stewards, and who know how to be. But when you're paying \$150 an acre cash rent you don't know what to do about it. I have a friend in Kansas who has made a conscious decision not to be an irrigator, trying to be a dry land farmer surrounded by irrigators out there, because he knows the Ogallala aquifer is drying up. That seems to me to be the communications job. We have to somehow figure out a way that people can afford to be good farmers.

## Land as an American Ethic

SARA EBENRECK: I'd like to acknowledge the importance of Ron's question, and then move back to something that seems slightly more impractical. The first point I'd like to make is that in order to communicate the land, we have first to communicate *with* the land. We need to sense what our connections are with the land.

Putting on my hat as a philosopher, one of the basic perceptual problems in the Western tradition has been the distinction, which comes from the Greeks, between persons and things. Way back, Plato and Aristotle shaped our intellectual categories for us. Whitehead said that all philosophy and all thinking is, in a way, a series of footnotes to Plato. Those two thinkers very distinctively separated the world of persons from the world of things, and created hierarchical categories in which persons were superior to things. That distinction is reflected in the fact that if you go out the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland, and look up philosophy of agriculture you will find a blank. There's not a single card. Look up political philosophy, in any category, and you will find shelves full of cards. That kind of thinking makes it seem almost mystical to talk about communicating *with* the land. We haven't learned to understand that. I think Aldo Leopold was right on target when he said we need to create an ethical community which includes things, which will allow our discourse to include the land. I have the feeling that we need ways to talk about listening to the land and learning what it has to say to us. I am not at all sure we know what is going on in the forest, what is going on in the soil.

If we could begin to sense more clearly our connections with the land, we might begin to move to some kind of ethical position which would respect the land as a value in itself, not simply in its usefulness to us. That would affect the whole way we treat it—not only farmland but also the way we treat our back yards. Like the native American Indians, we should be willing to give something to the land for what we take from it.

FRED ELDER: I've always operated, since my own conversion in the mid-'60s to the ecological point of view, with an holistic approach. I believe that any attempt to make aspects of the land discrete is unfortunate. I realize that there has to be attention given to certain particulars, but so often the neat separations that we make are really only attempts to avoid the difficulties, to avoid parts of the whole problem we don't want to look at. It seems to me we really are trying to establish the reverence concept that was mentioned by John Graves, and this is truly a radical point of view. Ultimately what you have to say to people is that they are not the owner of the land. There is



indeed something in this secular age which transcends the claims, even, of humankind. That has a very old tradition, as you know—Psalm 24 for instance. In so doing, one really does combat the dominant cultural values. The preeminent value, surely, in American culture, is freedom. I think the land has contributed to that value by its sheer quantity. People were convinced that the idea of freedom meant, they really *could* do what they wanted to do.

But what we are talking about is stewardship, and that implies a kind of a commitment which we have to admit, will infringe somewhat on freedom. The problem with freedom, as I see it, is that in the American culture we have come to understand it as a terminal value. It is good in and of itself. I prefer to think of freedom as an intermediate value, very precious of course, but no guarantor of proper behavior. I had hopes at one time that there could be a steady broadening of environmental awareness in the organized church. The church is very creaky, of course. It is a little like the railroads. It isn't used that much, but the tracks are everywhere. Still, we might touch a lot of people, with our aim being to provide a kind of pre-political push. I'm convinced that there has to be a change of attitude before anything good can happen for the land.

STEPHANIE MERTENS: When we were asked, what is the central idea that we're trying to communicate now, I thought: It's not just an "idea." There is an *emotion* about land that is going on. It has to have intellectual content for it to be sound and credible, but it has to go way beyond that in order to touch the whole reality. We speak of freedom, and I know many farmers want their independence. But if you edge around to it, they will accept the word interdependence. That's key to what we're talking about here, the kind of integration that's needed. My suit for over ten years now has been for the integration of the struggle for faith with the struggle for justice. It *has* to come together. Mr. Graves has spoken of reverence. But that reverence has to manifest itself in action. People can't get by with a fundamentalist approach to faith anymore. You can't let God be separate from getting down into the nitty-gritty grass-roots action. The reverence of which you speak rises out of the faith, but it doesn't stop at the spiritual level. It has to have its basis in action—in the legislatures, in government departments, in the courtrooms.

## The Land as American Image

SCHEFFFEY: We'll move now to the two artists in our group, beginning with Alan Gussow.

ALAN GUSSOW: To grow up in this country is to grow up with certain images that have been passed on to us. We don't question them very much—the image of the pioneer, of manifest destiny, of the whole notion that you really had to take charge of the land in a very male way. Clear the land. Lay claim to it. It is writ large in our own century with the Marlboro man. It is a mythic idea that persists and has a curious tenacity. The tenacity is of the kind expressed in sports for a lot of people—the sense of triumph over the land. Vincent Scully, somewhere in *The Earth, the Temples and the Gods*, says that only when the spirits died out of the land—at the beginning of the modern age—do you get the beginning of landscape pain-

ting and all the sentimental things. Meaning no disservice to our forebears and vicariously understanding their hardships, there is a sense in America that the spirits were taken out of the land almost forcibly. Rather than addressing ourselves to those authentic spirits that resonate in ways that have meaning for us now, we tend to look in a much more short-sighted way at images, both human and natural, which evoke 19th century ideals that I think mislead us. Although I have done a book which celebrated the American landscape [*A Sense of Place*], it would not be the book I would write today. I think those pictures which find ultimate expression in the Marlboro man, or even Norman Rockwell and his Thanksgiving dinner, are an inappropriate image for us.

The image we need is an image which Paul Shepard calls the ecological viewpoint, which is a vision across boundaries. There is a large, grand and beautiful continuity and connection, which is essentially the ecological viewpoint. If there was one single idea that I would try to send out to the people in our own nation, it is that they must see their future, and their connection to the future, with what is happening in the American soil, the American land in terms of people who grow the food that we all require. I don't think urban people really understand their dependency. The myth of independency is wholly inappropriate to our time. We must teach what my friend Jerry Mander calls "the humilities." We must understand our dependencies. Our dependency on one another and on various communities, both biological and human, is at the root of a broad comprehension that will lead people to take action. The reason my wife says it is important for people to grow gardens in cities is not because it will meet their food needs but because it will keep alive two things. One is the taste of fresh food so that they will demand more; and the other is they'll learn the vulnerabilities. There are things that one can not control.

There are two related points that I would make. There is a

