Forests and Future Resource Conflicts

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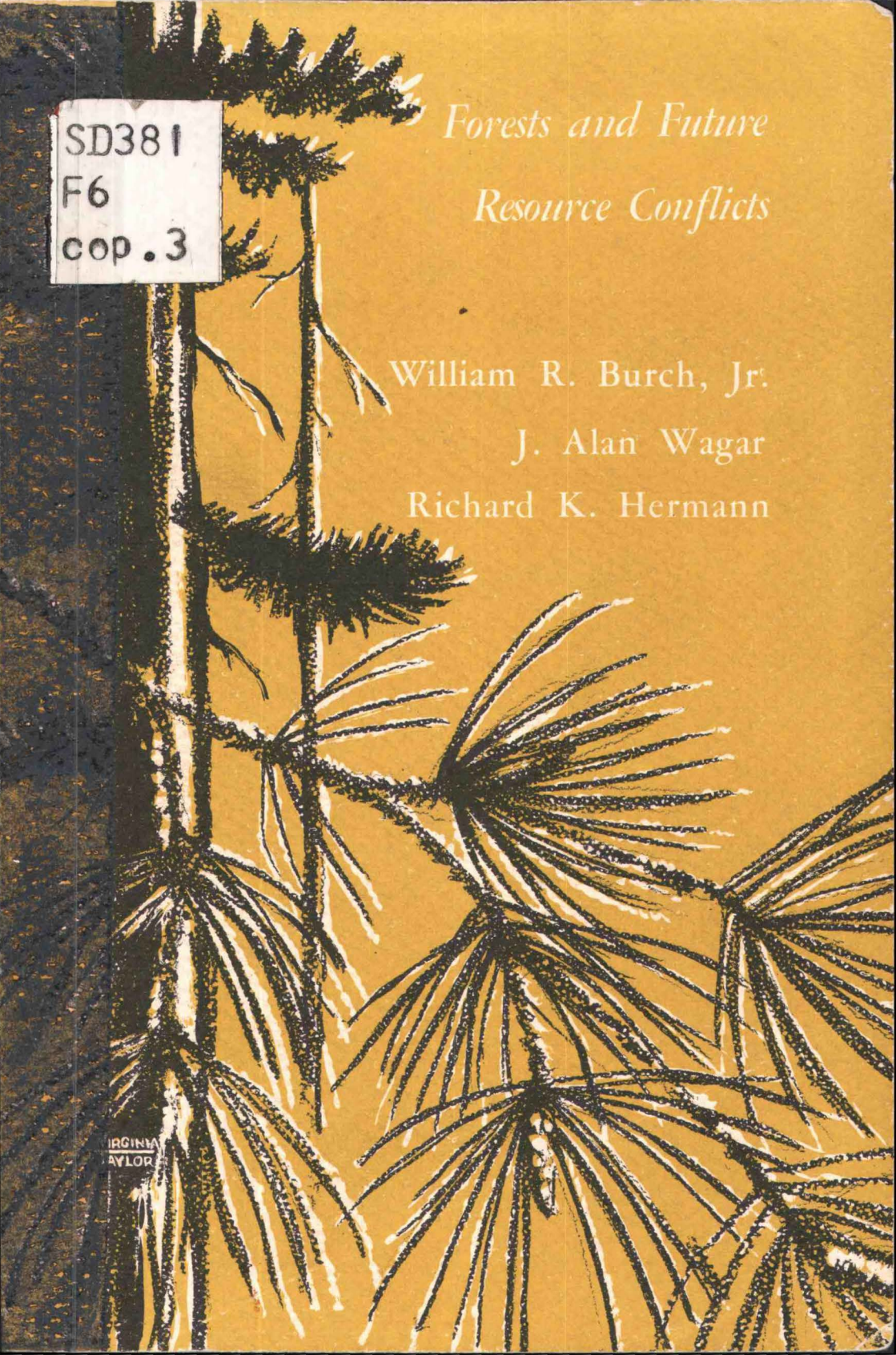

Time, Land, and People-
Old Resources
and New Social Institutions

William R. Burch, Jr.

In the last half of the twentieth century, any consideration of the disposition of land needs to take into account both old and new realities. The old reality is that land is a physical resource vested with a heavy load of symbolic meaning that shapes the identity of both individuals and nations. The new reality is that property institutions regulating the disposition of land are operating in a world of rapidly altering scarcities. We have an untidy and complex residue of rights and traditions inherited from the past, rights and traditions no longer viable under new conditions. An examination of our property institutions, the creations of our society, and our renewable and nonrenewable resources can reveal the extent of social change and help us find new directions.

LAND–SOCIAL SYMBOL AND MORAL PARADOX

The fate of *Homo sapiens*, as of other animals, is bound to the land and its envelope of air and water. Yet, whether organized into tribal, feudal or industrial societies, our species remains curiously ambivalent toward the land. We worship the land, create deities from its living substance, write poems and sing songs that honor its grace and beauty. At the same time, we seek to minimize effort and maximize yield in exploiting the land and its resources. Often, the motherland gets patriotic songs and dustbowls in about equal measure (2).

Such a seeming paradox occurs because, aside from working the land for survival, human beings erect an edifice of

ritual, territory, and identity whose fund of symbolic meaning often supersedes the necessity of survival. Tribal and modern societies alike establish elaborate rituals in praise of and hope for the land's fertility. In tribal society these rituals consist of sacred chants, dances, and omens overseen by holy men. In modern society we have councils of economic advisors and seers of agribusiness who speak in strange tongues concerning forces unseen by the laity; we religiously sprinkle the magic of chemicals upon the land, our animals, and ourselves; and we perform the elaborate wizardry of feasibility studies, cost-benefit analyses, and, recently, environmental-impact statements. The charm of ritual is that it imposes certainty upon an uncertain world, reaffirms our conventional wisdom, and substitutes mindless routine for systematic action.

In both tribal and modern society, bloody wars are waged for bits of territory whose value is unknown or questionable except for the elaborate patriotic sentiments regarding the motherland. Destroying something in the name of saving it is not confined to our time. Indeed, the strong emphasis on sentiment rather than survival is one of the many ways in which human territoriality differs from that of other animals (7).

In the human scheme of things, land and space also serve to announce and validate an individual's identity. For example, offices of executives and country estates of the well-to-do are considerably larger than those less favored, not from functional but from symbolic necessity, just as the Tiv of Western Africa organize their land in accordance with the ancestral spirits embedded in it. Though industrial society pretends less interest in so linking present generations to those of the past and the future, its landscape is ribbed with historic parks, sites, and monuments. The American suburbanite, two generations out of rural origins, seeks a replica of colonial housing or pioneering on a half-acre ranchette and votes for those who promise all the verities of an imagined past.

In all of our seeming concern over the land, our central interest remains in its function as symbol. That is, our conceptions of the land are never experienced directly but are

filtered eternally through the established linguistic systems (what Kenneth Burke (3) calls the "trained incapacities") of the social groups to which we belong. Because we belong to several such systems, what often seems inconsistent merely may reflect adherence to several consistencies. The person who sings the patriotic praises of the land is often unaware of inconsistency when profit motives send that same sacred land drifting in dust storms, eroding into the sea, or acidifying into sterility.

Most planning studies of the land's carrying capacity assume that the same biological and physical factors that direct deer and insect populations affect human populations. That is, such studies attempt to standardize on the basis of only those measures that easily lend themselves to quantification and computer manipulation. But this attempt to develop standards for universal application denies the fact that ecological diversity seldom lends itself to standardization. The allegedly scientific plans, often simply the artifice of an alternative symbol system, really avoid difficult political realities and moral responsibilities.

This modern deception makes us realize how the empirical realism of Frederic Law Olmsted, John Wesly Powell, Gifford Pinchot, and transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau remain essential guides for today. Indeed, they are clearer guides for building a humane and ecologically balanced world than are ecological theologists such as Garrett Hardin, Paul Ehrlich, and William and Paul Paddock. No ideas from Olmsted, Powell, and company rage at man the evil weed. Nor is there a write-off of whole societies because their diverse and rich humanity cannot be understood in the simplistic metaphors of jet-set biologists. Rather, Olmsted and Powell view humanity as an essential and natural component of the ecosystem. Though never so naive as to ignore the potential dark impulses in *Homo sapiens*, they sought to emphasize and enhance his capacity for good. They attempted to understand how human social systems, physical systems, and ecosystems interpenetrate. They emphasized "use value" rather than "price value". On this basis, they sought more fit metaphors and mechanisms for achieving social and ecological harmony. They emphasized homogeneity

at the level of niche and neighborhood and diversity at the level of ecosystem and community. In short, they were our first modern ecological visionaries.

Though one could argue that all science is an exercise in metaphorical leap frog, we should note that the holistic vision of ecology is almost entirely metaphorical. The work of Murray Buell, Eugene Odum, and Paul Sears, like that of many old-time silviculturists, illustrates that the understanding of whole ecosystems requires much of the method and all of the courage of a poet. For contrast, we need only reflect on the instrumentation and "hard" data of the molecular biologist, confidently reducing the world to its certain and measurable particularities, to realize that atomistic metaphors are not likely to return us to visions of the whole.

Working ecologists remind us that environmental arguments, which are often couched in terms of aesthetic differences, should be seen in terms of survival differences. A good part of the rhetoric of environmentalists concerning forest harvesting technique, size of wilderness areas, development of Alaska, quality of modern life, and use of automobiles is a statement of aesthetic preference. Such preferences have a strong element of patronizing snobbery and disguise the attempt to have someone else pay for the pleasures. Not surprisingly, the interlocking corporate structure that manages our economy has been fairly quick to pick this up and in its rhetoric to become an instant friend of the "little people."

Therefore, issues that are of direct relevance to all persons, and especially to the little people, are converted to seem merely aesthetic snobbery, which raises food prices and deprives us of gasoline to run our newly won auto and fuel to heat our newly purchased home. Of course, such an argument is patent nonsense. Yet the lesson is clear–in ignoring the humane views of Olmsted, Powell, the transcendentalists, and the working ecologists, the conservationist argument has often ignored and too often arrogantly debased the aspirations of the masses. What we must seek is a blueprint for a democracy where human aspirations and ecological constraint can find a meeting point. Events are too swift; it is false to assume that democratic drift

will ultimately evolve the appropriate solution. Intellectuals, as persons of uncommon, cumulative, and organized knowledge, have an obligation to create and explore metaphors of the future and to share in their implementation. Indeed, the lesson of Vietnam is not that it was a tragedy or an aberration in the American experience; rather, that it was the logical culmination of a system where the producers of dreadful knowledge were able to avoid the responsibility of moral choice.

Environmentalists–foresters, agronomists, hydrologists, ecologists, Friends of the Earth, and all the rest–can no longer remain in their specialized worlds. The establishment of a wilderness area, the choice of a silvicultural technique, or a watershed management decision are not simply technological choices, but are social and political issues with far reaching implications. The trial and conviction of advisors to Richard Nixon should remind men that each participant in a decision holds a significant residue of moral responsibility. We cannot leave decisions to "those politicians" while we make more elaborate footnotes on the margins of time. Perhaps in rediscovering our moral responsibility we may approach the wisdom of Powell, Olmsted, and others.

We need a renewed understanding of the key mechanisms by which a social order adjusts to changes in its environment. Such mechanisms regulate rates of fertility and mortality, of immigration and emigration, and of food production and consumption. Though in human society these mechanisms have a unique operation, they have consequences not unlike those found in other animal populations. The uniqueness seems to lie in the purely symbolic character of the mechanisms in human society, mechanisms seldom retimed without a great deal of ritualistic and rhetorical expression.

PROPERTY INSTITUTIONS AND THE REGULATION OF SOCIETAL "FITNESS"

Property, and the rights and obligations surrounding its disposition, seems to be one of the clearest focal points where ecosystem, economy, and social system come together. Prop-

erty, we should remember, is primarily a social, not a physical, phenomenon because it is part of the normative structure of a given social group. Society defines and regulates the ownership of rights to potential enjoyment or use of those things that have some social or economic value. All those "potentials" that a person or group has rights in become property. Persons own the right-of-use for their homes, though someone else holds the mortgages. The holding of General Electric common stock gives one certain circumscribed rights to voting and dividends; one certainly does not own General Electric—people's capitalism notwithstanding.

Contrary to our ideology, property rights are seldom neat and never finally settled. For example, the New England states reflect an accumulated residue of ownership rights compromised since the early 17th century from those that survived the Atlantic crossing. Thus, the State of Connecticut has purchased flowage rights on certain waters, and private persons retain bottom rights that exclude all trespass by the general public, such as fishermen. Additional lease rights must be secured before the public can fish in their publicly owned water for their publicly owned game.

For most species of wildlife, regardless of where they are found, the State claims exclusive ownership rights. But not only does our state wildlife property wander indifferently across public and private property, it also crosses the borders of Massachusetts and New York and thereby ends our property rights and becomes owned by someone else. The right to mobile, independent property, such as wildlife, might be expected to be confusing; but consider the situation wherein the state has rights in the salt water that rises and falls with the tides over wetlands where rights are held by private persons. Until recently, salt marshes were seen as wastelands to be occupied by garbage or drained and filled with marinas and suburban developments. In 1970, because of pressure by environmentalists, wetlands were recognized as essential components in a marine ecosystem that belonged to the public. The Connecticut General Assembly, morally excited and fiscally tightfisted, passed a wetlands conservation bill wherein the state

claims rights, without purchase or compensation, to tidal wetlands on which the fee holder continues to have the right to pay taxes but does not have the right to carry out certain activities. I will not mention the interesting possibilities associated with the fact that New England coastal lands have been subsiding for some time now at a seemingly accelerating rate.

The variations in property relations give us a reading of how stable a given social order is, how significant its patterns of change have been, and what is likely to be happening to a variety of other institutional clusters. Henry Sumner Maine's discussion of the shift from status to contract, Ferdinand Töennies' idea of a shift from *Gemeinschaft* (community) to *Gessellschaft* (society), Émile Durkheim's optimism regarding the change from the mechanical solidarity of tribal society to the organic solidarity of urban industrial society, Max Weber's analysis of men's "disenchantment" with the world in the rush to rationality, Karl Marx's concern with ownership of the means of production, and the analyses of other social theorists at the turn of the century were all attempts to account for the sharp changes that occurred in property rights as western society moved from tribal and feudal systems to an industrial political economy.

In tribal situations, property has use and status value and only marginally price value, and a central concern is to maintain continuity over generations. One of the most characteristic patterns of tribal groups is the tradition of food sharing (10). That is, all members of the group share equally in the food resource, regardless of who secured the food. Such patterns of social organization have importance for the species (11):

> Cultural Man has been on earth for some 2,000,000 years; for over 99 percent of this period he has lived as a hunter-gatherer. Only in the last 10,000 years has man begun to domesticate plants and animals, to use metals, and to harness energy sources other than the human body. *Homo sapiens* assumed an essentially modern form at least 50,000 years before he managed to do anything about

> improving his means of production. Of the estimated 50,000,000,000 men who have ever lived out a life span on earth, over 90 percent have lived as hunters and gatherers; about 6 percent have lived by agriculture and the remaining few percent have lived in industrial societies.

Because hunter-gatherer organizational forms–the clan, the band, the tribe–have been the major adaptive pattern for our species, their use of the time resource may tell us more about our species' regularities of behavior than we can learn from the brief moment of the industrial order. Until recently, we have either romanticized hunter-gatherer groups, the "noble savage," or excused the ills of the industrial order by depicting tribal life as short, nasty, and brutish, with the search for food constant. Happily, recent empirical research has satisfied neither polarized view, though major theories of social evolution such as those of Coon (5) and Lenski (13) will need substantial revision because the data indicate that longevity and leisure are essential characteristics of most hunter-gatherer groups.

The scholarly presumption of a dismal life style for hunter-gatherers is partially based on the acceptance of linear progress as an explanation of cultural variation. If "we," Victorian England or post-industrial U.S.A., who "are at the apex of human development" struggle so hard and are so unfulfilled, then certainly those at lower levels must be even worse off. If work is an unending burden to us, it must be even more so for hunter-gatherers. As Sahlins notes (18):

> Scarcity is not an intrinsic property of technical means. It is a relation between means and ends. We might entertain the empirical possibility that hunters are in business for their health, a finite objective, and bow and arrow are adequate to that end. A fair case can be made that hunters often work much less than we do, and rather than a grind the quest is intermittent, leisure is abundant, and there is more sleep in the daytime per capita than in any other conditions of society. (Perhaps certain traditional formulae are better inverted, the amount of work per capita

> increases with the evolution of culture and the amount of leisure per capita decreases.) Moreover, hunters seem neither harassed nor anxious. A certain confidence, at least in many cases, extends their economic attitudes and directions. The way they dispose of food on hand, for example—as if they had it made.

In contrast to subsistence political economies, the feudal system had a very elaborate set of property institutions. In Japan, the *Daimyo* was bound into a complex set of rights and obligations to the land and his dependent peasantry. He, in turn, was bound to the *Shogunate* who held in trust the lands for the Emperor, who, in theory, owned all the lands of Japan (8). In Europe, the Lord owned the land, but the land was bound into a set of reciprocal rights and obligations among the various elements of society. The Lord collected in-kind rents from the peasant and was, in turn, responsible for the protection and security of the peasant's welfare. The mixture of paternalism, reciprocity, and cooperation may explain why so many moderns of the left and the right romantically long for a return of the system.

The commons were an important sociological and ecological feature of the European Feudal system. As Earl Murphy describes it (15):

> This complex of (agricultural) techniques, called "champion husbandry," required regular cycling of the land to provide for fallow periods. This cycling developed because of the shortage of draft animals, the prevalence of subsistence farming that made each manor self-sustaining, the limited variety of crops available, and the short supply of fertilizers. With its stress upon crop rotation and mutual effort, this tradition economically discouraged the servile tenant from establishing a large, independent unit in his own or family name. To do so would have cut him off from help by his fellows, limited him to the resources of his own plot, and exposed him to the full consequences of his servile state.

Thus, one of the accompaniments of the higher material standards of agrarian society is the greater amount of time spent on simply maintaining the system. There must be the saving of seeds for planting next season, the storing of surplus for off seasons, the saving for festivals and religious assurance, the preparation for droughts and pestilence, the saving for ultimate replacement of draft animals, the saving to support rulers, scholars, and noblemen who produce symbols of unity rather than bushels of grain; these and all the myriad other tasks of maintenance of a more complex social order leave little time for leisure for the masses of agrarians.

The market society that emerged from the feudal period was a dramatically new social form that transformed traditional property relations so that natural and human components of society were converted into commodities. As Polanyi notes (16):

> But labor, land, and money are obviously not commodities; the postulate that anything that is bought and sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue in regard to them. Labor is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself, which in turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized; land is only another name for nature, which is not produced by man; actual money, finally, is merely a token of purchasing power which, as a rule, is not produced at all, but comes into being through the mechanism of banking or state finance. None of them is produced for sale. The commodity description of labor, land, and money is entirely fictitious.

Though the basic fictions of the market society continue to be solemnly honored by all who pretend to manage modern economies, there has been an eager attempt to avoid the consequences of honoring such fictions. Public, corporate, and private entities have sought property rights more congenial than

those offered by the market system—rights to control essential services and markets, rights to control specific occupations, and rights to control specific social problems. As Robert Lekachman noted in a recent article (12):

> . . . American politics is a covert hunt for new privilege and Government-created property, an avid search for franchises, airline routes, television channels, acreage allotments, tax advantages, ingenious subsidies, and grazing privileges at concessionary rates. The pricing decisions of the major corporations which exercise substantial power over their market amount to still less supervised creations of new property in the shape of excess profit.

If there has been one consistent trend in North American life, it has been the steady attempt to remove resources and aesthetic issues from the whim of the market. Thus, forest preserve acts, municipal, county, state and federal parks, wildlife refuges, soil conservation acts, zoning regulations and contemporary wetland, agricultural protection and land-use laws all reflect attempts to socialize property rights and to control professionally resource allocation rather than to leave the allocation to commodity and real estate markets.

Such acts have required the creation of new types of professionals. For example, federal legislation, such as the 1954 Urban Planning Assistance Act, was most beneficial to the land-use planning profession. As Luther Carter notes, "in the early 1950s there were fewer than 250 active planning professionals in the United States; by mid-1972, there were more than 6,200. Furthermore, over the same period more than 200 metropolitan planning agencies were established and some 4,000 comprehensive development plans prepared" (4).

Certainly, many entrepreneurs of social and biological science have not missed the equal opportunity for money and jobs created by the environmental impact statement of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Because of this act, one can safely predict a steady growth in demand for ecologists

and social ecologists similar to the growth in demand for planners. Thus, disciplines and occupational groups develop property in the form of vocational tasks.

Moreover, a public agency, such as the Soil Conservation Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Bureau of Reclamation, or the Corps of Engineers has a great stake in the perpetuation of the problems it services. Just as the policeman needs the criminal and, indeed, finds a rising crime wave helpful around budgeting time, so too do those conservation agencies that manage the timber famines, recreation explosions, water deficits, and energy crises have a property stake in their social problem. Consequently, such organizations seek to ensure problems to service even if this means violating the purpose of their original mission.

Property institutions designed to stabilize a market, an occupation, a bureaucracy, or a society, however, may have the unintended consequence of maintaining the forms while eroding the survival base. This might be illustrated best by considering rights of ownership in that oldest of abused natural resources–human beings.

Slavery has been wide in extent, covering all varieties of geography and culture in all times. The great West African civilizations, such as Benin and Timbuktu, benefited from this resource, as did the New Zealand Maori and other Polynesian groups, and Middle-Eastern and Mediterranean peoples. But slavery was given its most dramatic impetus by European mercantile societies. The cause was simple enough: the new lands of settlement in the Americas were labor deficient. The indigenous peoples could not be induced or forced to labor on the large-scale agricultural lands, and the indentured Scotch-Irish and other Europeans were hard to tell apart from their free counterparts. West African traders provided the solution.

Though both the Latin and Anglo-Dutch colonies exploited this human resource, it is important to note significant differences in treatment and present-day consequences. Frank Tannenbaum has argued that many of the contemporary differences in race relations between North and South America stem from different historical conditions (20). The Anglos had

no tradition of a slave code, but the Latins had a tradition tracing from Roman times. The Anglicans did not recognize slaves as baptizable human beings; further, the Protestants wanted individual converts to exhibit their conversion in worldly behavior. The Catholics saw slaves as human beings, accepted collective converts, and were able to accept local customs and personal deviations. For the Anglos, the rationale guiding the treatment of slaves was that they were innately inferior, and they were treated as another form of property. Among Anglos, the slave was bought or sold like any other property, had no moral or family rights, was denied human personality, and was condemned eternally to an inferior role. The Latins had a domestic concept of the slave: he could be adopted by the family, and he had family, moral, and personality rights that were respected so that he could earn freedom and then fully enter the company of free men. The Anglos believed property rights in the slave resource lay solely with the owner. Like taking over marshland without compensation, freeing a slave without compensation was stealing.

Eric Williams argued that the British abandoned slavery in the West Indies by 1833 because the change from mercantilism to capitalism made slavery unprofitable (21). Events after the conclusion of the Civil War in the United States, with the industrial north triumphant over an agrarian south, seem to support his argument. But this does not deny the moral paradox faced by Yankee abolitionists, who had to overcome the sacred shield of slavery, the right to private property, and argue that **ownership rights were made invalid by higher moral rights.** It is a significant model—not often announced by environmentalists—that theft in the interest of higher public value can be virtuous.

Property institutions exhibit tenacity, and they adapt to changed conditions or they bring down the whole social structure supporting them. The cotton culture reached its ecological and economic limits while the industrial culture moved toward ascendency in other regions. The inability to untangle property rights in the face of new realities led the cotton culture to its own destruction.

ADAPTING PROPERTY INSTITUTIONS TO THE REALITY OF THE CORPORATE SOCIETY

Fundamental changes in property institutions will be occurring in industrial societies. The traditional rights of private, public, and corporate entities no longer seem adaptable under conditions in which formerly free goods, such as water and air, become scarce, and formerly scarce goods, such as motor cars, skidoos, and high-fashion clothing, become abundant. This alteration of scarcities causes traditional market mechanisms disparately to create markets for nonessentials and to ignore the real depletion of essential resources. Private ownership was justified by the faith that self-interest would compel care in husbanding land and resources so as to pass on an improved estate to one's children. But if it ever functioned as planned, it no longer does. There is great spatial and occupational mobility between and within generations. The ever-present interest in gain through speculation, rather than work, has encouraged a rapid turnover of land and a greater interest in doing "with my property as I wish." Today, the predominant number of landowners (not to be confused with the few who control most of the land) holds tracts of land which serve dormitory rather than productive functions. And styles of dormitory functions seem as subject to fashion and fad as clothing. Consequently, the change of American housing taste and the march of slums can be read in the census tracts of metropolitan areas. Tracts where the newest single-family houses were constructed in the 1920-30 decade foretell the fate of those constructed in the 1960-70 decade. Our patterns of growth and mobility produce disposable housing stocks rather than a private castle for everyman.

Private or state corporate groups capture for private persons profit rights to offshore fisheries, airsheds, watersheds, commutersheds, noise avenues, and other communal property, yet the scale of and differences in these systems transcend our ability to assign responsibility. The study by Likens, Bormann, and Johnson of increasing acidification of water and soil in New Hampshire from industry-caused air pollution in New York and

Connecticut illustrates how poorly costs and gains are being distributed (14). Another example is apparent on the commons of airports, where costs are distributed so that it is more gainful for each airline to place partially filled airplanes on runways in closely ranked order than to combine passengers in a single plane; more gainful because crowding costs are borne by other airlines, passengers, municipalities, ground transport, and that great majority—the general nonflying public.

We should not forget that in corporations the persons who manage the enterprise do not own it. The desire of executives for personal gain often takes priority over the desire for gain for the corporation. Further, there is a tendency for corporate groups to have a trained incapacity such that costs and benefits other than those in their direct interest are not part of cost accounting. Hence, parklands and working-class neighborhoods are seen as inexpensive places for airports or highways and their sacred functions. Finally, power and concentration tend to force small operators, such as Wisconsin farmers, local industrial firms, or small logging operators out of operation and, thereby, to remove interest in husbanding the resources for heirs and to remove the enterprise from local accountability.

In our times, only the "economic goods" of the industrial system have clearly defined property rights and responsibilities. On the other hand, the "bads" of the system are lonesome step-children who belong to no one—and therefore to everyone. Such are the ironies of our times, that the only solutions we can conceive are more of the same—expand the market system, sell pollution rights, tinker with technology, pass more laws, identify those responsible for the grossest deterioration of the environment, and give them the largest subsidies to stop. Under these conditions, the first function of land-use planning has been the **validation** of exponential growth in machines, sprawl, and junk; in this way, planning legitimates the speculator hiding in us all. Hence, my first law of planning—each new plan incorporates all the failures of previous plans.

Because of the weight of traditions, it is certain that there will be a struggle to retain traditional patterns, just as it is certain that the trend must be toward radical rearrangement in

the distribution of property rights and responsibilities, a rearrangement that will require more than a dreamy slip into Consciousness III and a better expression of patriotism than decal flags and "love it or leave it" bumper stickers.

Rather, we will require completely new property institutions that will pinpoint responsibility between persons and across several generations as clearly as those of tribal societies. And further, such institutions must recognize the really important property rights of all of us at the tail end of the twentieth century. Though the media will continue to proclaim our need for rights to newer and more forms of consumer property, the junkyards, auto graveyards, and sanitary landfills speak eloquently of our contempt for what the media proclaims as our "needs." Those property considerations that are, and will become, most important will relate not to **things** but to **services** essential for a good life. As individuals, we need rights of equal access to the creations of our society–its food, shelter, health services, information, means of mobility, amenities, protection, and meaningful employment. Communally, we need rights to renewable resources such as air, water, wildlife, and forests, and we need imaginative planning to conserve energy sources and nonrenewable resources such as the land.

CONCLUSION

Throughout his history, *Homo sapiens* has been concerned acutely with survival but has behaved as though that survival were primarily dependent upon placating omnipotent gods of infinity and retribution, or upon following the modern secular shaman with his promise of unending "friendly skies" and eternal hedonistic bliss. Our tendency is to carry on as in the past. Yet for the first time in the history of the species, there are no tranquil isles, no vinelands into which to expand. The world has become finite and emptied of fertile Oregons beyond the desert.

Our leadership seems unable to recognize the finiteness of our earth. It does not recognize that we have reached the end of unlimited and cheap energy supply, that we will no longer be

able to spend fossil fuels to gain cheap food, and that the green revolution was a cultural and ecological fizzle.

We continue to act like the Donner party in its early stages, privately selling and buying under ever rising inflation and the increasing animosity of the poor. Like those solid New England merchants facing an unknown Sierra winter, we delude ourselves into thinking the old system will work even though the environment has changed radically. We avoid cooperation and sharing and mutual aid. We look to the other person to make the sacrifice and do the work. We expect the present distribution of wealth and prestige to remain intact. The Donner party held firm to the old enterprising values. They ended by devouring one another.

Is it not time that the oldest democracy in the world, celebrating its second century of existence, stopped acting like a petulant adolescent in regard to the primary producing regions of the world? The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) owes us nothing, did exactly what we would have done in a similar situation, and is not the central cause of our present problems. Indeed, we owe the OPEC countries gratitude for forcefully reminding us of our gluttony.

Certainly those learned professors who mutter about armed intervention to "save our economy" must not have noted the stupidity of the one-hour commute in the 8-miles-per-gallon dreamboat that maintains developers, construction unions, real estate agencies, Exxon, and the automobile industry as growth industries. Is an economy that can survive only through exponential growth in garbage and waste an economy really worth saving? Because of increased consumption of processed and fast food (MacDonald's and so forth) and other basic shifts in our diet, we now give an 8- to 10-fold caloric subsidy of energy for every calorie we consume (9, 17, 19). What kind of crackpot view of reality assumes that the survival of a fast-food chain is important enough to seek war in the Middle East?

We know that the most efficient energy converter is the human being himself (6)—yet, at the very time when we are grumbling about the policy of the OPEC countries, we can think of nothing better for our unemployed workers than the

dole. We strengthen our rejection of the healthy older citizen, the minority citizen, and the female citizen as part of our energy resource. Yet we know they are essential resources; during every war we suddenly discover their vitality, intelligence, and skill, and we encourage them to reenter the labor force. Indeed, as Eric Hoffer argues, the strength of our nation is our people–independent, creative, flexible, and hardworking. Hoffer has said on televison that he could take any group of Americans and in a short while accomplish almost any task. We know he is right.

If we are to love land, let us really love it. We must let no more agricultural land be planted to parking lot, supermarket, suburbia, "condominiumania", or second-home Swiss chalets. Indeed, we must have an agressive policy of reclaiming much of the sprawl for agriculture again. Let us make the farmer, not the promoter, our national hero. Let us recognize that forestry, and other renewable resource practices, requires investment. Forestry cannot sustain itself on money from timber harvest alone–the result of this myopia is that we think more about present markets than about future reproduction.

Our people and our land are unequaled in the ability to produce food and fiber. Wisely encouraged, our agriculture and forestry have the enduring capacity and world worth to sustain our influence and promise of good hope.

Though all the voices of the media will continue to proclaim that the highest achievements of our civilization are spray deodorizers, flip-top beer cans, electric toothbrushes, and color television, such absurdity may be endured as long as we remember that the only basic resources of any society are its people, its history, and its land. In this sense, we have abundant and strong resources and an optimistic future. We but need to reclaim our property.

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