

Lecture #23: Backlash: Environmental Politics, 1980-2000

Suggested Readings:

Norman J. Vig & Michael E. Kraft, *Environmental Policy: New Directions for the Twenty-First Century*, 2002.
William Shutkin, *The Land That Could Be: Environmentalism and Democracy in the 21st Century*, 2000.
For property rights arguments, peruse <http://www.cdfc.org/> and <http://www.rangemagazine.com/>.

Outline

I. Reagan's Revolution

George W. Bush administration's hostility to environmental regulation, desire to open public lands to development had a long history, but also represents a basic change in environmental bipartisanship from Teddy Roosevelt through Nixon, Democrats and Republicans had competed with each other over which had stronger conservation/environmental credentials; most major laws of 1960s-70s were passed during Nixon Administration: NEPA, Clean Air, Clean Water, Endangered Species, EPA, NOAA, etc. reactions against 1960s-era environmentalism appearing by early 1970s--J. Maddox, *The Doomsday Syndrome*; Wm Tucker, *Progress & Privilege* arguing that environmental doom exaggerated, progress not bad, regulation threatened economic growth, environmentalists unwilling to share material privilege Ronald Reagan combined these with general hostility to government intervention in private sector, resulting in systematic attack on TR/Pinchot-era conservation & later regulatory apparatus James Watt, Secretary of Interior, as key player: wilderness-designated lands opened to coal/oil exploration, sought to sell large blocks of public lands; reduce land-use regulation; favor states and private sector firestorm of opposition, petition drives; criticized for evangelical faith; removed for racist remark, 1983 EPA story similar: Anne Gorsuch reduced budget, staff, sought to end unnecessary regulation; removed in 1983 for delaying toxics action on Stringfellow Dump before CA election; big growth for env groups environmentalist lobbying symbol for conservatives of new "special interest" status of environmentalists

II. Environmentalist Counterrevolution

critiques from env left as well: older organizations attacked for being coopted by regulators, not radical USFS lands: attack on Reagan cut of old-growth forests attacked TR/Pinchot utilitarianism & multiple use Dave Foreman's Earth First! as "non-violent" "eco-warriors": spiking trees, vandalizing equipment, etc. bioregionalism as movement to reorganize nation into ecologically self-sufficient watersheds deep ecology as more philosophical wing of radical environmentalism: wilderness preservation tradition, biocentric vision of harmony with nature, anti-modernist ambivalence about human place in nature French & German Greens as radicals combining attacks on technology (esp. nuclear power) with Marxist attack on capitalism, much more class-conscious than US counterparts animal rights movement emerges from older anti-vivisectionist, humanitarian, vegetarian traditions, but rights-based defense of animal autonomy from human-induced pain/harm (roots in Jeremy Bentham) individualism of animal rights vs. ecosystem/wilderness/species concern of deep ecology

III. Learning from Complicity

broad US public far removed from most of these: strong commitment to env, but balanced by economy diminishing hope for simple environmental solutions in 1980s: politics of ambivalence indoor air pollution as political vehicle for shifting controversy away from corporations & industry: but also serious problem, radon as natural pollutant, significant health threat which in part derived from energy conservation measures that insulated houses and diminished ventilation during 1970s William K. Reilly as liberal Republican environmentalist EPA head for George H. W. Bush: how can we allocate funds to places to get greatest benefit, given public misperception of cost-benefit balance? politics of disconnection: public lack of awareness of consequences of ordinary life Exxon Valdez runs aground 3/24/89, 11 million barrels spill, 1200 miles coastline contaminated, public outcry against corporate malfeasance produces clean-up that does further damage: all for cars

IV. Paradoxes of Preserving Sacred Land

old-growth forest debate in Pacific Northwest symbolic of deepening conflict between old conservationist concern for productive resources and preservationist goal of protecting sacred land spotted owl as occasion for legal action: 1973 Endangered Species Act mandates federal protection of species (not ecosystems) threatened with extinction, so owl becomes surrogate for forest itself (first such controversy came in late 1970s over snail darter at Tellico Dam in Tennessee [TVA]) in old-growth controversy, heated debate about local economies vs. irreplaceable national resources

V. Partisan Environments: What Counts as "Wise Use"?

Wise Use (West) and Property Rights (East) movements as attacks on govt-based environmentalism 1994 Congress saw Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America" with strong critique of env regs; backlash Clinton Administration national monuments promoted by Sec. Interior Bruce Babbitt; roadless rule End of 20th century, 2 parties starkly polarized: Dems favored wilderness protection, pollution control, energy conservation; Republicans favored development, protect private property rights from government Debate over whether to drill for oil in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge a potent symbol of stark choices