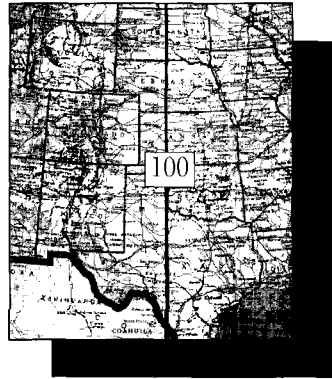

The Hundredth Meridian

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

What Do Environmentalists Want?

In a world filled with perplexity, inscrutability, and conundrum, two major mysteries at least are not unfathomable. What do women want? The answer has had human beings stumped from the time of the origin of species, yet the answer is perfectly plain: they don't know. The question of what environmentalists want is of more recent vintage, but here too there is no mystery, only a set of answers to be teased out: they know, but they're not saying. It would help of course if women spent less of their time talking about what even they don't understand, and if environmentalists were not intent on covering up what they understand very well and mean fanatically, but then life, as the prophet said, is unfair.

Out here in God's wild West the dwindling percentage of the population that are really Westerners keep environmentalists under the most strict surveillance, as the German government keeps tabs on neo-Nazis and the FBI tracks the vast right-wing conspiracy. No one takes them at their word, but that does not mean that their word is therefore taken lightly. Do environmentalists want to "save" Yellowstone Park, or present it gift-wrapped to a committee of the United Nations? Would the Greater Yellowstone Council be satisfied with managing the park and the immediate drainage area surrounding it, or does it secretly envision control over a region extending from Great Falls, Montana, south to the Uinta Mountains in eastern Utah? Is the environmentalist movement working for the abolition of grazing on all of the public lands, or in "sensitive areas" only? If the latter is so, what is environmentalism's current definition of a sensitive area? Environmentalists hector us regarding the need to achieve a sustainable population without coming clean by giving us the hard figures. Would 200 million people amount to a sustainable number of Americans? One hundred twenty million? Twenty million? The forcible reduction of a total population



of 260 million inhabitants to a sustainable rump of 20 million would be bad news for 240 million living Americans, and perhaps the environmentalist dream for the future is less sanguinary. Yet what environmentalists, if successful, have in store for the country may be hardly less unpleasant for everyone concerned.

Environmentalists present themselves as a nonpartisan movement in service to a transcendent cause beyond party politics, appealing to the most well-meaning and enlightened Americans of every political persuasion. In fact environmentalism is very much an enterprise of the left: no maverick, it carries the brand of the beast high on its rufus flank. In this respect the charge so often directed at environmentalists—that they are indifferent, even hostile to the just claims of the human race—distracts attention from the human-regarding aspect of their agenda, which include tacit support for continued mass immigration to the United States in spite of demonstrations showing conclusively how maintaining immigration at the present level assures that two generations of environmental legislation will, in two or three generations more, have been obviated completely by a population explosion produced by Third World immigrants incapable of telling a park ranger from a Juarez cop, or a snail darter from a sardine.

Environmentalism shares and approves the Establishment program because it is an important part of that Establishment, not the enemy of it—as Edward Abbey, a real environmentalist and an honest man, was. Though elected on the Democratic ticket, Bill Clinton appears to have gained the presidential

office while remaining indifferent to environmentalists and their concerns. Nevertheless, within a year or so of his inauguration, Clinton had launched the War on the West and commissioned Bruce Babbitt as his McClellan. An explanation of how the turnaround came about may be discerned by a careful reading of Alston Chase's *In a Dark Wood*, which inspires a possible scenario for the President's budding relationship with the green lobbyists. Look here, they might have said to him, we know you're a big-city boy from Little Rock, Arkansas, more interested in chasing skirts than butterflies, happier jetting to Hilton Head on Air Force One than scaling the Grand Teton. But you and us—we can do business, see? Your aim as Commander in Chief, Leader of the Free World, and the Man Who Shook Hands With John Kennedy is to extend the reach of the federal government into every valley, plain, and mountain in America, every nook and cranny in the life of every American. You want to deconstruct the old Constitution and turn every one of the 50 states into a fiefdom of the government at Washington, Dee Cee? Well, we want the same thing exactly. Play ball with us, we'll all be happy as skinnydippers in the Yellowstone warm springs, and we won't even bug you about putting those condos down there on the Whitewater River after you and Hillary leave office. To tell you the truth, Arkansas is mostly ruined for us already. But keep your hands off Big Timber, Montana, and Hillsboro, New Mexico. Ted Turner and Jane want those.

The Clinton administration has begun a renewed offensive on behalf of restive New Western interests concerned that the War on the West has yet to achieve the total effect recommended by William Tecumseh Sherman as being the necessary and appropriate end of modern warfare. Addressing a public forum on the future of the American public lands in Boise, Idaho, in mid-February, the directors of the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, and the National Park Service—all three of them Clinton appointees—insisted that their agencies are firmly committed

to the President's policy of favoring the tourism and recreation industries at the expense of mining, timber, and agriculture. In January, the administration announced an 18-month moratorium on roadbuilding into 30 million acres of federally owned land, while a bipartisan bill recently introduced in the House of Representatives would end all timber sales and logging operations in the national forests. Michael Dombeck, the Forest Service chief, explained that his agency is simply rediscovering its original mandate as restorer and protector of the national forest lands, while Robert Stanton, director of the Park Service, identified his constituency as urbanites wanting to establish a cultural and historical rapport with a national treasure.

Environmentalists, when they are being prudent by making nice with the great unwashed, talk about the cultural enrichment that occurs when Americans rediscover their heritage. They explain that they are concerned for people who have lost all contact with, and feeling for, nature and propose to help them regrow the roots they have severed. Of course the rootgrowing essential to the process they envision is literal rather than metaphorical: the way to reestablish a connection with nature is to work with it and develop it, not to play in it, admire it, or put it on videocamera. Environmentalism, whatever the environmentalists say, is not about bringing people closer to nature; it is about separating them still further from it.

As with every ism, the principal clue to environmentalism is the nature of the people who created it. If environmentalism were really about rootedness in nature, it would be predominantly an agrarian movement, invented and championed by rural people. Actually, the movement is a product of the suburbs, the brainchild of people born and bred in an environment that is more limbo than reality. Environmentalists are mostly upper-middle to upper-class people, professionals and technocrats educated beyond their capacity for both wisdom and common sense, fundamentally ignorant of what they profess to love most because they have failed to acquire a real experience of it. In this respect, of course, they are no different from others of their class who are *not* environmentalists. This is why the novels of Ernest Hemingway are currently out of fashion, a vagary of the public taste having nothing to do with macho matings in sleep-

ing bags or Robert Cohen's nose. In Hemingway's day, as now, Americans who paid attention to serious literature were the educated men and women of the middle and upper-middle classes. Where they differ from their counterparts today is in their background, their experience, their place of growing up. Middle-aged readers of fiction before the 1960's might be city-bred, country-bred, or Main Streeters. Whichever they were (well-to-do urbanites, like Hemingway's family, vacationed in the country then) they remembered how it was to hook a trout, row a boat around a point in a lake, wait out a big blow in a rustic cabin, raise a tent and cook flapjacks over a campfire. Nowadays, by contrast, this type of general reader no longer exists. Purchasers and readers of books are overwhelmingly people of suburban upbringing and experience. For them "Big Two-Hearted River" conveys no shock of recognition; to the extent that it has any effect at all, the story serves as an unpleasant reminder that even artists and people of talent, not very long ago, grew up in Hickville and amused themselves like rednecks.

The yokel's fear and suspicion of the big city and its inhabitants has been summer stock in American culture—the source of innumerable japes, gags, and gigs—for a century and a half, yet the city slicker has fears and suspicions of his own. In an astounding passage from a recent book, the late Diana Trilling describes her and her husband's apprehensions on the eve of the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939:

The idea that fascism is the consequence of war, even a war *against* fascism, lasted long and traveled far among the intellectuals of Lionel's and my generation. . . . [W]e and our friends contemplated what the war had in store for our young airmen when they would no longer have their giant bombers to command and had to resume their old civilian lives. How could one expect them to return to their factories and gas stations?

So far as this bizarre speculation makes any sense at all, it does so only if the reader assumes that the factories Mrs. Trilling had in mind are in Omaha, Nebraska, the gas stations in Bill, Wyoming, and Holly Springs, Mississippi.

What do environmentalists want?

This much we know, they and their water-carriers in the federal government having said as much: the destruction of traditional industrialism in the West, and its replacement by soft industrialism—tourism, recreation, and "cultural enrichment." In the Southwest especially, the process of dispossession, destruction, and displacement is already well advanced, as environmental groups file suit to bring logging to a halt in the forests of Arizona and New Mexico, bid against ranchers seeking to renew their grazing leases, and gain control over private property by appeals to the Endangered Species Act.

And this much we may infer, from their actions as well as from their peculiar vagueness, their thundering silences—to say nothing of such crackpot schemes as turning the Plains states from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains into a commons for the American bison to run on. Environmentalists envision nothing less than the eventual removal of rural Americans from the countryside, which will thereupon be declared pristine lands which every American will be required to obtain a permit to visit, as today one needs a permit to explore the Grand Canyon and Canyonlands National Park. This action, necessarily protracted in its duration, will recreate the American hinterland as a vast wilderness preserve to which only members of the elite national (and international) class will be granted access for the purpose of "necessary development in the national interest." Relocated in the great post-industrial cities of America, the unregenerate and barbarian redneck population will be domesticated through safe technocratic employment and reeducated in the doctrines of political correctness, multiculturalism, globalism, free trade, and world eco-government. Their guns will be taken from them, and so will their beer and their red-eye. All blood sports, including fishing, will be prohibited, while conviction on a charge of square-dancing or listening to country-western music will be punishable by an overnight in the slammer. At long last, America will have been made safe for rocks, grizzly bears, people of color, and Democracy.

Whoever finds this prophecy extreme and absurdist needs only to recall that we live in a country whose First Lady has expressed the desire to redefine what it means to be a human being living in the 20th century. ☺

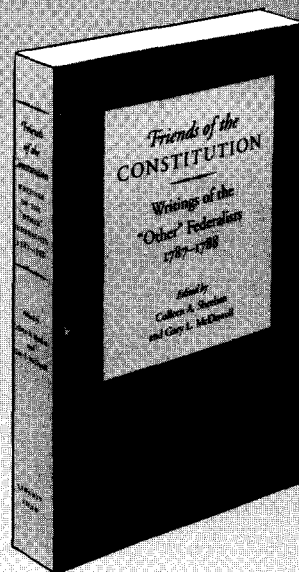
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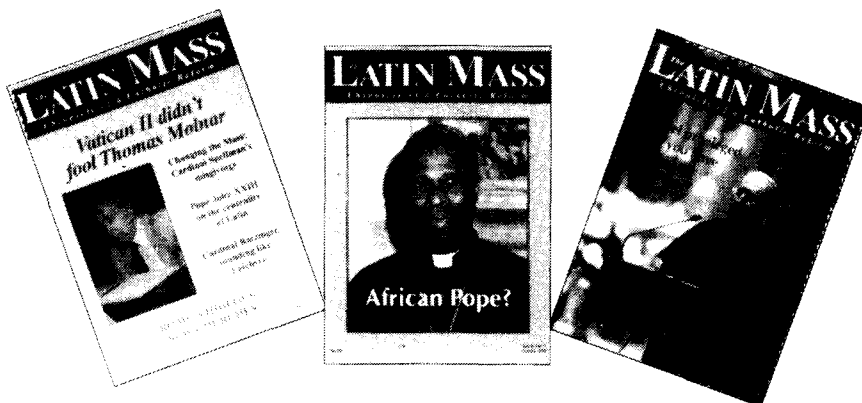
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