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Putting It Together: Implications and Directions—Clashing Cultures, Clashing Economies, Clashing Values

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**WHO GOVERNS THE PUBLIC LANDS:
WASHINGTON? THE WEST? THE COMMUNITY**

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Publisher
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**CLASHING CULTURES
CLASHING ECONOMIES
CLASHING VALUES**

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Boulder, Colorado**

September 30, 1994

Putting it together: implications and directions Clashing Cultures, Clashing Economies, Clashing Values

Introduction: Václav Havel, poet and president of the Republic of Czech, tells in *The Power of the Powerless* of a brewer under the old regime who loved to make beer. Thwarted by layers of bureaucracy, by refrigeration equipment that didn't refrigerate and by fellow workers who didn't work, he pushed hard on the system, often going out of channels to get hops and yeast and vats. As a result, he collided head-on with the political powers, and got demoted and punished for political violations.

Havel says that under the old regime, people such as the brewer who were driven to do good work or to speak the truth inevitably ran into political trouble. He says that although their troubles were profoundly non-political, those who angered the Communist regime were usually labeled dissidents, both by the Communists and by those who were against the Communists. Under that system, all sins were political, just as in the middle ages, all sins were religious.

Havel objects strongly to labeling these people as dissidents, as if they were members of a political movement or of a special interest. Havel says they transcended political movements and special interests and aimed for good work and the truth.

Under Stalin, the brewer would have been shot. But, Havel says that after Stalin, totalitarian regimes were forced to become softer. They needed the veneer of high ideals and legality: universal suffrage, equal rights, a fair justice system, and environmental protection. Under this softer form of totalitarianism, those who violated the unwritten norms of the system weren't shot - they were demoted, fired, institutionalized, shunned, and imprisoned. Havel even cites examples in which those who ran afoul of the Communist regime and were especially daring were able to use the facade of justice to actually achieve justice.

Applying Václav Havel's view to the West: The United States, to this western journalist, resembles the old Soviet regimes in the following ways:

1. Our individual impulses toward fundamental goals, whether they be an improved environment or a healthy economy and community, are almost always diverted into political channels, so that we end up as members of one interest group

battling other interests groups. Unlike the Czechs Havel writes about, who were profoundly disillusioned by politics and therefore shunned it, when we Westerners dream of achieving certain social or economic or environmental goals, we usually assume that we must become part of some interest group. These political forces are so powerful that they rip apart efforts to achieve person-to-person agreement, as we saw with the grazing consensus effort convened by Gov. Roy Romer and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. Those taking part in the discussions agreed while at the table. But once the process ended, the different individuals were quickly pulled back into their polarized camps.

2. Like the old Soviet regimes, we have created laws that are like Potemkin villages - there is no substance to them. Whether we are talking of the Endangered Species Act, the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act, the water reclamation acts, the superfund act, or the Clean Air Act, they are best known for failing. Havel tells us why: that the passage of these laws are necessary to present an outward appearance of justice and progress and environmental cleanliness. There is enough pressure to pass the laws, but not to make them work.

3. We treat our federal land managers exactly as the former Czechoslovakian Communist government treated Václav Havel's brewer. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management employees who manage land according to national laws are driven out of their positions. As the internal cultures of the agencies have changed, and as federal staffers have become more intent on safeguarding resources, the persecution of these men and women has become more obvious, and at a higher level.

Pity the Poor Federal Land Manager:

On one side is the environmental movement, which entered the West as a reform movement focused on the land. It has done enormous good in awakening the region and the nation to the past and on-going destruction of the West's resources and landscape. By exerting pressure at the national and local offices of federal agencies, by using Congress, and by using the courts, the environmental movement has made enormous changes. It has changed land management agencies' cultures, zoned large expanses of land against development, and fought against and defeated a number of large, destructive projects. The movement has also set into motion reform of grazing, timber and mining.

But environmentalism in the West has an enormous weakness; it has achieved its changes through the centralized power

of the federal government and the courts. So it is now in the position of attempting to impose its values from afar and onto an unwilling population. More seriously, parts of the environmental movement - national and local - are reluctant to enter the fray locally, and through the use of local forces. Much of the environmental movement thinks victories in Congress and in the courts translates into change on the ground. But only when the people who are on the ground internalize environmental values will the ground be affected. Environmentalists can tie up those who live on the ground and make their lives difficult, but they cannot achieve their objectives.

It is not just environmentalists who try to influence federal land managers. From the other side comes the Wise Use Movement and the County Planning movement. Their strength is the knowledge that change can only be implemented locally. They understand that environmentalism has gone about as far as it can go with present tactics.

The Wise Use/County Planning movement would sweep the field if it too did not have a fatal flaw: it blames everything on environmentalism and centralized government, and won't recognize the dependence of rural places on federal and environmental subsidies. It is also likely that the abused western landscape - now no longer forced into productivity by money for new dams or for chaining of brush or for new roads into the few remaining uncut canyons - can no longer support rural people even at past levels.

Basically, the rural inland West has never solved a fundamental question: How to make a living. The West has lurched from boom to bust and back to boom because it is unable to achieve stability. Many of us in this room lived through the energy boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s. I saw my town of Paonia, Colorado, go from standing-room only in the early 1980s until it was literally half empty by 1987 and 1988. It was an interesting time.

If you missed the energy bust, cheer up, for you are about to experience its successor when the present real estate boom turns bust in the next six to 18 months. This bust won't be triggered by an Exxon shutting down an oil shale operation. Instead of a few men acting in a New York board room, the bust will be caused by a few hundred thousand people in the rural inland West and in Southern California changing their behavior. In fact, it is being triggered at this very moment by the 50 percent or so drop in real estate prices in Southern California, which will make that region an easier place to do business and to live, and by the ongoing experiences of equity refugees in our Western towns, as they

discover that the places they moved to in search of community and clean air and a "great place to bring up children" are not what they expected. The statistics are that 9 out of 10 of them will move away, some to chase their dream in another western town, and some to return home. This leakage is not noticeable today because there are new dreamers with equity to take their places. But now that California has begun to right itself, our boom will decline and then turn to bust. The depth of the bust will depend on many things, including how quickly California rights its other problems, whether real estate remains liquid or is frozen by high interest rates, and how well the West deals with the internal war it is fighting.

A guess as to what will happen in the West. If my predicted bust doesn't happen, we will be riding out storm waves for the next decade and the rural West will be transformed. But let's assume I'm right, and let's talk about the West during and after the coming bust. (Do I sound like one of those guys who writes books telling you how to prepare for the Great Depression of the 1990s?)

I don't want to idealize the last bust - it caused enormous misery - but the West's small communities also ended up with Wallace Stegner's stickers, and those stickers got some very useful work done. In Grand Junction, Colo., for example, with people no longer intent on getting rich from oil shale, the town turned its attention to acquiring Colorado River waterfront for parks and public land and building a biking trail to Moab, Utah. The same burst of civic improvement was true in many small communities. Delta, Colo., for example, built a wonderful recreation center that would be the pride of much larger towns, as well as a riverfront park. Montrose created a planning and vision effort that was useful - although not a cure-all - once the subdividing boom hit.

The conditions in this coming bust will be different - different people will stick and different people will leave. The priorities of this generation will differ from those of the last generation. My point is that when the bust occurs, we should see it as opportunity - to buy and conserve open space, to plan, to save some wonderful land, and to get ready for the next boom.

RELEVANT ARTICLES\

The attached articles illustrate some of the points made above about the coming bust, the status of federal land managers, the clash of ideologies, and the debased state of the western landscape.

1) "California, Here We Stay," LA Times, 7/28/94: an article about the recovery in Southern California.

2) "Forest Service dunked by its own 'witch hunt'" and "As witness for prosecution, chief aids defense," High Country News, 8/8/94. These articles illustrate the persecution of federal land managers.

3) "A room full of heroes," HCN, 11/29/93. An account of a meeting of federal whistleblowers, illustrating the persecution of federal land managers.

4) "Don't try to improve grazing; abolish it," HCN, 6/13/94. An essay about grazing to illustrate the divisions in the West over that issue.

5) "Bruce Babbitt as Captain Consensus" and "How to turn lemonade into lemons," HCN, 3/21/94. Two essays illustrating the divisions within environmentalism over strategy and goals.

6) "Why one advocacy group steers clear of consensus efforts," HCN, 5/30/94. A statement of principles: why one group won't sit at the table with commodity interests.

7) "Grazing talks split both sides," HCN, 2/7/94.

8) "Fires illuminate the West's 'ecological darkness,'" HCN, 7/25/94. An account of the degraded ecological state of the West's forests.

9) "Clashing Cultures Impede Reform," Idaho Conservation League newsletter, July/Aug. 1994. An account of a talk by Ed Marston on the West's culture wars.