Presidential Greenspeak: How Presidents Talk About the Environment and What It Means

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I. INTRODUCTION .................................................. 196

II. PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE .................................................. 197
A. Methodology .................................................. 197
B. Presidential Rhetoric and National Political Life . 198
C. The Environmental Discourse .................................. 203

III. ANALYZING ENVIRONMENTAL RHETORIC ............... 204
A. Setting the Political Context .................................. 204
   1. The Awakening .............................................. 207
   2. Crises in Environmental Leadership ....................... 209
   3. Exploiting a Crisis .......................................... 211
B. Competing Values Framework ................................... 212
C. Strong Environmentalism or Ecocentrism .................... 214

IV. THE DISCOURSE ............................................... 215
A. Thematic Source: President Teddy Roosevelt .............. 215
B. ‘Tough Choices’ Versus ‘We Can Have It All’ ............ 218
   1. ‘Tough Choices’ ............................................. 218
   2. ‘We Can Have It All’ ....................................... 221
C. Technology and Markets: Marginalizing the Ecocentrists .................................................. 229
D. Stewardship—Dressing and Keeping the Garden .......... 232
   1. Similarities in Expression .................................. 232

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I. INTRODUCTION

This Article is about presidential rhetoric on the environment from 1970 to the present—the modern environmental era. It examines the language and non-verbal images used by the seven presidents of that period to convey their conceptions of "the environment" to Americans, and how Americans value that environment. As much as this Article is a chronicle of presidential speech, it is also a chronicle of the environmental movement in America—as it has been recognized, interpreted, accepted, or rejected by the highest elected official. Other examinations of presidential rhetoric on the environment have focused on particular presidents or issues;¹ ours is the first to analyze the presidential rhetoric of the modern environmental era as a whole.

Our analysis documents considerable variation in presidential environmental rhetoric, influenced by each leader's ideology, political circumstances, and political style. But it also reveals a high degree of commonality in the way presidents talk about the environment. Certain themes, images, references, and stories have evolved and persisted across personal and ideological differences among presidents. They establish a presidential discourse on the environment that is peculiar to our political culture. The variations in the discourse reveal differences in presidential ideology and po-

¹ See Symbolic Transformations of the Material World: Key Interactions Between Presidential Rhetoric and Environmentalism in the Twentieth Century (Tarla Rai Peterson ed.) (unpublished manuscript, on file with authors) [hereinafter Symbolic Transformations of the Material World].
itical agenda; both the commonalities as and the variations tell us something about ourselves as a polity. Presidential rhetoric offers us a way of understanding American environmentalism.

Part II of this Article describes our interpretive methodology and explores the role of presidential rhetoric in American political life. Part III locates presidential rhetoric on the environment in its political and cultural context. It also offers an analytical framework for comparing the environmentalism that emerges from the rhetoric against alternative versions of environmentalism.

In Parts IV and V, we analyze the rhetoric of seven presidents in an attempt to answer three questions: (1) Does presidential speech reflect a consensus on the environment, and, if so, what is the content of that consensus? (2) How robust is the consensus, if it exists, and what are the competing values that are likely to produce divergent policies? (3) How does the environmentalism reflected in presidents’ speech compare with other versions of environmentalism current in the culture? Part IV demonstrates how at a very general level the rhetoric supports a consensus on environmentalism across political lines. This consensus embraces environmental protection as consistent with continued technological progress and economic growth. It recognizes duties to preserve the environment for future generations and to protect the natural world for its own sake, and it celebrates a “love of the land” unique to the American character. Within this general consensus, however, the rhetoric reveals competing cultural values that greatly influence environmental policy. Parts IV and V explain how these competing values drive divergent policies on such central issues as determining the appropriate “use” of the environment, deciding whether to rely more on personal stewardship or regulation, and considering whether we should be concerned about the distributional effects of environmental policies. In addition, these sections show how the mainstream environmentalism voiced by the presidents is sharply at odds with stronger versions of environmentalism that identify technology and economic growth with environmental degradation and elevate the claims of the natural world against human exploitation.

II. *PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE*

A. *Methodology*

Our method is interpretive. We first establish the political con-
text in which the speeches should be understood, and then analyze the speeches themselves, eliciting cultural, political, and ethical significations. We have organized our interpretation around the major themes that emerged from our analysis. Our purpose is to get at the root sources of American environmentalism as depicted by our national leaders, in its emotional, imaginative, and conceptual dimensions. Employing a pragmatic model of interpretation, we use the presidential texts to illuminate the political culture.

One rather technical methodological point deserves mention. In setting out to analyze "public speech" by presidents, we needed to set parameters, especially since the time frame we cover saw major changes, not only in political media strategies, but also in the technology of delivering rhetoric. For the most part, we consider only officially released statements included in the Public Papers of the President.

While it is true that written statements, when released to the press corps, are covered and reported as public presidential speech, there is a qualitative difference—what we might call "traceable authorship"—between comments delivered in person and the often long, technical statements released by the White House press office. While we consider both written and verbal presidential rhetoric as important contributions to national dialogue and debate, there is added weight to direct presidential delivery of his message. The direct delivery is important both in a theoretical sense, relating to accountability and authorship, and in a practical sense—live presidential comments may be broadcasted on television and radio, amplified far beyond the level of written remarks.

B. Presidential Rhetoric and National Political Life

We use rhetoric to mean the presidents' public speech and communication. Presidents communicate with the public today much more than in the past, and commentators generally agree that this public volubility is an inevitable feature of the modern presidency. Presidents may use the "bully pulpit" to appeal directly to the public on issues of concern. This strategy of "going public" is

2. See Richard Rorty, Philosophy and Social Hope 144 (1999) (suggesting that we "scrap the distinction between using and interpreting, and just distinguish between uses by different people for different purposes").

3. We have included some news interviews and other events that were clearly designed to be covered by the press.
sometimes used to discipline a recalcitrant Congress. But more generally, the modern president is continually "reach[ing] out to the populace through speeches, events and press opportunities to promote himself and his policies." He is engaged in an ongoing presidential campaign. His public standing affects not only his chances for re-election and his desire to leave a legacy, but also his ability to achieve his immediate policy objectives. Presidential speeches and other events that stir public admiration and reassure us that he is in tune with us on important issues are understood as essential to effective governance. Thus, presidential rhetoric becomes an instrument of governance, and the study of presidential rhetoric becomes "the study of presidential public persuasion as it affects the ability of a [p]resident to exercise the powers of the office."

The increased importance of presidential rhetoric troubles some commentators. They argue that it undermines the deliberative elements of our political system, that it elevates "spectacle" over substance, and that it lends itself to cynical manipulation. They follow in a distinguished tradition from Plato to George Orwell, who wrote that "[p]olitical language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind."

There is some truth in these criticisms: presidential rhetoric can be used to limit or avoid political accountability, but it can also aid accountability. First, public words uttered by presidents are

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6. Id. at 2335.
7. Id.; see also Kernell, supra note 4, at 34-37.
11. Tulis, supra note 10, at 176.
themselves political acts that are open to scrutiny and evaluation. The public not only expects the president to weigh in on the issues and may punish him with lower approval ratings if he remains silent, but it may also punish him if he speaks and it dislikes what he says. Presidential rhetoric is one basis for evaluating whether the president is reliably representing our national values, aspirations, and preferred policies.

Second, rhetoric provides a standard against which the president's policies can be judged. It is the basis for comparing what the president says with what the president does. Policies found wanting in that comparison can cost the president politically. Often, the more vivid the rhetorical stance, as in George H.W. Bush's famous "read my lips" pledge not to raise taxes, the more severe the political penalty when events do not conform to it. Typically, the president's words are less definitive, and he may be accused of waffling, but the words are there to put his actions and policies to the test. Thus, public speech by modern presidents can be a mechanism of accountability as well as of evasion and obfuscation.

Presidential rhetoric defines a discourse of its own; it is also part of the larger national discourse that is part of—some might argue, is—our political life. Its dialogic, or interactive, qualities are pervasive, even when the form of the discourse is a presidential speech or statement. In preparing and delivering a speech, the president and his advisors have done their best to anticipate and shape the public's reactions, using the results of focus groups, polls, and their own political instincts and judgment. After the speech, the president's staff will assess those reactions for future planning. Thus, presidential rhetoric has the quality of both pushing and being pushed by the public's views. As Lawrence Jacobs and Marc Shapiro note:

Elected officials use public appeals for the quite different purposes of responding to the public's policy evaluations and attempting to direct them. . . . Successful politicians shift their public appeals between following the policy preferences of their constituents in order to maximize their electoral chances and attempting to shape public opinion in order to achieve their personal ideological goals and policy preferences.

Because the president is our national leader, his voice in the

15. E.g., Gelderman, supra note 10, at 95.
16. Lawrence R. Jacobs & Robert Y. Shapiro, The Politicization of Public Opinion: The Fight for the Pulpit, in The Social Divide 83, 85 (Margaret Weir ed., 1998); see also Windt, supra note 9, at xxxvi (political language is both "expressive and impressive").
larger discourse might be expected to carry particular weight. But whether and how presidential rhetoric actually affects or determines our political life is the subject of some debate. The myriad views can be lumped, crudely, into two major groups. The first group, with roots in political science and sociology, tends to see rhetoric as distinct from its political effects, such as changes in public attitudes or voting behavior; this group seeks empirical evidence that presidential communications discernibly affect the public's views, with a preference for quantitative methods. The evidence on the effects of presidential speech, studied from this perspective, is mixed. The literature suggests that presidents have a limited ability to lead public opinion on policy issues. However, there is evidence that presidents can be influential in shaping the public's perception of which issues are most important, and that rhetorical techniques can affect the success of their agenda-setting efforts. There is also empirical support for the proposition that the quality of presidents' speeches, for example, whether they are rich in image-based rhetoric, is linked to perceptions of their charisma and greatness.

The second group, with roots in the humanities, tends to see less distinction, if any at all, between public speech and our collective life. They see rhetoric as "deeply implicated in how human beings come to know and act upon their world." For them, the

17. See, e.g., George C. Edwards III, Presidential Rhetoric, What Difference Does It Make?, in BEYOND THE RHETORICAL PRESIDENCY 200, 210 (Martin Medhurst ed., 1996) (arguing that rhetorical scholars with a humanities approach have no evidence to support their assumptions that presidential speech moves the public); see also KERNELL, supra note 4, at 223-24 (quoting Jody Powell, Jimmy Carter's press secretary: "Communications and the management of them, the impact is marginal.").

18. Compare Jeffrey E. Cohen, Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda, 39 AM. J. POL. SCI. 87, 87-88 (1995) (summarizing literature to the effect that popular presidents are able to lead public opinion on policy issues); with Adam B. Lawrence, Does It Really Matter What Presidents Say? at 6 (paper prepared for delivery at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Aug. 28 to Sept. 1, 2002) (on file with authors) ("It is widely conceded that most presidential speeches are not a useful tool for changing citizens' attitudes on the important policy issues of the day.").

19. Lawrence, supra note 18, at 22.


21. GEORGE LAKOFF & MARK JOHNSON, METAPHORS WE LIVE BY (1980) (arguing that American voters' political views are founded in a worldview shaped by their participation in public debate—a language and image-based activity); RORTY, supra note 2, at 238 (positing that conception of "social hope" is founded on existence of successful national dialogue in the public sphere); Martin Medhurst, Afterward, in BEYOND THE RHETORICAL PRESIDENCY 221 (Martin Medhurst ed., 1996); see also JÜRGEN HABERMAS, THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE OF MODERNITY, chs. 6, 7 & 8 passim (1987) (stating the importance of public lan-
political process itself is a process of deliberative rhetoric; they resist viewing rhetoric as a "cause" linked to discrete effects, but conceive of it instead as broadly constitutive of our political and social culture.22 A group of commentators recently summarized the humanities-derived approach this way: "The study of rhetoric considers talk and mediated discourse . . . to be consequential, to have effect in the world . . . [T]hose things that are said and done are marks and measures of the culture, the speaker, and the language that generates them."23 For those adopting this approach, the importance of the speech of the president, as the preeminent voice within our national discourse, is obvious.

We do not feel compelled to take sides in this debate. Consistent with the political-science view, we assume that presidents act out of political self-interest and that they use rhetoric to produce measurable responses from the public favorable to them: increased approval ratings, political contributions, and votes. A corollary is that values predominant in our culture will act as constraints upon the speech of presidents, for whom public approval is critical. At the same time, closer to the humanities approach, we assume that the world created by presidential rhetoric has significance in and of itself, apart from its political consequences or lack thereof. We take the images, metaphors, stories, ideas, and moral sentiments in the rhetoric as an embodiment of our national culture, an artifact that can yield important insights about ourselves.24

22. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Eloquence in an Electronic Age 97, 99 (1988) (arguing that the president is a "custodian" of the "nation's symbolic past" and "national vocabulary"); David Zarefsky, President Johnson's War on Poverty: Rhetoric and History 6-7 (1986) (stating that political reality is constructed through symbolic interaction); Robert L. Ivie, Tragic Fear and the Rhetorical Presidency: Combating Evil in the Persian Gulf, in Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency, supra note 17, at 153, 161 (explaining rhetoric as a constitutive force and source of national identity); Medhurst, supra note 21, at 225 (arguing against treating "rhetoric as nothing more than a causal factor in a chain of cause-and-effect reasoning").


C. The Environmental Discourse

The environmental speeches of the seven presidents we have studied display remarkable unity. Presidents have spoken to both the public and each other, or at least successors have listened closely to their predecessors. Ideas, images, allusions, and stories used by a president may be quickly dropped or used repeatedly by him and appropriated by his successors. Some moves have become so common in the environmental speeches of presidents of all political stripes that they are almost reflexive, such as using "stewardship" to describe our environmental obligations, invoking the example of the "conservationist president" Teddy Roosevelt, or appearing amid the giant sequoias to express one's awe in nature.  

Our analysis in Part IV will trace the development of the common rhetorical stock in some detail as well as variations reflecting the particular ideologies, predilections, and circumstances of individual presidents. It will also show that even as the rhetoric develops and changes, it builds on previous presidential articulations, rejecting, modifying, or surpassing usages of the past. Presidential discourse on the environment constitutes an emerging rhetorical tradition—a lexicon of its own. It is influenced by many other discourses, but because of the unique position of the president in American public life, it is not only distinct from these other discourses; it is also distinctive.

Modern presidential speechwriting machinery is adapted to ensure that, to the extent consistent with his agenda, the president's utterances resonate with the public. Speechwriters utilize information from a number of current sources to determine how they will package their message: they watch polls; they test and refine alternative speeches using focus groups; and, they solicit the advice of experienced political observers. They also look backward, canvassing the speeches of past presidents for effective formulations.  

Presidential discourse on the environment, therefore, might reflect, as well as influence or determine, the way Americans think and feel about the environment in its many manifestations. This possibility is consistent with the strong commonalities we have discerned in the rhetoric over time and across wide personal and ideological differences. We might also expect the diversity of the

25. See infra Parts IV.A, D & E.
discourse to reflect the basic tensions and contradictions that affect our polity on environmental issues.

Our analysis in this Article considers the connection between the rhetoric and what polls and other studies reveal about the public’s environmental preferences, values, and ethical views. But the rhetoric is more than the sum of the polls and the studies; its store of ideas, images, allusions, stories, and dramatizations give a unique and particularized voice to our collective regard for our environment. We draw an image of American environmentalism from presidential rhetoric and locate this environmentalism within the broader cultural context.

III. ANALYZING ENVIRONMENTAL RHETORIC

In this section, we locate presidential rhetoric on the environment in its political and cultural context. We also provide an analytical framework for comparing the environmentalism that emerges from the rhetoric against stronger versions of environmentalism, which we group under the general label of ecocentrism.

A. Setting the Political Context

We begin in 1970, with the presidency of Richard Nixon. The public had registered a level of environmental concern before 1970; environmental advocacy groups were active; Congress enacted environmental legislation, including the Wilderness Act; and recent presidents, including Kennedy and Johnson, had urged the wisdom of environmental protection, carrying on a rhetorical tradition that began with Teddy Roosevelt. The year 1970, however, marked the emergence of the environment as a political and social issue that attracted the concerns of a majority of Americans. On January 1 of that year, Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act,27 which for the first time defined environmental principles and goals for the nation; the environment, he declared, could become “the major concern of the American people over the next decade.”28 Later that year, Congress amended the Clean Air Act to require uniform national ambient air quality standards and federal oversight of state plans to implement them—the first of the dozen

or so federal regulatory enactments that would dominate environmental law and policy in the years to come.

From 1968 to 1970, press coverage of the environment in the New York Times quadrupled. The percentage of the public who believed that air and water pollution deserved government attention more than tripled from 17% to 53% between 1965 and 1970. Grassroots concerns found their most compelling expression in the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, which one commentator described as the "largest one-day outpouring of public support for any social cause in American history." Environmental journalist Philip Shabecoff calls it "as good a date as any to point to as the day environmentalism in the United States began to emerge as a mass social movement." Presidents since Nixon have pointed to 1970 and to the first Earth Day as marking the beginning of the modern environmental movement.

The transformation of American society and law wrought by the environmental movement has persisted over time. In 1989, nearly two decades after the first Earth Day, a national poll indicated that 76% of Americans considered themselves environmentalists. The percentage of Americans classifying themselves as environmentalists has fallen more recently to around 50%. However, when pollsters ask Americans whether they think of themselves as active

30. Riley E. Dunlap, Public Opinion and Environmental Policy, in ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS AND POLICY, id., at 63, 72.
31. MARK DOWIE, LOSING GROUND: AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTALISM AT THE CLOSE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY 24 (1995); see also PHILIP SHABECOFF, A FIERCE GREEN FIRE 113 (1993) (quoting Earth Day national coordinator, Denis Hayes, claiming it was "the largest organized demonstration in human history").
32. SHABECOFF, supra note 31, at 113.
35. Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, supra note 34.
environmentalists, as sympathetic to environmental concerns but not active, as neutral, or as unsympathetic, approximately two-thirds respond that they either are active environmentalists or are sympathetic to environmental concerns.36 In 1995, based on their detailed study of views of diverse groups from sawmill workers to Earth First! members, a group of anthropologists concluded, “American environmentalism represents a consensus view, its major tenets are held by large majorities, and it is not opposed on its own terms by any alternative coherent belief system.”37 Some commentators have disputed this conclusion.38 But the notion that there is a “consensus on the environment” in this country has currency; presidents, among others, invoke it as if it were fact.39 We explore this notion through the rhetoric in Part IV.

Although environmentalism may constitute a core value for Americans, polls show that environmental concerns generally have lower priority than other issues such as crime, education, and health care.40 In presidential elections, environmental issues have had relatively low salience and therefore have drawn relatively little attention from the candidates. The major “parties apparently believe that other concerns—notably the economy—drive the most successful election campaigns.”41 Gary Coglianese characterizes the broad public acceptance of environmentalism, combined with the


39. E.g., Reagan, Remarks at Dedication Ceremonies for the New Building of the National Geographic Society, 1984 PUB. PAPERS 875 (June 19, 1984) (“We have ... reached consensus on the need to conserve our environment. Now we must come to agreement on how to do it.”); Clinton, The President’s Radio Address, 1995 PUB. PAPERS 1719 (Nov. 4, 1995) (“[P]rotecting our environment is a fundamental community value for all Americans.”); George W. Bush, Remarks on Earth Day in Wilmington, New York, 38 WEEKLY COMP. PRES. DOC. 672 (Apr. 22, 2002) (“Americans have reached a great consensus about the protection of [sic] the environment; we’ve come to understand the success of a generation is not defined by wealth alone.”).


41. Raymond Tatalovich & Mark J. Watten, Opinion Leadership: Elections, Campaigns,
generally low salience of environmental issues, as "latent environmentalism." As he observes, "[i]n the absence of crises, environmentalism does not motivate the political behavior of any large segment of the public."

What is "latent" has the potential to become manifest. Crisis events that elevate the public importance of the environment include not only alarming environmental occurrences or conditions, but also public perceptions that institutions designed to protect the environment are under threat, or that political leaders, including the president, cannot be trusted to protect the environment. Several such "crises" have occurred in the last three decades, elevating the visibility of environmental issues. These crises are closely associated with marked fluctuations in the prevalence, intensity, and inflection of the president's environmental rhetoric. In the brief sketch of presidential environmental politics below, we trace their ebb and flow while reflecting on each president's rhetorical attention to the environment in that context.

1. The awakening.

One such crisis was the dawning of the modern environmental era itself—the "awakening" as Nixon referred to it. Responding to the sudden upwelling of public concern and in competition with Senator Edmund Muskie for the allegiance of the emerging environmental constituency, Nixon devoted one-third of his 1970 State of the Union Address to environmental issues. He spoke in apocalyptic terms: We had been at war with nature; we must "make our peace with nature and begin to make reparations for the damage we have done to our air, to our land, and to our water"; failure to act would leave "young Americans . . . [to] reap the grim consequences." The sense of urgency continued in his spoken remarks a few weeks later as he sent Congress "a sweeping set of proposals to clean up our Nation's air and water and to make our land more

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42. Coglianese, supra note 40, at 109.

43. Id. at 111.


livable." It was necessary to act immediately, he said, because "it is now or never." His written statement to Congress claimed that America needed "fundamentally new philosophies of land, air and water use." No president had talked this way about the environment before, and Nixon spoke frequently and urgently on the environment through the remainder of 1970 and into 1971.

Under pressure from his conservative base and having concluded that environmental issues were not producing much political benefit, Nixon softened his stance in the months leading to the 1972 election; the White House strategy was to tone down the rhetoric and to stress earlier accomplishments. This flattened rhetoric continued with Nixon's successor Gerald Ford, who struggled to establish his leadership in the wake of the Watergate scandal and in a period of economic downturn. Ford blandly urged restraint in pursuing our environmental enthusiasms. Jimmy Carter expressed greater sympathy for environmental interests than Ford, but inflation and a stagnant economy also limited his enthusiasm for new environmental initiatives. He encouraged us to focus instead on implementing and enforcing environmental laws already on the books. While Carter's rhetoric reflects his generally modest environmental aspirations, he fought hard toward the end of his presidency to preserve large tracts of public lands in Alaska.

47. Id.
48. Id. at 96.
50. E.g., Statement on Signing the Toxic Substances Control Act, 1976-77 PUB. PAPERS 2487 (Oct. 12, 1976) (admonishing the EPA to "carefully exercise its discretionary authority so as to minimize the regulatory burden consistent with the effective protection of the health and the environment"); see also infra Part IV.B.1.
51. Carolyn Long et al., The Chief Environmental Diplomat: An Evolving Arena of Foreign Policy, in The Environmental Presidency, supra note 41, at 208-09; The Environment, Message to the Congress, 1977 PUB. PAPERS 967 (May 23, 1977) ("Congress has in the past carried out its share of this duty [of stewardship] well—so well, in fact, that the primary need today is not for new comprehensive statutes but for sensitive administration and energetic enforcement of the ones we have."). Carter did, however, sign a number of environmental measures into law, including the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1977, the Clean Water Act Amendments of 1977, the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.
52. Carter remarked:
We have many difficult decisions to make in a modern, fast-changing, technological society, where quite often the small and the isolated, the quiet person or group is never heard, or heard too late, after their own lives are destroyed—
2. **Crises in environmental leadership.**

Ronald Reagan did not make the environment an affirmative issue, but was forced to devote attention to it in response to a political crisis of his own making. In Reagan’s first term, his key environmental appointees, Secretary of the Interior James Watt and Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency Anne Gorsuch, pursued policies and used language that the great majority of Americans opposed.\(^{53}\) The public’s overwhelming disapproval of his administration’s environmental policies coincided with a sluggish economy, causing Reagan’s public approval ratings to drop.\(^{54}\) In response, Reagan fired Gorsuch and Watt, hired more environmentally sympathetic lieutenants for these key posts, and made speeches designed to assure Americans that he shared their concern for the environment. Among other rhetorical steps, he publicly identified himself as an environmentalist.\(^{55}\) He later sought to further his environmentalist credentials by proclaiming himself one of “the forerunners of the whole movement” as Governor of California.\(^{56}\) Having positioned himself rhetorically as an environmentalist, however, he attacked adherents of “environmental extremism,” who would want to make the White House look “like a bird’s nest.”\(^{57}\) Thus, Reagan considered his administration’s lack of

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57. *Id.* Reagan later softened his “bird’s nest quip,” acknowledging that there are “zealots on both sides.” Remarks and Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters on the Nomination of William D. Ruckelshaus to Be Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, 1983 PUB. PAPERS 423 (Mar. 21, 1983). But while calling himself one of them, he continued to caricature environmentalists. For example, in a speech before the conservative National Rifle Association in 1983, he hit at misanthropic environmentalists who wanted to “lock up” natural resources and “save the planet from mankind.” Remarks at the
credibility on the environment enough of a political vulnerability to need his personal attention, and he used rhetoric to rebuild his credibility.

Sensing perhaps that his predecessor had failed to capitalize on an important source of political support, on his election, George H.W. Bush declared himself the "environmental president" and vigorously developed environmental themes during the early portion of his presidency. Later, as the nation struggled economically and as Bush sought to reassure his conservative base, he backed away from his aggressive rhetorical posture and its related environmental policies. Like Nixon, Bush experimented unsuccessfully with taking the political offensive on the environment as a Republican president.

George W. Bush did not make the same miscalculation his father made. Instead, he may have made the same miscalculation Reagan made. Early in his presidency, Bush relaxed a drinking water standard for arsenic, rejected the Kyoto Protocol on global climate change, and took controversial positions on other environmental issues. Polls showed a weakening of his approval rating, with "[w]idespread worries about [his] energy and environmental policies . . . feeding the drop in his approval score." In response, Bush made several closely spaced speeches to display his environmental sympathies. These included an appearance amid the giant sequoias to express his awe in "a design that is not our own" and another in the Everglades to mark his appreciation of "beauty

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A variation on Reagan's anti-extremist theme was picked up by Bush in his 1992 re-election campaign, as he responded to claims by his opponent Clinton that his administration had not been vigorous in its protection of the environment. Speaking before the Natural Communities Conservation Planning Organization in San Diego, Bush declared that "when it comes to the environment, I believe extremism on either side is no virtue." Remarks to Natural Communities Conservation Planning Organization in San Diego, California, 1992-93 PUB. PAPERS 1554 (Sept. 14, 1992). Bush resuscitated Reagan's anti-extremist rhetoric but in a moderate form. The phrasing simultaneously evokes and repudiates Barry Goldwater's famous statement that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice." By implicitly rejecting Goldwater's statement, which was widely viewed as extreme at the time it was made, Bush sought to solidify his claim to the environmental middle ground—against the extremism he attributed to the Clinton-Gore ticket.

58. *Infra* Parts IV.B.2, E.2.


60. Remarks at Sequoia National Park, California, 37 WEEKLY COMP. PRES. DOC. 831 (May 30, 2001).
[that] is beyond our power to improve.”61 In August 2003, with a campaign approaching, Bush made another series of rhetorical forays to insulate himself against “expected campaign portrayals of [him] as a negligent steward of the air, water and land.”62 For Republican presidents, there seems to be hard truth in William Ruckelshaus’ early advice to Nixon: “You can’t win with the environment, but they can beat you up with it.”63

3. Exploiting a crisis.

In the first months of the 104th Congress, which was elected in 1994 with a Republican majority in both houses, Clinton used the environment affirmatively to punish the Republicans in Congress. The Republican leadership came to Washington armed with the Contract with America, which included provisions aimed at reducing the stringency and cost of existing environmental laws. Polls showed that a strong majority of the public disagreed with these proposals and did not trust Congress to take care of the environment.64 Clinton opposed the measures as a rollback of existing protections and boosted his environmental rhetoric to establish and affirm his own credentials on the environment while attacking the Republican majority for their callous approach to environmental issues. On Earth Day 1995, standing on the shore of the Chesapeake Bay, Clinton raised the alarm. He reminded his audience of the first Earth Day, when “[w]e joined together to save the natural beauty and all the resources that God has given us.”65 He decried the unprecedented role of industry lobbyists in writing the Republican-backed proposals, stating that “there has never in all my lifetime been an example like this,” and exhorted his audience,

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63. FLIPPEN, supra note 49, at 134.


“whether you are a Republican or a Democrat or a liberal or a conservative,” to express their common environmental commitment by saying “no, folks. Say no. Just say no to what they are doing.” In this and later rhetorical attacks, Clinton used the environment as a weapon more than any other president in the modern environmental era, casting his opponents as the villains in the fundamental sense that they acted on values inimical to those held by most Americans. There is evidence that this crisis-in-governance strategy helped raise the salience of environmental issues, and paid off for Clinton and his fellow Democrats at the polls in the 1996 elections.

Although it may be “latent,” American environmentalism has the capacity to be a salient issue in national politics, and can be a leverage point in national debates as parties compete for public approval and support. Presidents of both parties have marshaled their rhetoric to establish and maintain credibility with the public on the issue and to advance their particular agendas. Even Republican presidents, whose key constituencies have not included environmental groups, have not felt free to write-off the issue.

B. Competing Values Framework

Differences in perception of socio-political issues such as the environment can be analyzed along conventional party lines, but recent work in cultural theory offers more nuanced analytical frameworks. Social scientists such as Geert Hofstede and Shalom Schwartz have used empirically derived value dimensions to represent national cultures. Their analysis assumes that cultures face

66. Id. at 565.
67. Cannon, supra note 64, at 10,948.
69. See Geert Hofstede, Culture’s Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations (2d ed. 2001) (using attitude surveys of IBM employees worldwide and other data to document national differences along five dimensions of national culture).
similar choices among competing values and that cultures differ in the values they emphasize.

In Schwartz's matrix, one basic issue confronting all societies is the relationship of humans to the natural world, and he posits two opposing responses: (a) "mastery," with its emphasis on "active self-assertion," bending the world "to our will," "exploit[ing] it . . . to further personal or group interests" and (b) "harmony," with its emphasis on "fitting harmoniously into the environment" and "unity with nature, protecting the environment."\(^{71}\) Other value oppositions Schwartz examines are "conservatism," with its emphasis on social order and individual restraint, versus "autonomy," with its emphasis on individuals' right to pursue their own desires; and "hierarchy," with its emphasis on "the legitimacy of unequal power, roles and resources," versus "egalitarianism," with its emphasis on "commitment to promoting the welfare of others."\(^{72}\)

Other theoretical accounts also project environmental values as embedded in a larger cultural matrix. In their 1982 work, *Risk and Culture*, anthropologists Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky posited three competing cultural types or "biases": market individualism, hierarchy, and sectarianism.\(^{73}\) Defenders of the environment are sectarians or "border" dwellers, standing in opposition to the market individualists and heirarchists who occupy the cultural center.\(^{74}\) Cognitive linguist George Lakoff, by comparison, divides culture into two competing models: strict father morality, with emphasis on self-reliance, self-discipline, and making a living, and nur-

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72. *Id.* at 27-28. Schwartz describes the relationships among these values as follows:

Mastery values relate positively to Autonomy values, because both types presume the legitimacy of changing the status quo and they both emphasize stimulating activity. . . . Mastery values are also linked to Hierarchy values, because efforts to get ahead are often at the expense of others and result in unequal allocations of roles and resources that are justified in a society where hierarchical differences are viewed as legitimate. But Mastery values are opposed to Egalitarianism values, because exploitative self-assertion . . . conflicts with relating to others as equals.

. . . .

Harmony values are compatible with Conservatism values, with which they share an emphasis on avoiding change, and with Egalitarianism values, with which they share an emphasis on cooperative relations.

*Id.* at 31.


turtant parent morality, with emphasis on empathy, nurturance, and fairness.\textsuperscript{75} The nurturist paradigm encompasses strong forms of environmentalism, including respect for nature and recognition of its “inherent value.”\textsuperscript{76}

Although there are marked similarities among these conceptualizations, in Part IV and V we draw primarily on Schwarz’s matrix in characterizing the cultural values embodied in the rhetoric.

C. \textit{Strong Environmentalism or Ecocentrism}

In Parts IV and V, we compare the environmentalism espoused in presidential speech with stronger versions of environmentalism, which we characterize generally as “ecocentrism.”\textsuperscript{77} Ecocentrists share an urgent sense that the environment is in decline, and they identify modern technological development and associated patterns of production and consumption as primary culprits in that decline. They would sharply curb environment-altering technologies and would replace the prevailing societal “goal of maximizing production and consumption with the pastoral ideal of economic sufficiency”\textsuperscript{78} or perhaps an even more radical reordering of the claims of humans on non-human nature. For example, deep ecologists, who number among the more extreme ecocentrist, call for transformation of “basic economic, technological, and ideological structures” and a “resulting state of affairs [that] will be deeply different from the present.”\textsuperscript{79} Their policy goals include stabilizing or reducing the human population, aggressively extending areas of wilderness and near-wilderness, and permitting only sustainable forms of economic growth.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{75} George Lakoff, \textit{Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think} 65-152 (2d ed. 2002).
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Id.} at 215.
\textsuperscript{77} In using this grouping for purposes of our analysis, we acknowledge that there are many differences in attitudes, values, and beliefs even among those that would characterize themselves as strong environmentalists. We use “ecocentrism” because of the prevalence among strong environmentalists of a belief that non-human nature should be accorded some level of moral consideration or value in its own right. See Robert C. Paehlke, \textit{Environmentalism and the Future of Progressive Politics} 148 (1989); Shabeoff, \textit{supra} note 31, at xii-xiv; Jill Ker Conway et al., \textit{The New Environmentalisms, in Earth, Air, Fire, Water: Humanistic Studies of the Environment} 1, 8-11 (Jill Ker Conway et al. eds., 1999).
\textsuperscript{78} Leo Marx, \textit{Environmental Degradation and the Ambiguous Social Role of Science and Technology, in Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, supra note 77, at 335.}
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Id.} at 197-98.
IV. The Discourse

We now explore how presidential rhetoric has evolved in the modern environmental era. We organize our analysis thematically, focusing broadly on the cultural and ethical sources of environmental value rather than on particular policies, although we often refer to particular policies for context. We address not only the commonalties within each thematic category, but also differences that reflect the influence of potentially competing values such as personal freedom or autonomy, and economic advancement or mastery.81

A. Thematic Source: President Teddy Roosevelt

The environmental discourse of modern presidents has a host of sources. Presidents have named and quoted distinguished literary figures and conservationists such as Muir, Thoreau, Leopold, Carson, Frost, and Stegner. But the vast majority of presidential allusions on the environment cite former president Teddy Roosevelt. Both politically and rhetorically, Roosevelt is the dominant point of reference on environmental issues for all modern presidents, regardless of their ideology.

In 1969, Nixon appropriated Roosevelt’s legacy and made it relevant to the modern environmental movement. In his statement announcing the creation of the Council on Environmental Quality, Nixon said:

“The conservation of our natural resources and their proper use constitute the fundamental problem which underlies almost every other problem of our national life,” Theodore Roosevelt said in 1907. When men talked about conservation in his time, they usually singled out the wild lands, plant and animal life, and valuable minerals, for in these areas they saw the threat of scarcity. Resources such as the air or the water or the countryside itself were of less concern, for the supply and the quality of such things seemed invulnerable.

I am sure that Roosevelt and his associates of sixty and more years ago would be most surprised if they knew that in our time technological development threatens the availability of good air and good water, of open space and even quiet neighborhoods. Yet that is exactly what is happening.82

81. See supra Part III.B.
Environmental degradation is even more acute now than in Roosevelt’s era, Nixon suggested, because what was unimaginable then had come to pass: our “good air and good water” have been contaminated by our “technological development,” and “open space,” “the countryside itself,” is also “threatened.” This comparison dramatizes the current problem, which was in Nixon’s political interest as he sought to capitalize on the wave of public concern about the environment. Significantly, the comparison brings Roosevelt into our modern era as a guide for how we should respond to our own environmental dilemmas. The implication is that the current environmental problems would not only surprise “Roosevelt and his associates,” it would horrify them. They would want us to act as they did—with energy and foresight. Thus installed, Roosevelt has remained a palpable presence in modern presidential speech on the environment—a witness to our environmental dilemmas and a trusted guide in resolving them.

Allusions to historical figures such as Roosevelt may serve a number of rhetorical purposes. By invoking a historical figure generally beyond reproach and removed from contemporary political controversy, the speaker can add a sense of historical significance to his observations or proposals and enhance his credibility. By suggesting a comparison between himself and the revered figure, the speaker can also seek to raise his own stature. Roosevelt’s successors have compared themselves to him for both these purposes. In his 1979 remarks urging the preservation of public lands in Alaska, Carter characterized Roosevelt as the “preeminent conservationist” among the presidents and then pointed out that Roosevelt “was attacked by many special interest groups, and the American people realized, a vast majority of them realized that he was right. [H]e was the kind of man who could balance properly immediate benefits . . . and the long-range benefits.”\textsuperscript{83} With this reference, Carter drew a parallel between himself and Roosevelt, both of them beleaguered by “special interest groups.” As he fought for the preservation of large tracts of land in Alaska, Carter suggested that he too could stand up to political pressure and balance the short term against the long term, claiming that the “vast majority” of Americans would vindicate him.

Reagan drew a similar parallel in a major speech to the National Geographic Society designed to enhance his “environ-

\textsuperscript{83} Alaska Public Lands: Remarks at a White House Briefing, supra note 52, at 775.
mentalism” image after the Gorsuch and Watt firings and in anticipation of the 1984 presidential election. Describing Roosevelt as “an old conservative” that “led the charge to create the National Park System,” Reagan went on in his speech to take credit for protecting that same system.\footnote{84} In his reference to Roosevelt, Reagan played on his political association with Roosevelt as a fellow conservative as well as the common etymological origins of “conservative” and “conservation” in an effort to position himself in the mainstream of the American environmental tradition.

These references by two presidents of opposing ideologies testify to Roosevelt’s iconic status or at least to the power that modern presidents attach to his name and image. By far Roosevelt’s greatest contribution to modern presidential rhetoric on the environment, however, is as a source of the themes that have come to characterize that discourse and, as we suggest, to define our modern environmentalism. These Rooseveltian references include a broadly utilitarian notion that environmental resources should be used to contribute “their fair share to the welfare of the people”,\footnote{85} a collective obligation to leave the environment to future generations “increased, and not impaired in value”,\footnote{86} and a sense, sometimes expressed in religious or spiritual terms, that some places should be kept as they are, off-limits to human appropriation.\footnote{87}

\footnote{84. Remarks at Dedication Ceremonies for the New Building of the National Geographic Society, \textit{supra} note 39, at 875.}


\footnote{86. \textit{E.g.}, Carter, Statement of Policy: Renewable Resources of the United States, 1980-81 \textit{PUB. PAPERS} 1142 (June 19, 1980) (quoting Roosevelt: “The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired in value.”); Reagan, Remarks on Signing the Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality, 1984 \textit{PUB. PAPERS} 1031 (July 11, 1984) (same as Carter quote); George H.W. Bush, Remarks to Members of Ducks Unlimited, 1989 \textit{PUB. PAPERS} 694 (June 8, 1989) (quoting Roosevelt on setting aside the Grand Canyon: “The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it. What you can do is keep it for your children and your children’s children.”); Clinton, Remarks on Clean Water Legislation, 1995 \textit{PUB. PAPERS} 764 (May 30, 1995) (same as Carter quote); Remarks on Signing the Proclamation Establishing the Giant Sequoia National Monument in Sequoia National Forest, California, \textit{supra} note 33, at 720 (quoting Roosevelt on setting aside the Grand Canyon, same as George H.W. Bush quote); George W. Bush, Proclamation of Great Outdoors Week, 38 \textit{WEEKLY COMP. PRES. DOC.} 977 (June 7, 2002) (same as Carter quote).}

\footnote{87. \textit{E.g.}, Reagan, Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Take Pride in
Roosevelt’s successors have adopted these strains as among their preferred rationales for environmental protection and, with them, the implicit tensions between protecting and making use of the environment, or between environmental and economic commitments. The following sections further explore these themes.

B. ‘Tough Choices’ Versus ‘We Can Have It All’

Economists remind us that protecting the environment, whether protecting land from development or imposing limits on pollution, comes at a cost. When we choose to reduce our impacts on the environment, we can expect to pay for it in (1) out-of-pocket costs, such as the expense of buying and operating pollution control equipment or potential effects on productivity and jobs, or (2) in opportunity costs, such as the foregone profit from industrial or commercial development. Although if we make the right choices we will come out ahead in the aggregate, we can expect that increasing one good will result in reducing the availability of another. Thus, protecting the environment is likely to require trade-offs, and we must take care to ensure that the benefits of protective measures outweigh their costs. We call this the ‘tough choices’ view of environmental policy.

Alternatively, we might see technological and market innovations as enabling us to achieve environmental protection at lower costs while simultaneously improving overall productivity. We would still have to make choices affecting our welfare, but in this scenario, we would focus less on trading off one good against another. We might dub this the ‘we can have it all’ view. In this section, we trace the competition between these two themes for dominance in presidential speech.

1. ‘Tough choices.’

Presidential rhetoric has often reflected the ‘tough choices’ view. In the early years of his presidency, Nixon dramatized the

America Awards, 1988-89 PUB. PAPERS 983 (July 26, 1988) (quoting Roosevelt: “A grove of giant redwoods or sequoias should be kept just as we keep a great and beautiful cathedral.”); George H.W. Bush, Remarks at White House Tree-Planting Ceremony, 1990 PUB. PAPERS 402 (Mar. 22, 1990) (same as Reagan quote); Clinton, Remarks Announcing the Lands Legacy Initiative, 1999 PUB. PAPERS 33 (Jan. 12; 1999) (Roosevelt “knew nature was a divine gift, that old growth forests were more than trees to be cut down, that a pristine peak was more than a repository of ore. He set aside millions of acres of forests and mountains and valleys and canyons, land shaped by the hand of God over hundreds of millions of years.”).
seriousness of the nation’s environmental quandary using defense terminology, calling for a “war on pollution,” or religious terms invoking an “awakening” to our common destiny with all life on earth.  

His Special Message to the Congress Proposing the 1971 Environmental Program warned: “As our nation comes to terms with our environmental problems, we will find that difficult choices have to be made, that substantial costs have to be met, and that sacrifices have to be made. Environmental quality cannot be achieved cheaply or easily.” Sacrifice,” with its wartime connotations, perhaps was too demanding for the public’s taste. Use of the term did not persist beyond Nixon’s presidency, but the idea did.

While avoiding Nixon’s choice of the word “sacrifice,” Ford—more than any other president—resorted to the language of ‘tough choices.’ While the country struggled through an energy crisis, he vetoed Surface Mining Control and Reclamation legislation because it failed to “strike a proper balance between our energy and economic goals and important environmental objectives.” In approving a bill designating the Flat Tops Wilderness, he admonished Congress to “consider the trade-offs between wilderness values and other resource values and uses,” reminding Congress that other resource uses “will now be partially or completely forgone.” He rescinded his request to Congress to tighten automobile emissions standards, citing increased costs to consumers and possible health effects of control technology: “We have now reached the point where the further incremental progress we all want can only be achieved slowly and at higher cost.”

Subsequent presidents have resorted to the ‘tough choices’ theme, but none has expressed the pervasive sense of constraint that characterized Ford’s public pronouncements on environmental issues. “Balance” in the sense Ford used it has emerged as the

88. See supra Part III.A.1.
89. Special Message to the Congress Proposing the 1971 Environmental Program, 1971 PUB. PAPERS 142 (Feb. 8, 1971).
93. E.g., Carter, The State of the Union, 1980-81 PUB. PAPERS 157 (Jan. 21, 1980) (“Balancing the need for resource development and conservation has been a major environmental theme of my Administration.”); Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act: Remarks on Signing H.R. 39 into Law, supra note 52, at 2756 (Alaska lands legislation
preferred term to carry this theme, as it connotes moderation and justice in situations of conflict,\(^\text{94}\) and avoids the negative valence of “sacrifice.”

Reagan expanded this notion of “balance” in his address to the National Geographic Society, as he sought to define his kind of “environmentalism” in the wake of the Gorsuch and Watt debacles. Here the trade-offs were not only economic but included other values that might compete with environmental values:

> [W]e must keep in mind the word “balance”—a balance between the desire to conserve and protect, and the desire to grow and develop; a balance between concern for the good earth, and concern for the honest impulse to wrest from the earth the resources that benefit mankind; a balance between the overall demands of society, and the individual demands of the free citizen.\(^\text{95}\)

Reagan described each set of values in oppositional terms and worked to make the potential conflicts among them palpable, with sufficient appeal on both sides to take them seriously. “Concern for the good earth” is balanced, not against the desire for economic growth, but something more vivid, personal, and appealing—“the honest impulse to wrest from the earth the resources that benefit mankind.” And those “resources” cannot just be taken gently from the earth, they must be “wrested,” extracted, or violently taken. “[T]he overall demands of society” weigh against not just an abstract desire to be free of government intrusion, but also the “individual demands of the free citizen.” Although Reagan was there to assure his listeners that he could be trusted on environmental is-


\(^{95}\) Remarks at Dedication Ceremonies for the New Building of the National Geographic Society, supra note 39, at 875-76.
sues, he also made it clear that the policy choices would not be easy.

George H.W. Bush made “balance” on environmental issues a fighting point in his 1992 campaign against Clinton. Judicial injunctions restricting timber harvesting on federal lands pursuant to the Endangered Species Act’s protection of the northern spotted owl had thrown the Pacific Northwest into controversy. In speeches to timber constituencies in Washington and Oregon, Bush emphasized the local impact of reduced timber harvests and quoted Teddy Roosevelt: “Wise forest protection does not mean the withdrawal of forest resources from contributing their full share to the welfare of the people . . . . The balance . . . has been lost. I’ve come here because we must restore the balance. . . . My opponent will not fight to change the law to restore the balance.” We have lost the balance by making the wrong trade-offs, he suggested, by sacrificing too much timber production for old growth forest protection, and we must “restore the balance” in order to maximize “the welfare of the people.”

Although the ‘tough choices’ theme persisted after its apogee in the Ford administration, it shared rhetorical space with the alternative formulation—’we can have it all’—and over time the latter has overshadowed it. The emerging dominance of the ‘we can have it all’ theme, although predictable perhaps as a matter of political expedience, represents one of the most intriguing evolutions of presidential rhetoric on the environment.

2. ‘We can have it all.’

The ‘we can have it all’ theme also had its origins with Nixon. In 1970, the same year he declared a “war on pollution” and not long before his warning to Congress that “sacrifices will have to be made,” Nixon spoke at the dedication of the Ocean Science Center of the Atlantic Commission in Georgia. We did not need to reject “progress” to protect our environment, he said. Instead:

[I]n this country with its enormous industrial capability, it is possible to have progress and at the same time use those enormous talents in those areas to clean up the air, and clean up the water, and develop the open spaces, the recreation that we want for our young people in the years ahead.

96. Remarks to Vaagen Brothers Lumber Employees in Colville, Washington, supra note 85, at 1555-56.
America's "enormous talents," the same talents that have brought us "progress" in the past, will devise ways to bring us "progress" in the future without degrading the environment. Nixon suggested that there is no inherent contradiction between our industrial civilization and environmental quality; indeed, that civilization has within itself all that is necessary to provide environmental quality without requiring difficult trade-offs.

Nixon advanced this proposition even more emphatically in the final year of his administration. In his opening remarks at Expo '74 in Spokane, Washington he said: "We have gone through a period in the energy crisis when there have been evidences that these two great interests—one, production which would provide jobs, and two, a clean environment—seem to come into conflict. But let me tell you what the answer is. We can have both, and we shall have both." 98 Made in the context of scarcity during the energy crisis, this remark has a pointed, almost defiant tone, and contrasts starkly with his earlier talk of sacrifice. At the time that Nixon delivered this speech, he was facing impeachment charges, and his acerbic tone on this issue may have reflected the larger mood of his presidency.

Nixon's successors have repeated, repackaged, and reinvented the 'we can have it all' theme. In a speech inaugurating the "Second Environmental Decade," Carter offered a considered version: "We are recognizing that the conflict between resource use and resource protection is often unnecessary." 99 Addressing the National Campers and Hikers Association and echoing Nixon's reliance on American ingenuity, Reagan said: "[W]e're convinced that working through the wonders of science and technology, the human mind can enable our economy to grow, providing new jobs for millions, while at the same time enhancing our precious natural resources." 100 George H.W. Bush reintroduced the theme early in his administration. In a 1989 speech to members of Ducks Unlimited, he announced "a new kind of environmentalism," the first principle of which was that sound ecology and a strong economy

can coexist,”\textsuperscript{101} and he reiterated this “principle” at other times during his administration.\textsuperscript{102} He made clear that his “new environmentalism” was not about balancing:

To those who suggest we’re only trying to balance economic growth and environmental protection, I say they miss the point. We are calling for a really new way of thinking to achieve both while compromising neither by applying the power of the marketplace in the service of the environment.

And we cannot allow a question like climate change to be characterized as a debate between economists versus environmentalists. To say that this issue has sides is about as productive as saying that the earth is flat.\textsuperscript{103}

In Bush’s vision, adherents of the old ”balancing” view were unhelpful and, like Flat-Earthers, patently wrong. The “new” conception of a mutually enhancing relationship between economic growth and environmental protection had all the courage, vision, and prospect of vindication of a Columbus setting off for the New World.

Despite his early rhetorical commitment to “new environmentalism,” in the last years of his presidency, Bush reverted to the language of ‘tough choices,’ as he sought to address an economic slowdown. The “balance” concept, which Bush himself had so vividly connected with the Flat Earth view, was invoked several times. In explaining his administration’s objections to international environmental accords at the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Conference, Bush said, “I am the one that’s burdened with finding the balance between sound environmental practice . . . and jobs for America’s families.”\textsuperscript{104} Later, in a question and answer session with outdoor groups in Salt Lake City, he described himself as “trying to achieve a balance between growth and the environment,”\textsuperscript{105} and he

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{101} Remarks to Members of Ducks Unlimited, supra note 86, at 692.
\item \textsuperscript{102} \textit{E.g.}, Remarks at the Montana Centennial Celebration in Helena, 1989 PUBL. PAPERS 1210 (Sept. 18, 1989) (“We can have a sound ecology and strong economy.”); Message to Congress on Environmental Goals, 1992-93 PUBL. PAPERS 498 (Mar. 24, 1992) (“[W]e can have both economic growth and a cleaner, safer environment. Indeed the two can be mutually supportive.”); Remarks to Natural Communities Conservation Planning Organization in San Diego, California, supra note 57, at 1554 (“And we can have a strong environment and a strong economy. Indeed, the way I look at it is we must have both.”).
\item \textsuperscript{103} Remarks at the Closing Session of the White House Conference on Science and Economics Research Related to Global Change, 1990 PUBL. PAPERS 518-19 (Apr. 18, 1990).
\item \textsuperscript{104} Exchange with Reporters Prior to Discussions with Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway, supra note 93, at 899.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Outdoor Groups in Salt Lake City, Utah, 1992-93 PUBL. PAPERS 1129 (July 18, 1992).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotes}
sounded the theme again, as discussed above, in the Pacific Northwest dispute between environmentalists and the timber industry. In the 1991 campaign, Clinton attacked Bush for posing “false choices” between a strong economy and a clean environment. Clearly stung by Clinton’s claim, Bush felt compelled, even after his electoral defeat, to refute it: “We sought to achieve both while sacrificing neither.”

Clinton for his part reestablished the “we can have it all” theme for his presidency and brought it to new heights of expression with a rhetorical exuberance characteristic of his presidency. With a flourish remarkably similar to Bush’s rhetoric at the commencement of his presidency, Clinton immediately announced a “new way of thinking” and a “new direction” in environmental policy that would recognize “that protecting the environment means strengthening the economy and creating new jobs for Americans.” At the Forest Conference in Portland, Oregon, which he convened in April 1993 to address the spotted owl controversy, Clinton sought to “build a consensus on a balanced policy to preserve jobs and to protect our environment.” Doing that would be difficult, he claimed, at least in part because “the rhetoric from Washington has often exaggerated and exacerbated the tensions between those who speak about the economy and those who speak about the environment.” Having portrayed the tension between jobs and the environment itself as a creature of political rhetoric, Clinton then moved to defuse it. He mentioned the “tough decisions” that would have to be made and the need for a “balanced policy,” but rather than stressing the oppositional nature of the interests involved, he sought to construct a convergence of interests:

This is not about choosing between jobs and the environment but about recognizing the importance of both and recognizing that

108. Remarks Announcing the Creation of the White House Office on Environmental Policy, 1993 Pub. Papers 82 (Feb. 8, 1993) (focusing on “absolutely enormous business opportunities that exist both here and around the world for new environmental technologies that protect the environment and increase business profits and jobs”).
110. Id. at 386.
111. Id.
virtually everyone here and everyone in this region cares about both. After all, nobody appreciates the natural environment more than the working people who depend upon it . . . . And most environmentalists are working people and business people themselves, and understand that only an economically secure America can have the strength and confidence necessary.

. . . .

A healthy economy and a healthy environment are not at odds with each other. They are essential to each other. . . . [P]eople understand that healthy forests are important for a healthy forest-based economy; understand that if we destroy our old growth forest, we’ll lose jobs in salmon fishing and tourism and, eventually, in the timber industry as well.\textsuperscript{112}

Here the new president moved quickly to establish himself as the spokesperson for this “new direction.” Driven by his impulse to “bring people together,” Clinton’s rhetorical commitment to transcend any perceived conflict between the economy and the environment was to become one of the hallmarks of his environmental discourse.\textsuperscript{113} The long time antagonists attending Forest Conference may not have believed that Clinton could protect everyone’s interests and, as it turned out, he could not,\textsuperscript{114} but he maintained his insistence that it was possible.

Clinton expanded on the ‘we can have it all’ theme in his first Earth Day speech at the Botanical Gardens, where he implicitly rejected Nixon’s “sacrifice” terminology in favor of a broader and more optimistic vision.\textsuperscript{115} “We are challenged here today,” he said, “not so much to sacrifice as to celebrate and create.”\textsuperscript{116} He then outlined the principles of his environmental program:

First, we think you can’t have a healthy economy without a healthy environment. We need not choose between breathing clean air and bringing home secure paychecks. The fact is, our environmental problems result not from robust growth but from reckless growth. The fact is that only a prosperous society can have the confidence and means to protect its environment. And the fact is healthy communities and environmentally sound products and services do the best in today’s economic competition. That’s why our policies must protect our environment, promote

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\item \textsuperscript{112} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{113} See Cox, supra note 94, at 179-80.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Mark P. Moore, Colliding Ironies and Clinton’s Salvage Rider Rhetoric in the Northwest Timber Controversy, in Symbolic Transformations of the Material World, supra note 1, at 224.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Remarks on Earth Day, supra note 33, at 472.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Id.
\end{itemize}
economic growth, and provide millions of new high-skill, high-wage jobs. 117

Consistent with its message, the language works to meld environmental quality with economic prosperity. Clinton assured his audience that economic prosperity is not only consistent with environmental quality, it is a necessary condition of environmentalism: “only a prosperous society can have the confidence and means to protect its environment.” Healthy communities and environmentally sound products can not only co-exist with a sound economy, they yield competitive advantages and enhance economic growth. This speech represented the most ambitious rhetorical effort yet by a president to eliminate or verbally transcend the tension between economic growth and environmental protection. This idea became a recurrent theme throughout Clinton’s presidency. He repeatedly characterized opponents on environmental issues, particularly leaders of the Republican majority in Congress seeking to loosen environmental restrictions, as urging a “false choice” between the economy and the environment,118 of being “pessimists,”119 and of espousing an “old and now wrong idea that a nation can only grow rich if it continues to despoil its environment and burn up the atmosphere.”120 Unlike Bush, he never retreated from this rhetorical posture. Indeed, with a thriving economy to back him up, the “false choice” rather than the “tough choice" became a mantra during the last years of his administration.

Like his father and Clinton, George W. Bush sounded the ‘we can have it all’ theme early in his administration. Honoring Environmental Youth Award winners at the White House in April 2001, he argued that “[t]he whole world doesn’t have to be zero-sum. It doesn’t have to be that we find more energy, and therefore, the environment suffers.”121 In his 2002 announcement of his Clear Skies and Global Climate Change Initiatives, he honed this theme to support his policy proposals—a market-based “cap and trade”

117. Id. at 469.


119. E.g., The President’s Radio Address, 1999 PUB. PAPERS 667 (May 1, 1999).

120. Remarks at the Grand Canyon Announcing the Establishment and Expansion of National Monuments in Western States, supra note 118, at 29.

system to reduce domestic air emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and mercury, and a voluntary incentives program to encourage reductions of greenhouse gas emissions. Having angered environmentalists and many in the international community by repudiating the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, Bush began by reassuring us of his environmental orientation: "America and the world share this common goal: We must foster economic growth in ways that protect our environment." Like his father and Clinton before him, he claimed status as policy innovator. His approach to solving these environmental problems was "new" albeit cast in by now familiar language: "This new approach is based on this common-sense idea: that economic growth is key to environmental progress, because it is growth that provides the resources for investment in clean technologies." Similarly, Bush claimed:

To clean the air, and to address climate change, we need to recognize that economic growth and environmental protection go hand in hand. Affluent societies are the ones that demand, and can therefore afford, the most environmental protection. Prosperity is what allows us to commit more and more resources to environmental protection.

This was essentially the theme of Clinton's Botanical Gardens speech but with the emphasis reversed to favor the economy. Bush stated even more explicitly than Clinton that economic growth is essential to fostering societal preferences for environmental protection as well as providing the means for that protection. For Bush, our environmentalism depends on our affluence. But Bush omitted Clinton's corollary that a healthy environment is essential for a sound economy. After all, Bush's global climate change policy proposed to address what many perceived as the most significant global environmental threat with only further study and a voluntary incentives program for industry. He invited us to assume with him that protection would follow from affluence.

But the differences between Clinton and Bush are relatively subtle. What is perhaps linguistically most significant about Bush's speech is that it avoided what one might view, based on the elder Bush's experience, as the rhetorical trap of 'tough choices.' Bush's

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122. Remarks Announcing the Clear Skies and Global Climate Change Initiative in Silver Spring, Maryland, 38 WEEKLY COMP. PRES. DOC. 292-36 (Feb. 14, 2002).
123. Id. at 293.
124. Id.
125. Id. at 296.
speech mentioned that the Kyoto Protocol would have cost $400 billion and 4.9 million jobs. 126 Yet Bush did not urge us to favor his voluntary approach to global climate change because it is more important to save money and jobs than it is to protect the environment; he argued instead that it would be unnecessary and environmentally counterproductive to incur these costs. He simply extended the rhetorical logic of ‘we can have it all’ to argue that we must first have more. He has learned from his father’s mistakes and has continued to embrace the ‘we can have it all’ concept as his presidency matured. 127

‘We can have it all’ is an attractive theme for presidents because it allows them to declare a win-win on environmental issues. No interest has to suffer, and therefore no constituency need be disappointed. The theme also has roots in the way the public actually thinks or wants to think, about the environment. Polls taken over the years since the first Earth Day consistently show that more Americans believe that we should be prepared to sacrifice economic growth for the environment than that we should sacrifice environmental quality for growth. 128 These polls also show, however, that most Americans believe that we can have both environmental quality and economic growth without sacrificing one or the other. 129 Moreover, this majority has grown in the last decade, with recent polls showing more than 80% of respondents in agreement with this view. 130 Thus, on the whole, Americans prefer to consider

126. Id. at 235.
127. E.g., Remarks in Redmond, Oregon, supra note 62, at 1092 (“[T]here’s too much confrontation when it comes to environmental policy. There’s too much zero-sum thinking.”); Remarks at Ice Harbor Lock and Dam in Burbank, Washington, supra note 62, at 1095 (citing increased salmon runs in the Columbia River as proof that “we can have good clean hydroelectric power and salmon restoration going on at the same time”); Remarks at the Detroit Edison Monroe Power Plant in Monroe, Michigan, 39 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 1222 (Sept. 15, 2003) (“That [data on air quality improvements and economic growth] should say to people that we can grow our economy, that we can work to create the conditions for job growth, and that we can be good stewards of the air that we breathe.”).
128. Ladd & Bowman, supra note 34, at 26-27.
129. Id. at 9.
130. Telephone poll of 1200 registered voters by Tarrance Group, Inc., for League of Conservation Voters (Nov. 19, 2000) (on file with authors) (85% of those polled agreed that “[w]e can have a clean environment and a strong economy at the same time without having to choose one over the other”; 14% agreed that “sometimes a clean environment and a strong economy are in conflict and we must choose one over the other.”); Telephone poll of 1000 subjects by Rasmussen Research (Apr. 23, 1999) (on file with authors) (83% answered yes to the question: “Is it possible to have both a growing economy and a healthy environment?”).
environmental issues from a perspective of amplitude, i.e., Bush’s assurance that the world is not “zero-sum,” rather than one of scarcity. In elevating this theme in their rhetoric, presidents may merely be pandering to the views of the public. Or worse, they may be using the rhetoric to mask policy choices with serious consequences, either to our economic well-being or to the environment. Arguably, this was precisely what occurred, for example, in Clinton’s addresses to the Forest Conference or George W. Bush’s speech on global climate change. But one can only view this rhetoric as an attempt to capture and further public aspiration that shapes expectations and motivates behavior in beneficial ways. From this perspective, the rhetoric contributes to a strain of buoyancy and optimism in American culture. In any event, we seem to demand optimism of our presidents. Roderick Hart has characterized “the president as the country’s first cheerleader.”

C. Technology and Markets: Marginalizing the Ecocentrists

In 1970, as Nixon was taking the first steps to develop a language adequate to address the environmental “awakening,” he remarked that we had “become victims of our own technological genius.” At that moment, Nixon seemed poised to condemn modern technology and the industrial economy that it had served so well. But in the next breath, he claimed, “the same energy and skill that gave rise to these problems can also be marshaled for the purpose of conquering them”: technology would save us from its own depredations. As we have seen, Nixon sounded the same theme at other times during his administration. Similarly, rather than disavowing the market economy that had produced intolerable levels of pollution and swallowed open space, he talked about restructuring economic incentives to put the market to work for environmental ends. Nixon’s successors have followed his

131. See earlier discussion in this section.
132. Roderick P. Hart, Verbal Style and the Presidency 34 (1984) (computerized studies of presidential speech showing “that the president’s Optimism scores were significantly higher than those of all other speakers”).
133. Statement Announcing the Creation of the Environmental Quality Council and the Citizens’ Advisory Committee on Environmental Quality, supra note 82, at 423.
134. See supra Part IV.B.2.
135. E.g., Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, supra note 28, at 13 (stating that protecting air and water resources “requires that, to the extent possible, the price of goods should be made to include the costs of producing and disposing of them without damage to the environment”); Special Message to the Congress Proposing the 1971 Environmental Program, supra note 89, at 134 (“In addition, we must begin to
rhetorical lead. In presidential rhetoric, industrial technology and the market economy do not contradict environmentalism; they are essential to its success.

This conviction serves to distinguish sharply mainstream environmentalism, as interpreted by our presidents, from stronger versions of environmentalism, which we have characterized generally as ecocentrism in Part III.C. Ecocentrists have argued for a societal transformation that would limit the deployment of environment-altering technologies and reduce consumption. Such transformational rhetoric is absent from the presidential lexicon. In the months following the first Earth Day, Nixon indulged in dire images of the seriousness and urgency of environmental deterioration. But there was never any doubt about his commitment to existing political and economic institutions or his confidence that, with proper management, those institutions could produce the desired results. In a 1970 speech at the Dedication of the Ocean Science Center of the Atlantic Commission, Nixon considered the alternative:

There are those who, of course, would suggest that [pollution] makes progress bad, that what we should do is go back to the time when we didn’t have any factories, when we didn’t have any automobiles, when we didn’t have any roads, because if we didn’t, then you would have clean air and clean water, and wouldn’t life be wonderful!

But this was only a setup. For Nixon, the answer was immediate, certain, and definitive: “[I]t wouldn’t be [wonderful] at all.” So much for the deep ecologists and other ecocentric critics of the technological age. This early rhetorical move rejecting the call to undo industrial progress in the interest of the environment remains unchallenged in presidential discourse.

Nixon’s declaration is a pointed endorsement of the idea of progress that has characterized American political thought since at

136. See supra Part IV.B.2.
137. See supra Part III.C.
138. E.g., Special Message to the Congress Proposing the 1971 Environmental Program, supra note 89, at 142 (the “plunder of America’s natural heritage”); Special Message to the Congress on the Administration’s Legislative Program, 1970 PUB. PAPERS 735 (Sept. 11, 1970) (the need for “prompt and vigorous action . . . if our lives and those of our children are not to be blighted”).
139. Remarks at the Dedication of the Site of the Ocean Science Center of the Atlantic Commission, Skidaway Island, Georgia, supra note 97, at 833.
140. Id. at 833.
least the nineteenth century—"the idea of steady improvement in the overall conditions of life stemming . . . from the expansion of scientific and technological knowledge."\textsuperscript{141} Nixon spoke of technological and economic progress—progress exemplified by "factories," "automobiles," and "roads"—the very kind of progress resisted by deep ecologists and other ecocentrists seeking to defend nature against human degradation. As we have noted, Nixon went on to argue here that because our technological and economic prowess will also help us improve the environment, we can expect progress to encompass environmental quality of life. Thus, Nixon's vision incorporates environmentalism into a broader utilitarian progressivism. This progressivist notion continues to dominate presidential rhetoric on the environment.\textsuperscript{142}

There is a final related sense in which presidential discourse on the environment has rejected, in large part, the urgings of the more radical environmentalist critiques. Deep ecologists and other ecocentrists hold that the natural world is entitled to moral consideration in its own right; they value the natural world for itself and not merely for its utility to humans.\textsuperscript{143} Presidential discourse on the environment, however, is framed predominantly in anthropocentric terms: the environment is important because we want what it offers us, not because it has some intrinsic value apart from our use and benefit.\textsuperscript{144} Although presidents have sometimes advanced the notion that nature has moral claims of its own, as we explore in Part IV.E, these references occupy a relatively narrow niche in the discourse.

\textsuperscript{141} Marx, \textit{ supra} note 78, at 530.

\textsuperscript{142} See Paehlke, \textit{ supra} note 77, at 212; Leo Marx, \textit{The Domination of Nature and the Redefinition of Progress, in Progress: Fact or Illusion} 201 (Leo Marx & Bruce Mazlish eds., 1998); Richard White, \textit{The Nature of Progress: Progress and the Environment, in Progress: Fact or Illusion}, \textit{id.}, at 121.


\textsuperscript{144} See also \textit{infra} Part IV.D.1.
D. **Stewardship—Dressing and Keeping the Garden**

1. **Similarities in expression.**

   All seven presidents of the modern environmental era have spoken often of our duty to protect the environment for future generations; the prevalence of this theme suggests that it is at the core of our shared environmental values. In his 1970 State of the Union speech, Nixon sounded an early rendition of this theme: "Clean air, clean water, open spaces—these should once again be the birthright of every American."\(^{145}\) In 1973, at the signing of the United Nations Environment Program Participation Act, he expanded on this theme: "We hold the Earth—its environment and its resources—in trust for future generations. We must not violate that trust, nor our obligation to the future, by permitting the increasing degradation of the environment."\(^{146}\) Ford likewise referred to the "ecological concept of man as a caretaker of limited resources" and vowed to "pass on to future Americans the magnificent legacy of nature."\(^{147}\)

   All presidents since Ford have quoted Roosevelt on our duties as environmental stewards,\(^{148}\) while elaborating further on the theme themselves. Indeed, presidents as ideologically diverse as Carter, Reagan, Clinton, and George W. Bush have all invoked exactly the same words from Roosevelt: "The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired in value."\(^{149}\)

   Among recent presidents, the use of "steward" and "stewardship" to convey our environmental caretaking obligations has become almost automatic.\(^{150}\) Often presidents draw an explicit connection between "stewardship" and obligations to future generations.\(^{151}\) Even when they do not, the notion of a generation-span-
ning trust is implicit.

Presidents frequently characterize stewardship as a "moral" duty owed to future generations. They also sometimes speak of stewardship as a matter of "justice" among generations of humans. In Roosevelt's much-quoted rendition, stewardship takes the coloration of a national virtue—we are a good people, or we "behave well," to the extent that we embody it. With their focus on the welfare of children, grandchildren, and human generations yet

on natural processes and sensitive management of renewable resources. We are charged with the stewardship of an irreplaceable environment."; Reagan, Remarks on Signing the Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality, supra note 86, at 1031 (associating "stewardship" with Teddy Roosevelt's charge to leave natural resources for "the next generation increased and not impaired in value"); Radio Address to the Nation on Environmental Issues, 1984 PUB. PAPERS 1046 (July 14, 1984) ("We believe very strongly in the idea of stewardship, caring for the resources we have so they can be shared and used productively for generations to come."); George H.W. Bush, Remarks to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 1990 PUB. PAPERS 158 (Feb. 5, 1990) ("I spoke of stewardship because I believe it's something we owe ourselves, our children, and their children."); Remarks at the Opening Session of the White House Conference on Science and Economics Research Related to Global Change, 1990 PUB. PAPERS 512 (Apr. 17, 1990) ("Success requires a sense of global stewardship, an understanding that it is the Earth that endures and that all of us are no more than tenants in temporary possession of a sacred trust."); Clinton, Remarks on the 25th Observance of Earth Day in Havre de Grace, Maryland, supra note 65, at 566 ("Stewardship of our land is a major part of the stewardship of the American dream since the dream grew out of this very soil. . . . This continent is our home, and we must preserve it for our children, their children and all generations beyond."); The President's Radio Address, 2000-01 PUB. PAPERS 760 (Apr. 22, 2000) ("This Earth Day, let us remember that we are only stewards, in our time, of the Earth God gave us for all time. And let us strengthen our resolve to preserve the beauty and the natural bounty that sustains us and must sustain generations yet to come."); George W. Bush, Remarks at Everglades National Park, Florida, supra note 61, at 608 ("Our job here is to be good stewards of the Everglades. . . . Lost, if we are careless, are the sparrows and wading birds, panthers and bears who live here, and the chance for future generations to see these creatures in the place that nature gave them."); The President's Radio Address, supra note 62, at 1077 ("Our system of national parks and forests is a trust given to every generation of Americans. By practicing good management and being faithful stewards of the land, our generation can show that we're worthy of that trust.").

152. George H.W. Bush, Remarks to Members of Ducks Unlimited, supra note 86, at 693 ("[T]he environment is a moral issue. For it is wrong to pass on to future generations a world tainted by present thoughtlessness."); Clinton, Message to the Congress on Environmental Policy, 1995 PUB. PAPERS 472 (Apr. 6, 1995) ("We have a moral obligation to represent the interests of those who have no voice in today's decisions—our children and grandchildren."); George W. Bush, Remarks at Sequoia National Park, 2001 PUB. PAPERS 599 (May 30, 2001) ("Good stewardship of the environment is not just a personal responsibility: it is a public value.").

153. George H.W. Bush, Remarks to Members of Ducks Unlimited, supra note 86, at 693 ("It is unjust to allow the natural splendor bestowed to us to be compromised.").

154. See Jennifer Welchman, The Virtues of Stewardship, 21 ENVTL. ETHICS 411, 414 (1999) (discussing "loyalty" and "benevolence" as "traditionally virtuous dispositions that seem central to the character of stewards").
unborn, all of these understandings of stewardship are anthropocentric.

Stewardship also has a strong religious tenor.\textsuperscript{155} Presidents talk about the earth as given to man by God in trust for future generations.\textsuperscript{156} Thus, stewardship takes on the quality of a "sacred trust" or "sacred obligation."\textsuperscript{157} As Reagan put it, to "give the American land to our children, not impaired, but enhanced" will "honor the great and loving God who gave us this land in the first place."\textsuperscript{158} This rationale, too, is anthropocentric in that it posits nature as a gift to humans for our use and enjoyment.\textsuperscript{159}

In their anthropological study of environmental values, Kempston, Booster, and Hartley found that the "emotionally strongest of [the] anthropocentric values was a concern for one's descendents."\textsuperscript{160} They identified "a value given to future generations in general, and to one's descendents in particular, as one of Americans' most widely and strongly held points of reference for environmental values."\textsuperscript{161} This conclusion was born out by their survey results,\textsuperscript{162} and it is fully confirmed by the presidential emphasis on stewardship and the crucial importance of "our children

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\item 155. Historically, "steward" was used primarily to characterize obligations to the church, not to nature. The classic early identification of stewardship with caring for the earth was presented by a seventeenth-century English jurist, Matthew Hale, who wrote that "[t]he end of man's creation . . . was, that he should be the viceroy of the great God of heaven and earth in this inferior world; his steward, \textit{villicus} [farm-manager], bailiff or farmer of this goodly farm of the lower world." \textit{John Passmore, Man's Responsibility for Nature} 30 (1974) (quoting \textit{Matthew Hale, The Primitive Origion of Mankind} 370 (1677)). It is in this sense, with religious overtones still clinging to it, that "steward" became part of the modern environmental discourse. Its lingering religious connotations may well explain its prevalence in presidential speech over more secular alternatives such as "trustee" or "caretaker."
\item 157. George H.W. Bush, Remarks to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, \textit{supra} note 151, at 160 ("We bear a sacred trust in our tenancy here and a covenant with those most precious to us—our children and theirs."); Clinton, The President's Radio Address, \textit{supra} note 39, at 1719 ("Because we believe that what God created we must not destroy, each of us has a sacred obligation to pass on a clean planet to future generations.").
\item 158. Remarks to the National Campers and Hikers Association in Bowling Green, Kentucky, \textit{supra} note 100, at 1038.
\item 159. Later in the Article we explore other constructions of God and nature in presidential speech. \textit{See infra} Part IV.E.
\item 160. KEMPTON ET AL., \textit{supra} note 37, at 95.
\item 161. \textit{Id.} at 99.
\item 162. \textit{Id.} For example, overwhelming majorities in each of the five diverse groups that
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and grandchildren” and the more abstract “future generations.” The unanimity among presidents on the general duty of stewardship, however, obscures a diversity of views on questions of interpretation. What parts of the environment are important to preserve or protect for the benefit of future generations? What kinds and levels of present use are consistent with our stewardship obligation? Where does the obligation properly reside—with individuals or with government?

2. Differences in interpretation.

Presidents have offered a range of articulations to define, more precisely, the nature and extent of our obligations as “stewards.” The articulations vary with the ideological predilections and political circumstances of the speakers. In this, the variations on “stewardship” may be more revealing than the similarities.

In the first flush of the modern environmental era, Nixon invoked the myth of the Garden of Eden to dramatize the failure of environmental stewardship:

The first man created on earth according to the ancient Scriptures, was placed by his creator in a huge natural garden and charged “to dress it and to keep it.” In the ages since, men have worked energetically at dressing and improving God’s good earth—but their efforts at keeping and preserving it have been scant. ¹⁶³

This image, which appears in a 1971 written transmittal of wilderness proposals to Congress, has potentially ominous implications. It assumes a kind of prelapsarian state; we remain, it appears, in the “huge natural garden” in which we were placed by our “creator.” But by our failure to heed God’s commandment to “keep” as well as “dress” the garden, we have threatened our Eden and risk losing it altogether. ¹⁶⁴ The sentence that follows conveys an air of desperation: “Now, all around the world, people are awakening to

¹⁶³. Statement on Transmitting to the Congress Proposals to Establish New National Wilderness Areas, 1971 PUB. PAPERS 587-88 (Apr. 28, 1971); cf. Leroy G. Dorsey, Preaching Conservation: Theodore Roosevelt and the Rhetoric of Civil Religion, in Symbolic Transformations of the Material World, supra note 1, at 34, 44 (noting Teddy Roosevelt’s similar descriptions of the environment as Eden-like, “a God-given paradise”). Nixon’s statement quotes Muir: “The whole continent was a garden, and from the beginning it seemed to be favored above all the other wild parks and gardens of the globe.” Id.

¹⁶⁴. See Gallicott, supra note 143, at 302 (“In Genesis there is even the tantalizing suggestion that man’s original sin was environmental, not sexual as usually supposed.”).
the urgent need of protecting the fragile life-balance and of setting aside for the future such wildness and natural beauty as still remains to us.”165 The “awakening” Nixon envisions is sudden and universal, as if from a common sleep, and the “urgent need” that confronts us is nothing less than the survival of “the fragile life-balance” itself. The garden image appeared again in Nixon’s 1972 wilderness transmittal to Congress, along with a reference to the commandment that humans “dress it and keep it.”166 By this point, however, the Nixon White House had significantly softened its tone on environmental issues. There was now no suggestion of failure to keep God’s commandment, no rude awakening, or ill foreboding. The statement simply concluded that “[t]he addition of these new [wilderness] areas will help to keep” the garden beautiful.167

Reagan also used the garden image in connection with stewardship, but consistent with his more overtly conservative ideology, the implications he drew from it were hospitable to human use. In his 1984 speech to the National Geographic Society, even as he attempted to shore up his credibility as a leader on environmental issues after the Gorsuch and Watt firings, he made clear that “[w]e want, as men on Earth, to use our resources for the reason that God gave them to us—for the betterment of man.”168 Reagan’s expression of the anthropocentric view of God’s design for the world was direct and unapologetic. He was committed to stewardship— “[w]hat is a conservative after all but one who conserves”—but adamantly rejected those “who use the conservation movement as an excuse for blind and ignorant attacks on the entrepreneurs who help the economy grow.”169

As Reagan later emphasized in a story repeated at least twice during his presidency, God’s gift of “the garden” is of little benefit without human action. In a 1986 radio address on economic growth, Reagan told this story:

[A fellow who [sic] took some land down by a creek bottom all covered with brush and rocks. And he cleared the brush, and he

165. Statement on Transmitting to the Congress Proposals to Establish New National Wilderness Areas, supra note 163, at 588.
167. Id.
168. Remarks at Dedication Ceremonies for the New Building of the National Geographic Society, supra note 39, at 875.
169. Id. at 874-75.
hauling the rocks away. And then he started cultivating, and he planted. And finally he had a beautiful garden. He was so proud that one Sunday after the church service he asked the minister if he wouldn’t come see what he’d done. So, the minister came by. And when he saw the corn . . . , he said he’d never seen any corn so tall and the Lord had really blessed this land. And then he looked at some melons, and he said he’d never seen any as big as that and thank the Lord for that. And he went on praising the Lord for everything else. The farmer was getting a little fidgety. Finally, he interrupted and said, “Reverend, I wish you could have seen this place when the Lord was doing it all by himself.”

This homely tale puts environmental stewardship into Reagan’s perspective. By detailing all the steps in creating the garden, Reagan solidifies the sense that the farmer—and not God—is really doing the work here, that it is hard work, and that the land would have no particular value without it. Reagan offers the farmer as a particularly sympathetic surrogate for all economically beneficial use of natural resources. Thus, the story perfectly completes the idea behind the sentence that Reagan used to introduce it: “You know, some people say it’s America’s natural resources that make our country so great, but the greatest resource of all is our working men and women—their skill, hard work, guts, and determination.” In a written statement on United Nations World Environment Day, Reagan offered a conceptual framework to complement his farmer story, explaining that the operation of the free market will ensure that natural resources are appropriately conserved and that “wise stewardship” will be realized, and that “personal initiative,” “individual creativity,” and “social justice” are the “main sources of progress in the world.” Reagan’s rhetoric effectively collapsed environmental stewardship into economic stewardship.

Clinton’s use of environmental stewardship, by contrast, was mainly offensive. Unlike Reagan, he had no ideological objective to narrow the scope of stewardship, and unlike Bush, economic con-


171. Id. Reagan used the story at least once again but in a different context. See Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Take Pride in America Awards, 1987 PUB. PAPERS 853 (July 21, 1987). The relevance of the story in this context was not entirely clear. Reagan acknowledged: “Unlike the farmer in the story, more often than not, those we honor today are protecting our land from some of mankind’s more wasteful and destructive ways.” Here the idea seemed to be that stewardship has a protective as well as a developmental dimension.

ditions provided no necessity for him to do so. Instead, he used stewardship, as well as other environmental themes, to punish his Republican adversaries for their environmental proposals. In his April 1995 speech declaring war on the “rollback” proposals of the Republican-controlled Congress, Clinton said, “The beauty you see is God-given, but it was defended and rescued by human beings. . . . [T]he bay is coming back because people overcame all that divided them to save their common heritage.” Clinton’s message is virtually the mirror image of Reagan’s during his 1986 radio address. Here the value of nature is God-given, not man-created; the human challenge is taking collective action to prevent its abuse. In later speeches, Clinton made this preventive stewardship mission personal to himself as he faced off against congressional leaders. In his November 1995 radio address, he stated, “Because we believe that what God created, we must not destroy, each of us has a sacred obligation to pass on a clean planet to future generations. . . . As President, it is my duty to protect our environment, and on my watch, America will not be for sale.” He casts himself as “steward-in-chief,” alert to efforts by his political adversaries to undermine the sacred trust. Clinton continued to advance this image of himself, broadening it to include the Vice-President as co-steward, through the end of his Administration.

Pronounced rhetorical differences between the presidents arise on the question of where the stewardship responsibility properly resides. Most, if not all, acknowledge that stewardship is a personal obligation as well as a function of government, but the emphasis varies. To illustrate the range of expression on the issue: Carter stressed, “stewardship of the environment on behalf of all Americans is a prime responsibility of government”; while Reagan stated that stewardship was “primarily the responsibility of the indi-

173. Remarks on the 25th Observance of Earth Day in Havre de Grace, Maryland, supra note 65, at 563.
174. The President’s Radio Address, supra note 39, at 1719-20.
175. Remarks at the American Heritage Rivers Designation Signing Ceremony in Ashe County, North Carolina, 1998 PUB. PAPERS 1373 (July 30, 1998) (“[F]or 5 ½ years the Vice President and I have worked hard to honor one of our Nation’s oldest, most enduring values, to preserve for future generations the Earth God gave us.”); Remarks on Signing Proclamation Establishing the Giant Sequoia National Monument in Sequoia National Forest, California, supra note 33, at 721 (expressing profound gratitude “for the opportunities that Vice President Gore and I have had over the last 7 years and a few months to act as stewards of our environment”).
176. The Environment, Message to Congress, supra note 51, at 967.
vidual landowner.”

Similar striking contrasts appear in competing personal narratives of Clinton and George W. Bush. Presidents in the modern era have increasingly relied on stories about themselves to project admirable traits and give emotional and imaginative resonance to their themes. Over the course of his presidency, Clinton developed a story about his boyhood that featured the importance of public lands and the public employees who manage them in protecting our natural heritage. This story first appeared in a 1996 speech in Hackensack, New Jersey: “I was lucky enough to grow up in a national park surrounded by three lakes. I was never, I don’t suppose in my whole childhood, more than 10 minutes away from the mountains and the woods and the creeks that became all too easy for me to take for granted.” In a 1996 Earth Day speech, he extolled again his good fortune in being raised in a national park. This narrative strain reached its culmination in a speech commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Department of Interior. Clinton mentioned again his childhood in Hot Springs National Park and then concluded his speech as follows:

Let me say in closing one very personal thing. As I have already explained, I am as deeply indebted to the work of the Department of the Interior as any President could possibly be—to the visionaries like John Wesley Powell and Harold Ickes and Rachel Carson, to the park rangers that I’ve seen in Yellowstone and Grand Teton and other parks, to the people that were kind to me as a boy when I roamed the trails and the mountains of the national park which was my home.

At one level, this story worked to strengthen Clinton’s environmentalist image, as one who grew up close to nature, “roam[ing] the trails and the mountains” in a kind of pastoral state of grace and, innocent of the threats posed to it by the world outside, taking this uncorrupted state “for granted.” Establishing his environmental credentials was essential to counter early perceptions that Clinton did not have a personal feel or political sensitivity for

177. Written Policy Statement on Soil and Water Conservation Programs, 1982 PUB. PAPERS 1629 (Dec. 21, 1982).
181. Id. at 311.
environmental issues, and to sustain his rhetorical assault on Republican policies in the wake of the Contract with America. But the story also conveys an idealized image of the governmental “stewards” of our public lands, along with warm personal feeling for them.182

George W. Bush has also complemented the work of park rangers and other public conservation employees and acknowledged the governmental stewardship role.183 But in his personal narrative, which implicitly competes with Clinton’s, he showcases the virtues of private stewardship. Bush’s narrative takes place on his ranch in Crawford, Texas, and plays out as he leads tours of the ranch for reporters, describing his feelings for the land and his work in caring for it. For example, on September 3, 2001, Bush talked to reporters as he cleared brush to open access to scenic cliffs and canyons on the ranch and then drove them around the property.184 He used the exchange to showcase his knowledge of the land—its topography, its trees, the nesting habits of birds, places where wildflowers will bloom in the spring—and his appreciation of the “natural beauty of the place.”185 “I fell in love with [the ranch] the minute I saw it. . . . [Y]ou learn to fall in love with trees.”186 “I love the nature.”187 “In the evenings—you’ll see some cliffs over here that really are—I think are really special.”188 His knowledge of the trees particularly impressed his audience:

[The President.] And we’ve got a beautiful bur oak stand in here. That’s a bur oak, these great big oaks. And we discovered what’s a pretty rare tree, this tree right there, is a chinquapin oak, which is mainly found in the Houston area.

[The President.] . . . See the size of these cedar elms here? They are magnificent trees.

182. See also Remarks at George Washington National Forest, Virginia, 1999 Pub. Papers 1762-63 (Oct. 13, 1999) (“This kind of [forest] land has been important to me since I was a boy, where I learned by walking the Ozark and Quachita National Forests of my home state that national forests are more than a source of timber, they are places of renewal of the human spirit and our natural environment.”).

183. E.g., Remarks at Everglades National Park, Florida, supra note 61, at 845 (“Our job here is to be good stewards of the Everglades.”); Remarks at the President’s Environmental Youth Awards Ceremony, 38 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 651 (Apr. 18, 2002) (“Stewardship is the calling of Government, and it is the calling of every citizen.”).


185. Id. at 1224.

186. Id. at 1225-26.

187. Id. at 1228.

188. Id. at 1232-33.
[Reporter.] Quite the arborist —

The President. I am. Tree man.189

Bush is clearly comfortable in this milieu and uses action and setting as well as words to get out his message. First, he uses the ranch tour, as Clinton sought to use his childhood connection to the Arkansas hills, to display his personal environmental credentials. He invites us to see him as someone who understands the land and cares about it. As his approval ratings slid in the wake of his controversial decisions to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol on global climate change and to suspend the Clinton’s administrations regulation on arsenic in drinking water, Bush was anxious to depict himself as sensitive to the environment in ways with which most Americans would identify. In the ranch tour, this took on an almost Druidical cast, as he jokingly characterized himself as “Tree man”—a self-characterization that also echoes his father’s declared love of trees and plays on his surname.190

But the ranch tour went beyond the simple enhancement of the president’s environmentalist image. Through his actions as well as his words, Bush exemplified the notion that stewardship begins with the individual landowner. Earlier that year at an environmental awards ceremony, he had extolled the role of “private citizens who understand that each have a duty to be good stewards of the land and life around us.”191 He mentioned then that he and his wife were “fortunate enough to own a ranch in central Texas. I like to remind everybody that if you own your own land, every day is Earth Day.”192 In Bush’s view, landowners are the real stewards, the people who must be depended upon to love and care for their land “every day.” Bush repeated this refrain in remarks to a meeting of cattlemen in Denver, a particularly sympathetic audience for this message: “Let me tell you exactly what I think about the land and how best to manage it. Every day is Earth Day for people who rely upon the land to make a living.”193 Echoing Reagan, he went

189. Id. at 1233-34.
190. See Remarks at White House Tree-Planting Ceremony, supra note 87, at 403 (“Trees are an inheritance precious to our cathedral of the outdoors.”).
191. Remarks to the Environmental Youth Award Winners, 2001 Pub. Papers 447 (Apr. 24, 2001); see also Remarks on Signing the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act in Conshohoken, Pennsylvania, 38 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 53 (Jan. 11, 2002) (“All of us have a responsibility to be the stewards of our land.”).
192. Remarks to the Environmental Youth Award Winners, supra note 191, at 447.
193. Remarks by the President to the Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show in Denver, Colorado, 38 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 201 (Feb. 8, 2002).
on to say that "[t]he best conservation practices happen because somebody realizes that it's in their benefit, their own economic interest, to practice good conservation in order to raise cows, for example." 194 Indeed, as he later asserted in a speech defending his administration's relaxation of Clean Air Act rules for large coal-burning power plants, government interference may actually impede good stewardship.195

A final message that flows from Bush's ranch tours is that stewardship is not only, and perhaps not even primarily, passive appreciation, e.g., "roaming the hills" as in Clinton's childhood idyll; it is also, and perhaps most importantly, the hard work of improving and maintaining the land. Although on his ranch tour he talked appreciatively about the trees, birds, and animals on the land, the image that he left was most prominently that of man actively making the land better, cutting down new growth cedar trees to conserve water for other species. He recreated this image in his Denver speech to the cattlemen.196 He has extended it into the stewardship of public as well as private lands. For example, news photos in 2002 showed him wielding a saw in Estes Park,197 and he began a recent speech at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area with the comment, "If it looks like I'm kind of sweaty, it's because I am. [Laughter.] I've been shoveling dirt to make sure the trails are maintained so people can use them."198 Parks, he made clear, also need improvement: "God designed this park's beauty, but men and women make sure it remains beautiful" and accessible.199 In advancing his Healthy Forest Initiative, Bush has argued in a similar vein that the national forests need active management in order to

194. Id.

195. Remarks at the Detroit Edison Monroe Power Plant in Monroe, Michigan, supra note 127, at 1221 ("The old regulations on the book [sic] made it difficult to either protect the economy or—protect the environment or grow the economy.").

196. Remarks by the President to the Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show in Denver, Colorado, supra note 193, at 201 ("I like to cut down . . . the new growth cedar, because the new-growth cedar sucks out a lot of water from the . . . beautiful hardwoods that we have. . . . It enhances the beauty and the value of the land if you can get rid of the new-growth cedar.").


198. Remarks at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in Thousand Oaks, California, supra note 62, at 1069.

199. Id. at 1070. This is an ironic twist on Clinton's 1995 Earth Day declaration: "The beauty you see is God-given, but it was defended and rescued by human beings." See supra note 65.
not “let the forests fall apart,” or be “scarred by nature” through forest fires.

With obligatory nods to Teddy Roosevelt, George W. Bush has followed his predecessors in acknowledging that some natural wonders, like the giant sequoias, cannot be improved: “Our duty is to use the land well and, sometimes, not to use it at all.” But on stewardship for every day use, Bush is the rhetorical protégé of Reagan. Indeed, it is as if in his ranch-owner persona, he has stepped into Reagan’s story about the hard-working farmer in the creek bottom, scripting himself as the good steward.

E. Value of Nature Beyond Human Use and Enjoyment

The self-described enterprise of prominent “environmental ethicists” has been to usher us into a moral universe in which the natural world is valued for itself and not simply for the use and enjoyment it provides human beings. We might come to such a result by numerous intellectual paths. Many of them are through God; other routes are secular, positing the “rights” or “moral considerability” of beings and things in nature. Presidents have reflected both kinds of claims in their rhetoric, and we explore them here.

1. The spiritual connection.

American presidents universally embrace the notion that God created the natural world, but as we have seen, they often construe divine creation as a gift to us and to future generations of humans

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200. Remarks on a Trail Tour and an Exchange with Reporters in Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado, 37 WEEKLY COMP. PRES. DOC. 1160 (Aug. 14, 2001); see also Remarks at a Reception for Senator Gordon Smith in Portland, Oregon, 38 WEEKLY COMP. PRES. DOC. 1407 (Aug. 22, 2002) (“Why don’t we use our God-given talents and our technology to manage the forests, so that the forests are healthy for generations to come?”); Remarks on the Healthy Forests Initiative in Ruch, Oregon, 38 WEEKLY COMP. PRES. DOC. 1397 (Aug. 22, 2002) (“Actively managing forests is going to be the centerpiece of this administration.”).


202. Remarks at Sequoia National Park, California, supra note 60, at 831.

203. See generally Callicott, supra note 143, at 299 (“[T]he most important task for environmental ethics is the development of a non-anthropocentric value theory.”); Holmes Rolston, III, Is There an Environmental Ethic?, 85 ETHICS 93, 103-05 (1975) (arguing for an “ecological morality” extending ethical consideration to “the ecosystem”); Richard Routley, Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?, in PROCEEDINGS OF THE XVTH WORLD CONGRESS OF PHILOSOPHY 205 (1975).
for our collective use and benefit. Although this view does not give the present generation of humans leave to rule as despot over the natural world, its orientation is thoroughly anthropocentric. In his classic 1967 essay, after branding Western Christianity as the “most anthropocentric religion the world has seen,” Lynn White suggested an alternative. Following the example of St. Francis, we might conceive that God created the natural world not for us, but for his or her own glorification and delight, and thus that world is of value apart from whatever use or pleasure it may offer us. Contemplation of the natural world, as “known and loved” by its creator, might also be seen as offering a form of communion with God. The presidential lexicon includes these views, but presidents have expressed them in ways that limit their scope.

Presidents have regularly attached words such as “awe,” “majesty,” “serenity,” “humility,” “solitude,” “refreshment for the spirit,” and “harmony of the universe” to the experience of wilderness or unique natural settings. All of these words have reverential overtones. Although they are often associated with a powerful sense of the “beauty” of nature, they lead beyond a purely aesthetic response to suggest a spiritual experience of the divine in, and through, nature.

Recent presidents have followed a pattern of speaking of places of special significance in overtly religious terms. Quoting Teddy Roosevelt, for example, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton have all described the giant sequoia and redwood groves as “cathedrals.” Cathedrals bring to mind the beauty of the trees,

204. See supra Part IV.D.
205. Lynn White, Jr., The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis, 155 Sci. 1202,1205 (Mar. 10, 1967).
206. See Jay McDaniel, Christian Spirituality as Openness to Fellow Creatures, 8 ENVTL. ETHICS 33, 43-46 (1986).
207. George W. Bush, Remarks at Sequoia National Park, California, supra note 60, at 831.
210. Id.
211. See Marx, supra note 78, at 324-25 (“[T]here are good reasons for thinking that in a secularizing era like our own, some part of that ostensibly aesthetic attachment to ‘nature’...is an expression of repressed, sublimated, or somehow redirected religious feelings.”).
212. Reagan, Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Take Pride in America Awards, supra note 87, at 983; George H.W. Bush, Remarks at White House Tree-Planting Ceremony, supra note 87, at 402; Clinton, Remarks on the 150th Anniversary of the Depart-
and the aesthetic pleasure they give, but the word suggests much more. Cathedrals are holy places, places where one is in God’s presence and the tone is worshipful. Speaking in Sequoia National Park, George W. Bush extended this rhetorical idea, capturing the holy hush of the cathedral without specifically using the term: “This place leaves each of us with a feeling of incredible humility. . . . In our daily lives we’re surrounded by things of our own making. . . . But come here and you’re reminded of a design that is not your own. Here we find a grandeur beyond our power to equal.”

In his 1984 remarks on the signing of wilderness bills, Reagan offered a similar view of wilderness: “And because of this legislation, these wilderness areas will remain just as they are, places of beauty and serenity for hikers, campers and fishermen. . . . [A]s Americans wander through these forests, climb these mountains, they will sense the love and majesty of the Creator of all of that.” Reagan said this in the same year as he addressed the National Geographic Society, extolling use of natural resources “for the betterment of man,” but here the tone and content were markedly different: it is important to protect these places, he implied, not only because they are useful or pleasing to us but also because they bring us to awareness of God’s glory.

In 1998, Clinton’s use of “sacred places” to describe the Head-
waters Forest in California and other sites he proposed for public acquisition conveyed a similar sense of nature’s holiness. In proposing a Lands Legacy Initiative, he expanded the concept to include not only “our grandest natural wonders” but also “the small but sacred green and open spaces closer to home.” Clinton traded more provocatively on this sense of nature in his declaration to the League of Conservation Voters and elsewhere that during his tenure, “the sacred” will not be for sale. His cry echoed the outrage of preservationist Muir more than a century before as he inveighed against the “moneychangers . . . in the temple.” It moved beyond the “sacred obligation” to preserve what God has given us for future generations to an implicit assertion that the natural world is itself sacred and worthy of reverence.

Clinton personalized this sense of nature’s sacredness in an account of a childhood visit to the Grand Canyon, developing an image introduced by his predecessor, George H.W. Bush. In his 1991 remarks on the rim of the Grand Canyon, Bush quoted Dave Beal, a Park Service naturalist:

“Go out along the Canyon rim alone to watch dark shadows climb the colored walls as the sun drops to the horizon. Think about the eons of time represented by rock formations exposed to your view and the fossil record of life through the ages . . . And finally, dwell for just a moment on thoughts about yourself and the role you play on this Earth.” Real, philosophical, practical, wonderful words.

Although Beal’s image clearly energized him, Bush had trouble locating its significance. It was everything at once—“[r]eal, philosophic, practical, wonderful”—and therefore the point was lost. Clinton appropriated the descriptive power of this image, personalized it, and shaped it to convey his capacity to feel awe and reverence in the contemplation of God’s creation.

217. Remarks Announcing the Lands Legacy Initiative, supra note 87, at 34; cf. Remarks at the 150th Anniversary of the Department of Interior, supra note 180, at 309-10 (using same language).
218. Remarks at the League of Conservation Voters Dinner, supra note 118, at 1759; see also The President’s Radio Address, supra note 39, at 1720 (“[O]n my watch, America will not be for sale.”); The President’s Radio Address, 1995 PUB. PAPERS 1266 (Aug. 26, 1995) (criticizing those who want “to close the parks and sell them off to the highest bidder”).
This process began with his September 1996 announcement of the creation of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. At least in part because of the intense political opposition to the monument in its home state of Utah, the announcement took place on the rim of the Grand Canyon. Clinton took the opportunity to recall a trip he had made to the Canyon twenty-five years before. He had sat on a rock overlooking the Canyon at sunset and "watched the colors change layer after layer for two hours."\(^{221}\) This was a warm-up to his rendition of the episode in his 1999 remarks at the Department of Interior:

In one way or another, almost all of us have come to see nature as a precious but fragile gift and an important part of the fabric of our lives. . . . I remember once in 1971, when I was driving to California to visit Hillary—we had just started seeing each other—and I stopped at the Grand Canyon. And I crawled out on a ledge about an hour-and-a-half before sunset, and I just sat there for 2 hours, and I watched the sun set on Grand Canyon. . . . [B]ecause of the way the rocks are layered over millions of years, it's like a kaleidoscope. And the colors change over and over and over again, layer by layer by layer as the Sun goes down. It is a stunning, stunning thing to see the interplay of light and stone and realize how it happened over the ages. I never got over it. I think about it all the time, now, nearly 30 years later:

That kind of moment can't be captured in the words I have shared with you, or even photographed, because the important thing is the interaction of human nature with nature. But we've all felt it. And we all know that part of our essential humanity is paying respect to what God gave us and what will be here a long time after we're gone.\(^{222}\)

Clinton used this personal story to capture a mystery that cannot "be captured in words." His detailed account of the light in the Canyon conveyed his full absorption in what he was seeing. He was awestruck at the beauty and timelessness of the Canyon sunset, and he carried that experience, that "interaction of human nature with nature," vividly into the present. The inadequacy of photographs or words to convey it did not matter, because his audience knew what he was talking about—"we've all felt it." Thus, he connected his own experience to the experience of his listeners and the shared knowledge "that part of our essential humanity is paying


\(^{222}\) Remarks at the 150th Anniversary of the Department of Interior, supra note 180, at 311.
respect to what God gave us.” Here the idea of nature as a gift is associated not so much with human use and enjoyment as with an awed sense of nature’s grandeur and scope; nature extends beyond us in both space and time.223 Although lacking in traditional religious symbols, this narrative showed that Clinton understood what it means to connect at a spiritual level with the nature that “God gave us.”

Presidents have limited their nature-as-holy talk to unique or unusual natural landmarks—the Grand Canyon, the giant sequoia groves, the Everglades—and wilderness areas. In his lands legacy speech, Clinton did extend it to the “the small but sacred green and open spaces closer to home,”224 but that move appears to be an anomaly within the discourse. Thus, the nature-as-holy rhetoric is not offered to inform a general understanding of our relationship to nature—its spiritual overtones might be seen as incompatible with even a restrained use of natural resources.225 “Cathedrals,” “sacred places,” or “sanctuaries” are places set apart; they are special places that seem in our experience to evoke the presence of the divine. The images provide a rhetorical justification for leaving these places untouched, while not undermining the general proposition that earth is given to us for our use and benefit. Rhetorically, the presidents have adopted a kind of “separate facilities” solution: the “cathedral” or the “sacred place” for meditation, the rest of the world in which to work and live our daily lives.

2. Claims of nature.

Independent of theological justifications, ethicists and other environmentalists have called for recognition of the “moral considerability,” or “intrinsic value,” or “rights” of things in nature, such as individual plants and animals, species, or even entire ecosystems.226 Although they have diverse rationales, these notions of intrinsic value are all similar to the idea of nature as sacred in that they indicate a moral obligation independent of the use or enjoyment we humans may draw from nature. Presidents have flirted with these notions too, although they remain on the periphery of presidential discourse—and indeed of public discourse on the en-

223. See generally Carol M. Rose, Given-ness and Gift: Property and the Quest for Environmental Ethics, 24 ENVTL. L. 1 (1994) (comparing values associated with a sense of the world as a given versus those associated with the world as gift).
224. Supra note 217 and accompanying text.
225. Id.
226. See supra note 143 and accompanying text.
In his initial enthusiasm for the environment, Nixon stated in his 1970 State of the Union address, “Through our years of past carelessness, we incurred a debt to nature, and now that debt is being called.” Thus, nature itself has a “claim” against man, the careless polluter. Similarly, he pronounced, “The great question of the seventies is, shall we surrender to our surroundings, or shall we make our peace with nature and begin to make reparations for the damage we have done to our air, to our land, and to our water?” Nixon evokes an image of nature as a force against which mankind has made war and to which we now owe damages. Both the debt and war reparations metaphors imply nature’s independent standing as claimant against man. Nixon balanced his speech with less ecocentric descriptions of clean air and water as “scarce resources” that are a “birthright” of all Americans, and therefore demanding of our protection. The debt and war reparations metaphors would not enter the mainstream of presidential rhetoric, but the ethical impulse driving them would continue to find expression.

Nixon used different words to dress this theme in his 1971 statement transmitting wilderness proposals to Congress. In this statement, he evoked the spiritual value of wilderness and introduces the earth as “garden” which man has been charged to dress and keep. He then covered his utilitarian bases—when the low costs of wilderness preservation are balanced against the “priceless, finite and fragile” qualities of remaining wilderness, “wilderness is a spectacular bargain for the American people.” He concluded with a clear acknowledgement of the ethical claims of wilderness. Among the “habits of mind” we should adopt in order to realize our wilderness preservation goals, Nixon listed “the becoming humility that accords nature’s domain an equal right to coexist with the domain of man.” “Nature’s domain” suggests of kind of separate nationhood, entitled to a status equal to “the domain of man.” Although setting “nature’s domain” against the “the domain

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229. Id. at 12.
230. Id. at 13.
231. See supra note 163 and accompanying text.
232. Statement on Transmitting to the Congress Proposals to Establish New National Wilderness Areas, supra note 209, at 589.
233. Id. at 590.
of man” constructs a separation between them that might seem unscientific and even counterproductive, it serves to drive home the point that nature’s moral entitlement is independent of our use and enjoyment.

Nixon offered another expression of this theme in a statement made after signing a bill to protect wild horses and burros. The statement argued that wild horses “merit man’s protection historically,” because they are a living link to the past. But “[m]ore than that, they merit it as a matter of ecological right—as anyone knows who has ever stood awed at the indomitable spirit and sheer energy of a mustang running free.” The words make the fierce independence and vitality of the “mustang” palpable and its claim to moral consideration all the more compelling.

Nixon sounded the inherent rights theme again in his Special Message to Congress Outlining the 1972 Environmental Program, but this time with a caveat as he questioned the benefits of an activist approach. In a section on “Protecting Our Natural Heritage,” the statement read:

Wild places and wild things constitute a treasure to be cherished and protected for all time. The pleasure and refreshment which they give man confirm their value to society. More importantly, perhaps the wonder, beauty and elemental force in which the least of them share suggest a higher right to exist—not granted them by man and not his to take away. In environmental policy as anywhere else we cannot deal in absolutes. Yet we can at least give considerations like these more relative weight in the seventies, and become a more civilized people in a healthier land because of it.

For Nixon, nature may have separate moral standing based upon “higher rights to exist,” but these rights must be interpreted pragmatically. They are not “absolutes,” but are instead “considerations” that must be weighed with other considerations in making policy. Implicit here is the concern that if given unrestricted application, inherent rights theories would be politically unsupportable. This concern similarly applies to the spiritual or sacred view of nature discussed in Part IV.E.1. At some level, we believe in nature’s

235. Id. at 1194.
236. Id.
237. Special Message to the Congress Outlining the 1972 Environmental Programs, supra note 44, at 182.
inherent rights, but where does it take us? Significantly, apart from the 1970 State of the Union speech, all these articulations occur in written statements; they are not words Nixon spoke and therefore may not reflect values Nixon would voice publicly.

Presidents after Nixon have supported notions of the inherent rights of nature and its entitlement to moral consideration. Even the determinedly pedestrian Ford, who was attacked in the 1976 presidential campaign for his lukewarm embrace of the environment, wrote, "[a] higher consciousness—even spiritual awareness—must evolve if humanity is to live in harmony with nature. . . . I am optimistic that growing American recognition of the respect and reverence that we must accord to earth, water and air will light the way to a new era." In 1980, Carter signed the Alaska National Interest Lands Act while in office after losing the election to Reagan. Perhaps feeling freer to express his own values, Carter said, "Today, we know that all of us, the globe over, belong to the same, very small world, adrift in the vast areas of space. We see more clearly that we have a duty—to ourselves and to our descendents, to the environment and to the world itself—to conserve, to preserve, to use, but to think before we act, and always to care."

In the early days of his presidency, while still trying to occupy the environmental high ground, George H.W. Bush cited Aldo Leopold, the father of the land ethic and icon of ecocentrist such as J. Baird Callicott. Speaking to members of Ducks Unlimited, he described Leopold's canonical Sand County Almanac as a book "about values, values that you and I share. . . . 'That land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.'" During that period of his presidency, Bush offered a remarkable metaphor for the claims of nature in announcing proposed revisions to the Clean Air

238. Id. at 182. The final sentence of the statement's section on Protecting Our National Heritage offers an alternative way of thinking about our obligations to wild places and wild things: consideration of them would allow us to "become a more civilized people in a healthier land because of it." Giving consideration to wild places and things, even where it might not redound to our benefit, is thus cast as a virtue—we will be better people if we do this—but without the possibly absolutist qualities of a moral entitlement or "right."


Act. He envisioned 1989 "as the year we mobilized leadership, both public and private, to make environmental protection a growth industry and keep our ecology safe for diversity. The wounded winds of north, south, east, and west can be purified and cleansed, and the integrity of nature can be made whole again." The speech gave winds life; they have wounds suffered at our hands. By implication, we must dress these wounds and correct the injuries to nature that we have inflicted. The reference to the four winds also strengthens the sense of obligation by evoking American Indian mythologies and mystical connections to nature.

After this extraordinary rhetorical flourish and as his enthusiasm for the environmental presidency waned, Bush avoided similar expressions. His successors have articulated the theme in more modest forms. Early in his tenure, as he met with diverse interests to resolve the dispute over the harvest of old growth forests in the Pacific Northwest, Clinton said: "Coming from a State, as I do, that was also settled by pioneers and which is still 53% timberland—we have an important timber industry and people who appreciate the beauty and intrinsic value of our woodlands. . . ." Although not defined, "intrinsic value" carries the same connotation as that used technically by ethicists. Later in his presidency, Clinton also used the idea of development "in harmony with the environment" to suggest a moral respect for the non-human world.

In 2001, seeking to repair his environmental image and also to


244. Presidents have associated American Indian beliefs with reverential attitudes toward nature. E.g., Carter, Alaska Public Lands: Remarks at a White House Briefing, supra note 52, at 774 (accepting expressions by Tlinget leaders of "their deep feelings, historic feelings, paramount feelings about the importance of the preservation of the quality of life and the quality of the land"); George H.W. Bush, Remarks at the Washington Centennial Celebration in Spokane, 1989 PUB. PAPERS 1228 (Sept. 19, 1989) (quoting Chief Seattle: "The Earth does not belong to man," he said, 'man belongs to the Earth.'"); Clinton, Opening Remarks at the Lake Tahoe Presidential Forum in Incline Village, Nevada, 1997 PUB. PAPERS 1003 (July 26, 1997) ("When Washoe families came to [Lake Tahoe] each spring, they blessed the water and shared its bounty.").

245. Remarks on Opening the Forest Conference in Portland, Oregon, supra note 109, at 885.

246. See John O'Neill, The Varieties of Intrinsic Value, 75 THE MONIST 119 (Apr. 1992) (primary meaning of "intrinsic value" is having non-instrumental value or being an end in itself).

register support for the vast Everglades restoration program crucial to his brother’s political fortunes, George W. Bush discussed the Everglades with similar ethical overtones:

Growth and progress are desirable, and environmental destruction is not inevitable. We must build and plan with respect for nature’s prior claims. Lost, if we are careless, are the sparrows and wading birds, panthers and bears who live here, and the chance for future generations to see these creatures in the place that nature gave them. We must meet the demands of growth but without harming the very things that give Florida and the Everglades their beauty.\textsuperscript{248}

There is much that is anthropocentric here—the affirmation of growth and progress, the value of preserving wildlife stated in terms of “future generations,” and the reference to “beauty.” But “nature’s prior claims” suggests another basis for valuing the Everglades, and it is something very close to Nixon’s “right” of “nature’s domain.”

Presidential rhetoric on the inherent value of nature, whether of religious or secular origins, is rooted in values commonly held among the public. Kempton, Boster, and Hartley found that a substantial majority of the subjects in their study agreed with the proposition that “[b]ecause God created the natural world, it is wrong to abuse it.”\textsuperscript{249} Their finding is consistent with a 1992 compilation of several surveys showing over 90% of respondents agreed that “[n]ature is God’s creation and therefore it is the duty of humans to take care of the environment.”\textsuperscript{250} A large majority of Kempton, Boster, and Hartley’s subjects also subscribed to statements expressing a responsibility to the environment itself.\textsuperscript{251} And in detailed interviews, the authors determined that some subjects invoked God to justify or explain their sense that nature had rights of its own. This was the case even for subjects who were not otherwise religious.\textsuperscript{252} Subjects also described feelings of spirituality in nature—a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{248} Remarks at Everglades National Park, Florida, \textit{supra} note 61, at 845.
  \item \textsuperscript{249} KEMPTON ET AL., \textit{supra} note 37, at 91.
  \item \textsuperscript{250} Princeton Religious Research Center (1992) (on file with authors) (responses compiled from several Gallup Organization surveys).
  \item \textsuperscript{251} For example, 80% or more of subjects in all groups agreed with the statement that “[o]ur obligation to preserve nature isn’t just a responsibility to other people but to the environment itself.” KEMPTON ET AL., \textit{supra} note 37, at 260. Substantial majorities also agreed that “[o]ther species have just as much right to be on this Earth as we do. Just because we are smarter than other animals doesn’t make us better.” \textit{Id.} Consistently, substantial majorities disagreed with the statement that “[p]lants and animals are there to serve humans. They don’t have any rights in themselves.” \textit{Id.} at 263.
  \item \textsuperscript{252} KEMPTON ET AL., \textit{supra} note 37, at 90.
\end{itemize}
sense of "harmony," "spiritual enlivenment," a "calming and healing process" that was understood as a religious experience or like one. Thus, the theme of nature's sacredness and independent moral claim in presidential rhetoric seems to capture a significant strain in Americans' thinking about environmental issues—there is "something compelling about the metaphor of God's creation."253

However, presidents have not allowed this theme to dominate the discourse on environmental issues. These are not " absolutes," as Nixon cautioned.254 Presidents tend to confine these sentiments to places or species of particular appeal (e.g., the Grand Canyon, or wild mustangs running free) or mix them with indications of the importance of human benefit (e.g., Nixon on wilderness, or George W. Bush on the Everglades). These alternative, independent sources of the value of nature do not exclude utilitarian considerations on environmental issues.

F. Right to a Clean Environment and Environmental Justice

The most prominent distinction between the modern environmental movement and the conservationist concerns of Teddy Roosevelt's era is the emphasis on human health. Most of the regulatory statutes administered by the Environmental Protection Agency have the protection of human health as their primary goal. Presidents have often used the same rhetorical frame to talk about issues of air and water pollution, hazardous wastes, and pesticides as they have used for conservation or preservation issues. They offer stewardship obligations, for example, in support of measures to protect human health from air pollution and chemical contami-nants as well as to conserve land and related natural resources.255

253. Id. at 94.
254. See supra note 237 and accompanying text.
When they talk about stewardship, at least, presidents tend to see the environment and our responsibilities to it as of a piece. For example, the speeches portray protecting our air, water, and land as part of our stewardship obligations.

Presidential rhetoric on the human health dimensions of the environment trades on a series of basic oppositions: clean, healthy, or safe are opposed to dirty, sick, hazardous, or poisonous; the ultimate pairing is life versus death. With the exception of some of Clinton’s rhetoric, discussed below, the presidents’ speech on these issues reflects the same utilitarian progressivist mode that dominates the rhetoric generally: a commitment to progress that includes using scientific and technical know-how to make the world “cleaner and better for everybody.”

256. See e.g., Nixon, Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, supra note 28, at 12, 15 (asking whether in 10 years we will be “suffocated by smog, poisoned by water” and arguing that “[i]t is no longer enough to live and let live. Now we must live and help live”); Ford, Statement on Signing the Safe Drinking Water Act, 1974 PUB. PAPERS 759 (Dec. 17, 1974) (“Nothing is more essential to the life of every single American than clean air, pure food, and safe drinking water.”); Carter, Denver, Colorado, Remarks at a Meeting With Environmental, Community and Governmental Leaders, 1978 PUB. PAPERS 832 (May 4, 1978) (“Not long ago in Denver, you could almost always . . . draw a deep breath of air with pleasure and safety. But today, a brown cloud of dangerous pollution frequently hides the mountains and invades the lungs of the people of this city.”); George H.W. Bush, Remarks Announcing Proposed Legislation To Amend the Clean Air Act, supra note 243, at 706, 708 (“Too many Americans continue to breathe dirty air. . . . People who live near industrial facilities should not have to fear for their health.”); Remarks to Students at the Teton Science School in Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming, 1989 PUB. PAPERS 719 (June 13, 1989) (“[O]ur goal is nothing less than an America where all air breathes as clean as morning in the Rockies.”); Clinton, Remarks on the 25th Observance of Earth Day, Havre de Grace, Maryland, supra note 65, at 563 (“Americans have stood as one to say no to dirty air, toxic food, poison water.”); Remarks on Clean Water Legislation, supra note 86, at 764 (“Clean water is essential to the security our people deserve, the safety that comes from knowing that the environment we live in won’t make us sick.”); George W. Bush, Remarks on Signing the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act in Conshohoken, Pennsylvania, supra note 191, at 52 (“[W]e’ve got a responsibility of making sure . . . that the environment in which our children grow up is healthy and clean.”).

257. Nixon, Remarks Opening Expo ’74, Spokane, Washington, supra note 98, at 414 (“We can look back on [this] period when the whole world enjoyed the benefits of what our scientists and engineers were able to find out in terms of making our air and our water cleaner and better for everybody.”). To similar effect, see Carter, The Environment, Message to the Congress, supra note 51, at 969 (“We are particularly committed to strong measures to protect our most important resource—human health—from the increasingly apparent problem of hazardous substances in the environment.”); Environmental Priorities and Programs: Message to the Congress, 1979 PUB. PAPERS 1357 (Aug. 2, 1979) (“These abuses [improper disposal of hazardous wastes] have caused serious damage to human health and economic welfare. . . . The cost of cleaning up these sites runs into the billions
One might imagine, as an alternative formulation, a rights-based approach. Presidents might claim that each citizen has a right to a clean or healthy environment that ostensibly would not be subject to a utilitarian calculus.258 But they have been hesitant to do so. In his advocacy for what became the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, George H.W. Bush edged toward a notion of environmental rights, declaring that “[e]very American expects and deserves to breathe clean air” and that his mission as president was to “guarantee it . . . for this generation and for the generations to come.”259 Of our seven presidents, however, Clinton appears to be the only one explicitly advancing a right to a healthy environment. This first occurred in 1994 when in issuing an Executive Order on Environmental Justice, Clinton asserted, “[a]ll Americans have a right to be protected from pollution—not just those who can afford to live in the cleanest, safest communities.”260 On at least two occasions, he also asserted the right to a healthy environment on behalf of children. In a 1996 speech addressing environmental issues in Hackensack, New Jersey, he voiced his determination that “every child will have the safe and healthy future that every child should have as a God-given and a legal right in the United States of...
America." And again in announcing air emissions controls for cars and sport utility vehicles, he argued that the new regulations would "ensure both the freedom of American families to drive the vehicles of their choice and the right of American children to breathe clean, healthy air." Clinton did not elaborate further on this notion of an environmental right. Perhaps because his references to it are in the context of protecting children and the poor, they seem to stop short of a robust endorsement of a general right to a clean environment. Perhaps they are best understood as one way of expressing egalitarian or fairness concerns that were a prominent and distinctive feature of Clinton's environmental rhetoric. Earlier presidents had expressed special concern for groups, such as children and the elderly, whom they saw as particularly vulnerable to pollution. Clinton not only continued this tradition of concern; his attention to the environmental plight of children became a signature of his rhetoric. This emphasis was distinguishable from the generic in-

261. Remarks to the Community in Hackensack, New Jersey, supra note 178, at 409.
263. Nixon, Special Message to the Congress Outlining the 1972 Environmental Program, supra note 44, at 187 (arguing for the need to protect children from lead-based paint poisoning); Reagan, Message to the Congress Transmitting the Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality, 1982 PUB. PAPERS 953 (July 21, 1982) ("We require standards of environmental quality that will protect the most vulnerable—the very young and the very old, the infirm and the yet to be born."); George H.W. Bush, Remarks Announcing Proposed Legislation to Amend the Clean Air Act, supra note 243, at 707 ("I'm concerned about vulnerable groups like the elderly and asthmatics and children.").
264. Remarks on Clean Water Legislation, supra note 86, at 763 (arguing against amendments to the Clean Water Act because "[i]n human terms, it keeps poisons out of your child's evening bath and bedtime glass of water"); Remarks on Environmental Protection in Baltimore, Maryland, supra note 260, at 1218 ("Today we must ask, if our child asked about the future, will we give him or her dirty air, poison water; would we keep them from knowing what chemicals are being released into their neighborhoods and keep their parents from protecting them?"); The President's Radio Address, supra note 39, at 1719 ("Because we cherish our children, we want to be sure that water they drink and the food they eat won't make them sick."); Remarks on Vetoing Appropriations Legislation for the Departments of the Interior, Veterans Affairs, and Housing and Urban Development and an Exchange with Reporters, 1995 PUB. PAPERS 1897 (Dec. 18, 1995) ("They have sent me legislation that would give our children less clean drinking water, less safe food, dirtier air... Therefore, in the interests of our children I am vetoing these measures..."); Remarks to the Community in Hackensack, New Jersey, supra note 178, at 409 ("No child should have to live near a toxic waste dump. No child should have to drink water contaminated with chemicals. No child should have to eat food poisoned with pesticides."); Remarks to the United Nations Special Session on Environment and Development in New York City, 1997 PUB. PAPERS 827 (June 26, 1997) ("In America, the incidence of childhood asthma has been increasing rapidly. It is now the biggest reason our children are hospital-
terest expressed by all presidents in protecting the environment for future generations. It focused instead on children of the present who were exposed to immediate, serious, and disproportionate adverse impacts of pollution.

Clinton also articulated, for the first time in presidential discourse, an environmental justice theme focused specifically on poor and minority communities. Presidents before Clinton had noted the concentrated effects of pollution on the urban poor but had not articulated the justice concerns lurking in that concentration. In bringing justice to the rhetorical surface, Clinton was responding to the claims of the environmental justice movement, an offshoot of the civil rights movements that gathered momentum in the early 1990s. The movement's leaders argued that mainstream environmentalism catered to the interests of affluent, politically powerful whites while "blacks, lower-income groups, and working-class persons are subjected to a disproportionately large amount of pollution and other environmental stressors in their neighborhoods as well as in their workplaces." Clinton identified himself with their cause in a 1993 speech to his Council on Sustainable Development, calling for "a halt to the poisoning and the pollution of our poorest communities." In 1994, he backed up his rhetorical embrace with an executive order to prevent minority and low-income communities "from being subject to disproporti-

ized. These measures will help change that."); Remarks on Emissions Standards for Cars and Sport Utility Vehicles, supra note 262, at 2326 (Dec. 21, 1999) ("These measures . . . will prevent thousands of premature deaths and protect millions of our children from respiratory disease. . . . [S]urely it is our sacred obligation to ensure that each and every child, from the first breath on, will be drawing the cleanest, purest, healthiest air we can provide."). Clinton also gave some attention to the vulnerabilities of the elderly, but much less than those of children. The President's Radio Address, supra note 39, at 1719 ("Because we honor our parents, we want the air they breathe to be clean so that they can live long and healthy lives and not be housebound by smog.").

265. See supra Part IV.D.

266. Nixon, Special Message to the Congress Outlining the 1972 Environmental Program, supra note 44, at 187 ("We can and must prevent unnecessary loss of life and health from [the hazard of lead-based paint], which particularly affects the poorest segments of our population."); Carter, The Environment, Message to the Congress, supra note 51, at 967, 975 (expressing concern for the effects of lead and other air pollutants on the "urban poor" and "inner-city residents").

267. Robert D. Bullard, Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality 1 (1990); see also Richard J. Lazarus, Pursuing "Environmental Justice": The Distributonal Effects of Environmental Protection, 87 Nw. U. L. Rev. 787, 806-25 (arguing that racial minorities suffer disproportionate economic harm from environmental regulations while also bearing a disproportionate share of pollution burdens).

tionately high and adverse environmental effects." 269

Like Clinton, George W. Bush has registered concern for the health of children, albeit with much less frequency and vehemence than Clinton. 270 But he has not extended Clinton’s environmental rights or justice themes. Thus far, these remain exceptional within presidential discourse on the environment.

G. National Character as a Function of Our Environment

As Americans, we might value our land because of its connection to our sense of the “American character.” 271 This connection is implicit in “America the Beautiful,” a national hymn that identifies the country’s beautiful and abundant landscape with its nationhood. Pressing for a national land use policy, Nixon explored this theme in his 1970 message to Congress transmitting the first Council on Environmental Quality report: “Throughout our history, our greatest resource has been our land—forests and plains, mountains and marshlands, rivers and lakes. Our land has sustained us. It has given us a love of freedom, a sense of security, and courage to test the unknown.” 272 The landscape this language evokes is spacious and varied, like the landscape in “America the Beautiful.” It has not only sustained us physically, it has also bred in us qualities that, as Nixon’s words suggest, are distinctive to our national identity. Elements of our national character were now causing degradation of the land:

Traditionally, Americans have felt that what they do with their own land is their own business. This attitude has been a natural outgrowth of the pioneer spirit. . . . The time has come when we must accept the idea that none of us has the right to abuse the land, and that on the contrary society as a whole has a legitimate interest in proper land use. 273

An otherwise valued part of our national character, the “pioneer


270. Remarks on Signing the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act in Conshohoken, Pennsylvania, supra note 191, at 52 (“[W]e’ve got a responsibility of making sure . . . that the environment in which our children grow up is healthy and clean.”).


273. Id.
spirit,” was responsible for bad environmental results. This view might be expected to have limited appeal, and it does not seem to recur in presidential discourse. But the primary theme—that the American landscape is the setting and source of our national virtue—persists and indeed, as we will see with recent presidents, has been transformed to give the “land” an even more central position in the national pantheon.

Carter rehearsed this theme briefly in his 1977 message to Congress on the environment: “In its land and its history, a nation finds the things which give it continuity.”274 Reagan tied it to the deeper themes of his presidency. In his 1984 remarks to the National Campers and Hikers Association, Reagan said:

Here in the open, close to the land, we feel refreshed and free. Here we see clearly what is important in life—the liberty our country offers, the love of our family and friends. And here it is that we’re given a strong sense of the majesty of our Creator. I just have to believe that with love for our natural heritage and a firm resolve to preserve it with wisdom and care, we can and will give the American land to our children. . . .275

Using this occasion to burnish his environmentalist credentials, Reagan sounded themes we have already identified: stewardship and a connection with God through the experience of nature. He further integrated these themes into the larger myth, the “American story,” that animated his presidency. The story is of America as “a chosen nation, grounded in its families and neighborhoods, and driven inevitably forward by its heroic working people toward a world of freedom and economic progress. . . .”276 Life “in the open, close to the land,” he implied to the campers and hikers, allows us to grasp that story, to “see clearly what is important in life.” It facilitates the appreciation of our unique national traits—love of freedom, love of family, and love of God. “[W]ith love for our natural heritage,” Reagan suggested, we will pass along the land to future generations primarily as a setting for appreciating the values that animate the American character. Although he mentions a love of the land, it plays a distinctly supportive role in service of the central values like freedom. Similar articulations appear in written state-

274. The Environment, Message to Congress, supra note 51, at 979.
275. Remarks to the National Campers and Hikers Association in Bowling Green, Kentucky, supra note 100, at 1038.
ments later in Reagan's presidency.\textsuperscript{277}

As he attempted to live up to the promise of an environmental presidency, George H.W. Bush made a significant change to the rhetorical formulation he inherited from Reagan. In 1989, Bush addressed an association of motor coach owners, whom he likened to the pioneers who "set out to explore the lands west of the Mississippi River. . . . [T]oday you continually rediscover the miracle of America's abundance through the romance of the road." Before going on to advocate his proposals to acquire additional public lands for recreation and to amend the Clean Air Act, he said to his audience:

You know, as those miles roll out beneath you, it seems that your ideals, traditional American ideals, become ever more firmly rooted. And they're the ideals of freedom, self-reliance, the love of nature and of this nation, and above all, the nurturing of family values.\textsuperscript{278}

Here "love of nature" takes its place as an American "ideal" alongside freedom and patriotism. Thus the American landscape is important not just because it is where we became who we are, as Nixon suggested, or because it reminds us of who we are, as Reagan suggested, but because our affinity for it is essential to who we are.

Bush's 1992 message to Congress on environmental goals offered another attempt to include the environment among our dis-

\textsuperscript{277} Message to the Congress Transmitting the Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality, 1986 PUB. PAPERS 227 (Feb. 19, 1986). Reagan stated:

Inspired by promise, sustained by hope, past generations of Americans built a free and prosperous Nation based upon the principles of individual initiative and personal responsibility and upon private institutions of many types. They worked to turn our abundant natural resources to productive use and they learned to love their new land with its grand vistas, its mountains and forests, its fertile fields, and its bustling cities. Environment and natural resources policy can be used to help further these ideals so that liberty, prosperity, and a beautiful and healthful natural environment will continue to bless the lives of the American people.

\textit{Id.} Again, in 1988, Reagan stated:

The preservation of parks, wilderness and wildlife has also aided liberty by keeping alive the 19th century sense of adventure and awe with which our forefathers greeted the American West. . . . [T]he nearly universal appreciation of these preserved landscapes, restored waters, and cleaner air through outdoor recreation is a modern expression of our freedom and leisure to enjoy the wonderful life that generations past have built for us.


\textsuperscript{278} Remarks to Members of the Family Motor Coach Association in Richmond, Virginia, 1989 PUB. PAPERS 769 (June 21, 1989).
tinctive national values. The message talked of "a growing commitment from all segments of society to improve the environment" and of America's role in leading the "democratic family" of the world in reaching "for their God-given rights and aspirations."279 "[W]e Americans who have led the way for over 200 years will continue to bear a responsibility to give freedom its full meaning, including freedom from want and freedom from an unsafe environment."280 Here Bush elevates the environment to pre-eminence as a national value by including it within "freedom" at the core of our collective being.

Clinton expanded on Bush's rhetorical innovation. In his first Earth Day address in 1993, he said:

If there is one commitment that defines our people, it is our devotion to the rich and expansive land we have inherited. From the first Americans to the present day, our people have lived in awe of the power, the majesty, and the beauty of the forest, the rivers, and the streams of America. That love of the land, which flows like a mighty current through... our character, burst into service on the first Earth Day in 1970.281

"[D]evotion to... the land" is the key defining value of "our people." The image of "a mighty current" conveys the value's great strength; "our character," through which the river flows, metaphorically becomes the land we love. The passage culminates with the river "bursting into service" on the first Earth Day—an image of powerful collective feeling suddenly finding a pathway of expression and policy implementation. From the ambiguous footing accorded it in Reagan's American story, love of the land is now central to our national character.

Clinton exploited this theme repeatedly in a rich variety of phrasings. "The love of nature is at the core of our identity as individuals, as communities, and certainly as Americans..."282 As Clinton took up the cudgel against the Republican majority in Congress, his claims for the centrality of environmental aspirations became wrapped in the American dream. "It is our landscape, our culture, and our values together that make us Americans. Stewardship of our land is a major part of the stewardship of the American

279. Message to Congress on Environmental Goals, supra note 102, at 501.
280. Id.
281. Remarks on Earth Day, supra note 33, at 468.
dream since the dream grew out of this very soil."283 "A big part of the American dream goes way beyond economics and has to do with the preservation of our liberties and the stewardship of our land."284 And in the last year of his presidency, he made the point in words almost identical to the ones he used in the beginning: "I believe maybe if there's one thing that unites our fractious, argumentative country across generations and parties and across time, it is the love we have for our land."285

George W. Bush has not carried this theme forward with the flamboyance of Clinton, but it is present in his personal narrative as ranch-owner steward. In this role, Bush exemplifies his "love of the land" and the stewardship it implies. By his own model then—and he is modeling American virtues in his ranch encounters—love of the land is a central element of the national character and one that we should admire in ourselves. He addressed the theme explicitly, before the Cattle Industry Convention:

I appreciate being with people who love the land, and appreciate open space. I realize there's nobody more central to the American experience than the cowboy. But cattle raising is not only a big part of America's past; I view it as an incredibly important part of America's future.286

The cowboy, and his modern equivalent the cattleman, has become the embodiment of our national land ethic.

"Love of the land" is closely related to the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature based on religious and secular grounds as discussed in Part IV.E. As a part of the American character, however, the value is particularized and identified with a national experience rather than with more general religious or moral truths. It is also typically expressed as a sentiment, not a duty or right, and thus has a contingent quality. It is not clear exactly what loving the land might require of us. In his speech to the cattleman's association, Bush interpreted it as fully consistent with intensive use.287

283. Remarks on the 25th Observance of Earth Day in Havre de Grace, Maryland, supra note 65, at 566.
286. Remarks by the President to the Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show in Denver, Colorado, supra note 193, at 198.
287. Id. at 190.
V. American Environmentalism in Context

As projected in the speech of its national leaders, American environmentalism is pluralistic. It draws from a rich and diverse array of moral, cultural, and personal sources. It is fundamentally optimistic. We believe that our ingenuity and technological prowess will enable us to solve difficult environmental problems, and we are convinced that economic growth is consistent with, if not essential to, protecting the environment. Environmentalism as expressed by our presidents has a dominant, utilitarian, progressivist strain, but it also includes a strongly felt obligation to pass on the natural world to our future generations. Although this obligation can be understood as an extension of the dominant utilitarian view, it is animated by an understanding of the world as divinely created and as given into our care as stewards. The notion of divine creation is also associated with the spiritual experience of nature, in which feelings of awe and deep respect are registered, and it informs our sense that the environment has claims to protection for its own sake, not just for its benefits to humans—an intuition that lies at the core of ecocentric thought. Even without this theological grounding, we may be inclined to accept the claims of nature as a matter of “ecological right.” Although these ecocentric strains of regard for our natural environment are less prevalent than utilitarian perspectives, each of the seven presidents of the modern environmental era has acknowledged them.

Finally, Americans understand regard for the environment as fundamental to our national character. This goes deeper than whether substantial majorities of Americans self-identify as environmentalists. It is bound up with our collective identity—our recent origins in a land endowed with astounding natural abundance and beauty. Our presidents declare: we are a people who love the land, and who care for it because we love it. Like the other strains of American environmentalism, this love is not absolute; love of the land is mingled in presidential rhetoric with a host of other asserted national characteristics, from self-reliance and love of freedom to family values. But it is unmistakably enshrined in our political culture and may ultimately be what makes modern American environmentalism peculiarly our own. The following sections explore the deeper division within this consensus.

A. Competing Values

While supported by our analysis, this version of American en-
vironmentalism does not do full justice to the complexities we have discerned in the rhetoric. Kempton, Boster, and Harley’s conclusion that “American environmentalism represents a consensus view” may be true at some level, but recent studies indicate that environmentalism is not a separate discourse that transcends conventional ideological divisions; “environmental attitudes are embedded in broader sociocultural orientations.” Our analysis has revealed some sharp differences among presidents in the way they talk about our environmental obligations—rhetorical cleavages that reflect competing cultural values.

Recall the value oppositions in Schwartz’s matrix. Environmentalism is most closely identified with Schwartz’s harmony value, but how it is understood within a culture is affected by other values with which it may be in tension, such as mastery and autonomy. For example, the presidential rhetoric’s general emphasis on economic growth and technology reflects accommodations to the competing mastery value.

Schwartz’s value matrix goes further to illuminate the significance of the rhetorical variations among presidents that we have discerned. While all presidents have positively reflected the harmony value in their rhetoric, they have also advanced competing values. Reagan’s story of the man who made the “beautiful garden,” for example, is about managing or mastering nature, rather than harmonizing with it. For Reagan, without the good fellow’s exertions, the land would have remained worthless, “all covered with brush and rocks.” Reagan also stressed personal autonomy, strongly associated in Schwartz’s schema with mastery, in defining and carrying out environmental obligations.

George W. Bush’s environmental rhetoric has a similar inflection. Like the man in Reagan’s story, he prunes and sculpts his

288. See supra note 36 and accompanying text.
290. Supra Part III.B.
291. Reagan’s 1984 address to the National Geographic Society offers a partial catalogue of these tensions. See supra note 39 and accompanying text.
292. Radio Address to the Nation on Economic Growth, supra note 170, at 1134.
293. E.g., Letter to the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate Together With a Policy Statement, on Soil and Water Conservation Programs, 1982 PUB. PAPERS 1629-30 (Dec. 21, 1982) (characterizing land stewardship as “primarily the responsibility of the individual landowner” and the government’s role in soil and water conservation as properly limited by “economic conditions and the individual landowner’s willingness to cooperate”).
Texas ranch to improve it and offers images of himself doing the same in the national parks. The real stewards, he has said more than once, are the "people who rely upon the land to make a living"—the cattlemen, for example.\textsuperscript{294} As with Reagan, his rhetoric has also stressed autonomy: caring for the land as a matter of individual responsibility. For Reagan and Bush, mastery and autonomy in environmental stewardship are closely linked, and they are in tension with the notions of unity with nature and protection of the environment captured in the harmony value type.

Compare Clinton's competing narrative, his boyhood idyll of growing up in the national forest. His "roaming the trails and mountains" did nothing to disturb the natural order, showing his preference for harmony rather than mastery. Both he and the land he roamed were protected by a collective order maintained through public ownership of land and the ministrations of park officials, signifying conservatism rather than autonomy. Clinton's Republican adversaries, who would put "the sacred" up for sale, threatened this order.

In his attacks on the Republican congressional leadership, Clinton also invoked egalitarian values. With his repeated charge that the lobbyists had been given license to rewrite environmental laws, he traded on the association between environmentalism and egalitarianism—an association dating from the early days of the environmental movement when big business was widely understood as the enemy.\textsuperscript{295} Clinton's assertion of environmental rights on behalf of the children and the poor and his recognition of the environmental justice movement also exploit egalitarian themes that his Republican counterparts have minimized or avoided entirely.\textsuperscript{296}

Contrasting points of emphasis do not necessarily conflict with a consensus on environmentalism existing at a general level. But they confirm that environmentalism is not separate from the larger culture and that tensions among basic values within that culture affect its interpretation and implementation. Indeed, they help explain the increasingly sharp political divide that exists on questions of environmental law and policy. The bipartisanship that character-

\textsuperscript{294} Remarks by the President to the Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show in Denver, Colorado, supra note 193, at 201.

\textsuperscript{295} See Ellis & Thompson, supra note 289, at 892 (finding the "environmental debate to be primarily a dispute between egalitarians and individualists").

\textsuperscript{296} Supra Part IV.F.
ized the adoption of major environmental legislation in the 1970s no longer seems to exist. Richard Lazarus puts it succinctly:

The Republican Party generally favors less stringent environmental controls and increased resource exploitation, while the Democratic Party generally favors stronger environmental protection standards and resource conservation and preservation laws.

... 

[The major parties] are fundamentally opposed on matters of lawmaking principles, including the extent to which private property rights to natural resources should be protected, the efficacy and neutrality of market forces, and the necessity of a strong national government on matters of public health and welfare.\(^{297}\)

The parties also differ on how we should respond to the distributional effects of environmental programs. Republicans show particular concern over the burdens of regulation; Democrats urge justice for the victims of environmental degradation, particularly “vulnerable” populations such as children, the poor, and minorities. This does not mean that consensus or near consensus on particular policies or pieces of legislation is no longer possible. But it does mean that differences have hardened along lines of principle and that these differences are affecting treatment of a range of environmental issues from drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the regulation of greenhouse gas emissions.

B. Rhetoric and Strong Environmentalism

Even assuming that the presidential rhetoric, taken as a whole, reveals a meaningful consensus on the environment, one might argue that this consensus is not environmentalism at all, but its antithesis. The presidents profess environmental values—a love of the land, a sense of connectedness with nature—but at the same time assert that those values are consistent with and depend on continued technological development, economic growth, and human consumption. In this, they simply affirm the utilitarian progressivism that has dominated the culture of the nation.\(^{298}\) If this is true, then in some real sense, no actual “transformation” has occurred, even though the great majority of us, our presidents included, declare our sympathy with environmental concerns.

Ecocentrists would view this progressivist version of environ-


\(^{298}\) See Marx, supra note 78, at 327-30, 333-35.
mentalism as a thinly disguised brief for the domination of humans over nature, ensuring the continued degradation of natural systems.\textsuperscript{299} This kind of environmentalism would not recover the lost Eden, as the progressivists suppose, but would ensure that Eden’s loss becomes irrevocable.\textsuperscript{300} Ecocentrists would instead define environmentalism as rejecting the utilitarian progressivist worldview, seeing “human beings not as separate from and acting upon the environment but rather as an integral part of it,”\textsuperscript{301} and urging restraints on human production and consumption to protect and restore the health of the larger community.

Thus, far from the consensus articulated by presidents, ecocentrism or strong environmentalism represents a distinctly minority view. Ecocentrists have acknowledged and bewailed the failure of their enterprise to change the cultural status quo, and the solution that is sometimes offered is a rhetorical one. For example, ecocentric ethicists Michael Bruner and Max Oelschlaeger call for environmental ethics to transform itself into an “evocative” rhetoric that could effectively compete with other rhetoric, including presumably the unreconstructed rhetoric of American presidents, for the public’s allegiance.\textsuperscript{302} Bruner and Oelschlaeger’s proposal accepts that there is something outside the rhetoric itself—the public’s allegiance—that must change and thus that rhetoric alone is not constitutive of culture. There is some naiveté, however, in the notion that if ecocentrists just found the right words, a public transformation would follow.

The history of ecocentric thought and expression in this country suggests the limitations of a rhetorical strategy. Ecocentrists have been major contributors to a long and distinguished American tradition of nature writing and advocacy.\textsuperscript{303} Their contributions go back at least to Emerson and Thoreau, whom Leo Marx

\textsuperscript{299} See Marx, supra note 142, at 121.


\textsuperscript{301} Marx, supra note 78, at 335.

\textsuperscript{302} Michael Bruner & Max Oelschlaeger, \textit{Rhetoric, Environmentalism, and Environmental Ethics}, 16 Envtl. Ethics 377, 396 (1994); see also Doremus, supra note 227, at 63-72 (proposing a “new political discourse of nature” that emphasizes place-based or bioregional narratives).

\textsuperscript{303} See Buell, supra note 271 (documenting the role of nature writing, specifically that of Thoreau, in defining American culture); Marx, supra note 78, at 323-25.
has described as "the patron saint of ecocentrism."\textsuperscript{304} They have continued through John Muir and Aldo Leopold to contemporary ecocentric writers such as Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Barry Lopez, and Arne Naess.\textsuperscript{305} The works of these authors are widely taught in our high schools and colleges. They are valued for the power and subtlety of their expression as well as for their ideas, and as we have shown in Part IV, they sometimes even find their way into political discourse. One might imagine that if it were simply a matter of finding the right words, the values embedded in the works of these canonical writers would now dominate the culture. These writers have demonstrably influenced American culture and institutions,\textsuperscript{306} but for all the reverence we accord them, they continue to be identified primarily with minority cultural strains—Douglas and Wildavsky’s border dwellers. Contemporary ecocentric writers seeking to up the rhetorical ante risk even greater marginalization.\textsuperscript{307}

As we have seen, ecocentric references occupy a correspondingly limited niche in presidential discourse. References to Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, and other writers in the ecocentric tradition are scattered through the discourse; the progressivist Roosevelt is ubiquitously present. At moments we have detected surges of presidential passion and concern for the environmental “other” that seem to transcend the limited anthropocentric frame: Nixon reveling in the freedom of the wild horses, George H.W. Bush wishing to make whole the wounded winds of the north, south, east and west, and Bill Clinton meditating on time and our place in the universe at the Grand Canyon. Nixon and George H.W. Bush, however, both retreated from speech that tested the limits of anthropocentrism, and, more generally, presidents have shown an inclination to limit such speech to settings and circum-

\textsuperscript{304} Conway et al., \textit{supra} note 77, at 10.

\textsuperscript{305} We omit Rachel Carson from this list, as her most influential work, \textit{Silent Spring}, is identified with reform environmentalism, which has utilitarian underpinnings consistent with the mainstream environmental views espoused by the presidents. \textit{See} Robert J. Brulle, \textit{Agency, Democracy and Nature: The U.S. Environmental Movement from a Critical Theory Perspective} 174-86 (2000).


\textsuperscript{307} \textit{See} Payne, \textit{supra} note 306, at 171-72.
stances that not only acknowledge its power but also enforce its limited scope. Indeed, one could argue that by sacralizing only wilderness and other places of pristine natural beauty, the presidents strengthen the wall between humans and the rest of nature, and undermine our sense of responsibility for the environment.\textsuperscript{308}

Among modern national politicians, many believe that Al Gore might have broken this rhetorical barrier and lifted ecocentrism into the political mainstream. Although he vigorously rejected the more misanthropic tenets of the deep ecologists, Gore expressed sympathies with ecocentrists in his book, \textit{Earth in the Balance}.\textsuperscript{309} Yet he chose in the 2000 presidential race to marginalize the environment as an issue, speaking of it less frequently, and emphasizing progressivist themes consistent with technological advance and economic growth. Gore's strategy reflected the advice of his pollsters and other advisors on the likely reactions of the electorate to an assertively environmentalist message.\textsuperscript{310} Ralph Nader, the Green Party candidate and an alternative to Gore as standard-bearer for the ecocentrists, garnered 2.7\% of the popular vote.\textsuperscript{311}

None of this is to suggest that the presidents are somehow wrong—that we cannot, in fact, have it all, by harmonizing material progress with a regard for nature. It is simply to say that the environmental views advanced by the presidents are, in important respects, rhetorically and substantively at odds with those of a minority environmentalist faction. This may be inevitable. Ecocentrists, as border dwellers defining themselves in opposition to the mainstream, may resist inclusion as a matter of self-definition and self-preservation. Understood in this way, ecocentrism is a protest movement, not a serious attempt to capture the mainstream; its literature, from Thoreau to Abbey, is protest literature.

\begin{itemize}

\item \textsuperscript{309} \textit{Al Gore, Earth in the Balance} 216-18 (1992).


\item \textsuperscript{311} Federal Election Commission, \textit{2000 Official Presidential General Election Results}, at \texttt{http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/2000presegeresults.htm} (last visited May 4, 2004) (on file with authors). Nader clearly saw himself as an ecocentrist's alternative to Gore. See, e.g., \textit{Ralph Nader, Crashing the Party} 95-98 (2002) (criticizing the Clinton/Gore environmental record as "com[ing] up very short"); identifying himself with champions of ecocentric views, such as David Brower and Julia Butterfly Hill; and lamenting the co-opting of Earth Day by corporate interests).
\end{itemize}
C. Muir and Roosevelt: A Coda

In 1988, responding to a request by Congress, Reagan issued a proclamation declaring April 21 as John Muir Day.\textsuperscript{312} The document acknowledged Muir as someone who “understood, and helped others to see, the significance and beauty of the wilderness” and as the person who wrote: “The forests of America, however slighted by man, must have been a great delight to God; for they were the finest He ever created.”\textsuperscript{313} It records also that in 1903, Muir “hosted President Theodore Roosevelt in Yosemite.”\textsuperscript{314} Indeed, the two men camped together—Muir the dedicated ecocentrist, Roosevelt the enthusiastic but pragmatic patron of conservation. Later they would clash over the construction of a dam in Yosemite’s Hetch-Hetchy valley. Muir passionately opposed the dam; Roosevelt supported it, and it was built. We do not know whether Hetch-Hetchy would be built today if it were proposed under similar circumstances. But in a deeper cultural sense, it seems fair to question whether much has changed from the night Muir and Roosevelt slept out in Yosemite.

VI. CONCLUSION

While we conclude that the presidential rhetoric evidences a general consensus on the environment, it is not clear that the consensus is sufficiently deep or inclusive enough to be meaningful. Beneath the agreement signaled by commonly used words and phrases—“stewardship” or “love of the land”—swirl competing ideologies, some emphasizing values of autonomy and mastery, others of egalitarianism and harmony. Even if one accepts that the rhetoric reflects a consensus at some level, the consensus is predominantly utilitarian and progressivist, and therefore antithetical to the views of many ardent environmentalists.

It is significant, nonetheless, that the rhetoric is inclusive, even if it subordinates some thematic elements to others. The ecocentric themes are undeniably present; they are present presumably because they resonate with substantial portions of the American people. Even Republican pollster and political strategist Frank Luntz advises his clients: “[A]ny discussion of the environment has to be grounded in an effort to reassure a skeptical public that you

\textsuperscript{312} Proclamation 5794—John Muir Day, 1988, supra note 215, at 441.
\textsuperscript{313} Id.
\textsuperscript{314} Id.
care about the environment for its own sake.”

As already suggested, these ecocentric themes as presented in the discourse may serve perversely to disconnect us from the lived environment. But we can also view them as serving an ameliorative function, tempering the dominant progressivism, or as Leo Marx and colleagues put it, “[t]he value of ecocentrism, like other visionary or utopian doctrines, is to generate long-term aspirations—to educate desire.” These themes can also be seen more dynamically as part of a struggle to reconcile or transcend the deeper oppositions that have defined the environmental debate. Although as Nixon made clear, we are not going to return to an earlier time, presidents may yet be searching for an idea of progress that more fully accommodates a reverence or moral regard for nature. One sees glimpses of a possible new synthesis in presidential images such as Clinton’s “small but sacred green and open spaces closer to home,” which brings a sense of the spiritual dimensions of nature into our everyday lives. But such moves are tentative. ‘We can have it all’ notwithstanding, there has been no breakthrough in the rhetoric that would allow the president to have it all politically. Such a breakthrough is unlikely without changes in the political culture to support it. The rhetoric of presidents, however, as they search for a new, more resonant consensus to broaden their appeal, may be one factor among many in eliciting those changes.

315. Luntz Research Companies, supra note 68, at 132 (emphasis omitted).
316. See supra note 294 and accompanying text.
317. Conway et al., supra note 77, at 11; see also John W. Delicath, In Search of Ecotopia: “Radical Environmentalism” and the Possibilities of Utopian Rhetorics, in Earthtalk 153 (Star A. Muir & Thomas L. Veenendall eds., 1996) (urging “radical environmentalists” to construct utopian rhetorics that open up possibilities for change).
318. Supra note 217 and accompanying text.
Essay