

## Lecture #17: Strategic Resources and the Population Bomb

### Suggested Readings:

William Vogt, *The Road to Survival* (1948); Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (1969)  
William Petersen, *Population* (1969)  
Michael S. Teitelbaum & Jay M. Winter, *The Fear of Population Decline* (1985)  
Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception* (2008); Thomas Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment* (2012)  
James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (1998)

### Outline

#### I. Planning for City, State, and Region

governing metaphor of lecture: the power of the birds-eye view: integrated vision of comprehensive social planning, but sometimes at expense of not seeing things at ground level—and not always seeing human differences: the increasing scale of environmental challenges suggests shifting politics  
TVA stood as model for whole new approach to earlier conservation concerns: planning.  
planner as new professional expert with skills to integrate disparate activities and functions into unified, harmonious whole; proliferating throughout society  
James C. Scott's famous book *Seeing Like a State* links this birds-eye view to what he calls "high modernism" in twentieth-century governmental planning  
new towns of 1920s and 1930s as utopian vision for planners: Norris, TN; Radburn, NJ  
original inspiration for new town movement was Ebenezer Howard's "garden cities" in England  
earliest planning efforts generally in urban areas: 1893 Columbian Exposition a model, led to Plan of Chicago in 1908, effort to rationalize urban landscape  
1920s saw creation of Regional Planning Association of America: Clarence Stein, Lewis Mumford, Benton MacKaye, Catherine Bauer, Stuart Chase, Frederick Delano (FDR's uncle, for whom he was named); Goal was regional planning for NYC and its region  
movement culminated in Regional Plan of New York and its Environs, 1929

#### II. Planning for Conservation, Planning for War

New Deal extended these earlier efforts to nation as a whole, with planning at all levels  
key agency: National Resources Board, first report promoted planning in 1934  
important new resource issue emerges for planners in 1930s: strategic minerals  
unequal distribution of key industrial supplies gave nations differential power in war  
Axis powers saw war as best way to gain access to resources controlled by Allies  
geopolitics of resource economy an increasing concern for U.S. and allied planning  
Brookings Institution 1943 report on *World Minerals and World Peace*: "a modern war cannot be fought without tremendous quantities of a few minerals..."  
author of Brookings study was UW-Madison's Charles Kenneth Leith, geologist hired by Charles Richard Van Hise when he was serving as UW President (Van Hise had himself authored first textbook on conservation of natural resources)  
coordination of resource access essential to stability of post-war world; reinforced by Twentieth Century Fund's *America's Needs and Resources*, published 1947  
(worth noting that David Potter's *People of Plenty* was published in 1954 in this intellectual context)  
note convergence here of Cold War anxieties with longer-standing planning traditions that had been emerging for the past half century and more

#### III. The Bomb

persistence of strategic thinking in post-war world: collapse of European empires, rise of Cold War, and explosion of first atomic bombs (Trinity July 16, 1945, Hiroshima August 6, Nagasaki August 9).  
bomb pivotal to subsequent environmentalism  
nuclear weapons necessitated whole new realms of planning: extremely complex production cycle geographically spread across country, coordinated by state; strategic military planning; state secrecy apparatus; civil defense planning  
civil defense meant planning to protect national infrastructure and natural resources  
remember that the Interstate Highway System came into being in 1956 with the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956: explicitly a civil defense initiative to help evacuate cities in event of nuclear attack

#### IV. The Parson's Prophecy

post-war years saw new genre of apocalyptic environmental writing: threat to planet  
key texts: Fairfield Osborn's *Our Plundered Planet* and William Vogt's *The Road to Survival*, both published 1948, best sellers: human beings now threatened own survival  
bomb taught conservationists to think globally, reflects shifting political tendencies of environmentalism, which tended to conceive of problems on larger, more systemic and abstract scale than had been typical of Progressive conservation movement with its more nationalist emphasis

Vogt's argument: rising human population increasingly impinging on global resources  
familiar argument since Thomas Robert Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1798, which  
argued that resources increase arithmetically, population geometrically  
human populations therefore constantly tend to press against limits of environment  
pattern complicated: exponential population growth came from falling mortality, only stopped by  
comparable fall in birth rates (the "demographic transition")

#### **V. The Population Bomb**

post-WWII saw wave of neo-Malthusianism: 1954 pamphlet entitled "The Population Bomb" showed  
nuclear weapons as best available metaphor for apocalyptic population growth  
pamphlet funded by Hugh Moore, inventor & president of Dixie Cup, acted as major funder for  
publications promoting population control for next 20 years  
friend Margaret Sanger strongly supported; she had fought for birth control since opening first clinic in  
Brooklyn in 1916, many arrests, published *Birth Control Review*, founded organization that eventually  
became Planned Parenthood; she convinced Katherine Dexter McCormick to underwrite \$2+ million  
development funds for birth control pill, released on US market in 1960  
birth control at center of population controversy, much conflict with Catholic Church  
potential racist underside to population control: eugenics protects white races from dark  
movement culminated in 1969 with Paul R. Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*: population as the central  
environmental problem, Malthusian triage as solution, cut off aid to poor

Review key themes:

- 1) planning as intrinsically a top-down, elite phenomenon favoring birds-eye view
- 2) atomic bomb had consequence of increasing people's awareness of global threats & vulnerability
- 3) population as one of most macro ways of conceiving of global environment: power & weakness
- 4) analysis at global level tended to favor aggregates without much attention to distributional equity
- 5) population one of first environmental concerns to be perceived on global scale...
- 6) ...but its abstract birds-eye view made it hard to see individual people on the ground