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Article Painting Controversial Portrait Of West Arouses Congressional Discussion

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Mail Tribune Correspondent

Washington — Some Congressional discussion has been aroused by an article in the current issue of Harper's magazine which paints a striking, if controversial, portrait of the West as a land whose destiny has been more fully influenced by its desert character than anything else.

Some senators have taken issue with its author, Walter Prescott Webb, history professor at the University of Texas, but another senator, Mike Mansfield of Montana, liked it so well he recommended it to all his colleagues.

"The heart of the West is a desert, unqualified and absolute," declares Prof. Webb. He continues:

"If we do not understand the West it is because we have refused to recognize this fact; we do not want the desert to be there. We prefer to loiter on the edges, skirt it, avoid it, and even deny it."

"Its radius varies," he goes on, "because the desert expands and contracts as its enemy—rain—retreats or advances. Always at its margins there is dampness, at its borders moisture, at its limits wetness."

"When the desert pokes a hot finger into the border regions, the people speak of drought; when it pulls the finger back, they say 'the country is getting more seasonable.' At the heart of the desert there is no drought, there is only an occasional mitigation of dryness."

Indians Driven To Desert

"The concentration of the Indians in the West suggests how the desert has been used as a place to discard what is unwanted elsewhere," contends Prof. Webb. "In their rush westward, the Americans drove the Indians toward the desert to be the wards of Uncle Sam. In the same movement they took the land from Uncle Sam, all they considered worth taking. The refuse—mainly in the desert—left in the hands of the government. Here Uncle Sam is the biggest landholder; he owns 47.7 per cent of the land in the eight desert and three Pacific states. He owns 87.4 per cent of Oregon, 47.7 per cent of Wyoming, 42.6 per cent of

California. He owns it mainly because nobody wanted it. The Mormons, like the Indians, fled to it because they were not wanted, and all inland atomic explosions are touched off in the desert. (But ancestors of many of the best people in the West today went there because they were wanted elsewhere in another sense.)"

Challenged by Senator

When Prof. Webb pointed out that biographies of westerners constitute only 16.7 per cent of those listed in Who's Who, although the West has 22 per cent of the population, he was challenged by Senator Wallace Bennett of Utah. Said the senator:

"This figure is an unfair one. I believe it will be found that it is based on residence rather than birthplace, and it is natural that a larger proportion of outstanding men would be living in the larger metropolitan centers of the East, where we find the headquarters of the largest corporations, the most universities, the center of our national government."

Bennett pointed out that Dr. E. L. Thorndike of Columbia compiled a state-by-state list of the birthplaces of outstanding men listed in Who's Who, then ranked the states "on the basis of their superior birth quotient." Four of the eight highest states—Utah, Idaho, Colorado and Wyoming—are among what Dr. Webb calls the desert states. Utah ranked first, Idaho fourth, Washington state 15th and Oregon 24th.

But the senator tended to support the professor's thesis when he concluded that because of the desert, "the West makes extraordinary demands on those who attempt to wrest a living from its soil. . . . This fact, during the early days of the West, served to discourage those settlers who were too lazy, too indifferent or too weak to live the hard life of a westerner, and those less hardy souls usually moved to some less demanding climate."

Senator Bennett added that "in the number of school years completed, the Pacific and Mountain states lead all other regions

of the nation, with averages of 11.5 and 10.7 years respectively, compared to a national aver-

age of 9.3. Utah, incidentally, leads all the states with an average of 12 years."

Much Out of Little

Prof. Webb agrees that westerners have had to make much out of little. He said:

"This talent for making the most of little has produced two strange western societies, one good and one bad. The good society is that of the Mormons in Utah, a rejected people with a bizarre religion who sought peace in the desert, took the bee as their symbol, and created by their hive-like industry something admirable."

"The other society of more recent vintage sprang up in a similar desert, but took a dif-

ferent direction. No state has less to recommend it than Nevada. It is all desert and, once its minerals were depleted, it had little chance of prosperity and hardly enough people to maintain a state government. It solved its problem by creating an oasis of iniquity and license in a sea of moral inhibitions. It provided a haven in the desert to which all could come who wanted to gamble, divorce or fornicate and have it quick and legal. Then it found it could have a monopoly only on the first two, and so substituted for the third the abolition of state income tax to attract the millionaires who make good customers for the casinos."

"Nevada was revolutionized, its population shortly doubled, and it has had the highest income per capita of any state in the Union. Nevada is what it is today because of what it did not have yesterday. In compensating for what the desert denied it, it has created the most bizarre society in the nation."

But westerners generally, through ingenuity and the aid of the federal government, have built dams and created oases wherever possible—"Los Angeles is the greatest oasis of them all"—and "they are a normal people trying to create and maintain a normal civilization in an abnormal land."

"We can understand him bet-

ter," concludes Prof. Webb, "if we remember that he is seeking to conquer the great American desert."

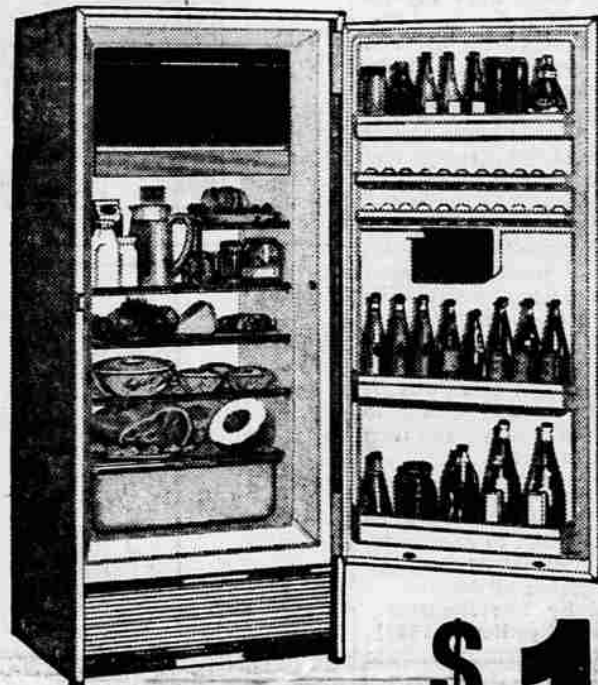
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Eisenhower Showing Signs of Enjoying News Conferences

Washington — The featured star of Washington's greatest show, the presidential news conference, gives every sign of liking his role.

There was a time when President Eisenhower dreaded this free-wheeling American version of parliamentary questioning. He tensed, stumbled over words and showed flashes of his famous temper.

At Wednesday's conference, he was obviously at ease, sure of himself and eager to launch into complex and politically treacherous questions.

Contagious Warmth

He makes up in contagious warmth and conviction what he lacks in natural eloquence. On the question of whether he was abandoning his 1952 conservatism, as some former supporters charge, "modern Republican" Eisenhower grins and rattles off a summary of his philosophy:

"... I thoroughly believe that any modern political philosophy that fails to study carefully the needs of the people today, not of 1860, of today. What we need, the complications that have arisen in our industrial life, in our economy, how are they going to take care of themselves in their old age, what happens if they are disabled and can't work for five months or so?"

Sitting in his presence, sensing his sincerity, most listeners aren't aware that he has become entangled in an unfinished sentence.

This news conference is a great show not only because of its star attraction. It is also a demonstration of the highest forms of journalistic gamesmanship.

Track Meet Staged

Here, at the close of every news conference, is staged a track meet that never makes the sports pages. The track is the center aisle of the stately marble and gilt room.

The starting signal is a blurted "Thank you, Mr. President," flung over the shoulder of the senior dash man of the White House press corps, U.P.'s Merriam Smith. Those four words

launch a half dozen competing sprinters—some balding, some punchy, but all fast off the blocks—down the short aisle to the telephone booths outside.

The "specials"—reporters for individual or small groups of newspapers and magazines—look down scornful noses at the deadline-chasing agency men's dash to the phones. They practice other cunning arts.

With an eye to the television cameras at the rear, some sit out on the flanks of the audience where their profiles will be available to cameramen. No back-of-the-head appearances for them.

Nuclear Explosion Slated for Saturday

Las Vegas, Nev. — The Atomic Energy commission's first nuclear test of its spring-summer series, twice postponed because of unfavorable weather and the danger of radioactive fallout, has been rescheduled for 5:50 a.m. (PDT) Saturday.

The nuclear device was to have been set off at the same time Thursday from atop a 500-foot tower on the southern Nevada test site 75 miles northwest of here, but was postponed for the second straight day.

The AEC said winds blowing towards the southeast from the test site would have strewn radioactive fallout across a long, narrow area embracing Las Vegas, Boulder City and the Indian Springs Air Force base.

The weather outlook for Saturday morning is "more promising" than it has been for the past several days, the AEC said.

Holmes Hopes Senate Will Reconsider Vote

Salem — Gov. Robert D. Holmes expressed hope today that the Oregon Senate would reconsider the vote by which it rejected the appointment of Rollin E. Bowles, 49, Portland attorney, to the State Water Resources Board.

Park Service Will Survey O&C Lands

Portland — The National Park Service will conduct a survey of the recreational potentials of the O&C lands. The O&C advisory board was informed Wednesday that such an agreement has been reached between the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service.

The agreement was signed by James F. Doyle, area administrator for BLM and Lawrence C. Merriam, regional director of the National Park Service at San Francisco.

The Service will make an inventory of recreational sites within the boundaries of the two million acres of O&C lands in 18 western Oregon counties. The report by the service will include plans of each area designated by the Bureau for development together with estimated cost of development, maintenance and administration.



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