

MIDCONTINENT PERSPECTIVES

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Kansas City, Missouri

September 10, 1981

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Washington D.C.

The Nine Nations Of North America

They say that the three biggest lies in America are, “The check’s in the mail”; “Of course I’ll respect you afterwards, honey”; and “I’m from Washington and I’m here to help you.” Well, I am from Washington, I’m an editor of the *Washington Post*, and I’m going to try to help you today. I’m going to try to explain how the continent is really working right now, not as if it were three nations – the United States, Canada, and Mexico; not as if it were 50 states; not as it should work, as an academic might have it; but how it is really working and how best to understand how we will be moving into the 21st century as a result.

This “nine nations” theory came about because I was the funnel for the out-of-town news – and isn’t that a wonderful reflection of how Washington works, with everyone west of the Potomac being out of town. I was the mouth of the funnel for hundreds of stringers and domestic bureaus in places like Houston, Los Angeles, and New York; and also for the drifters. Drifters are staff writers who travel around the country, reporting on it. The reason they are called drifters is that, when they call in, the telephone conversation always starts, “You’re where? Why?” But this is how the news is gathered.

We were always sitting around trying to figure out how this continent really works so we could get on top of events. We noticed that what we had been taught had little to do with reality. The first thing we tried to do was face this country as if it were all the same: all bland, all tapioca pudding – the way we had been taught – because of the interstate highways and the influence of network television.

We soon discovered that as a way of looking at things, that sameness theory wasn’t worth a damn. The Southwest is fundamentally different from New England, which is very different from the Caribbean Rim. So then we turned to other distinctions we had been taught, like the term “Midwest,” and that certainly proved to have no meaning either. To this day I don’t understand what people mean by the Midwest. I don’t know why they would want to put Ohio in the same region as Nebraska; Cleveland is very different from Omaha. Its people are different, as are its industry, farming, and its future.

So then we started to craft things our own way, in a way that would work to explain an event. Two reporters, one in Los Angeles and the other in Houston, started saying to me, “The Southwest is a nation within a nation, and it goes from Los Angeles to Houston. It is the fastest booming area, the one that may be the most dominant part of the continent as we head into the

21st century, if it isn't already." The Southwest is the place that is right now what the rest of North America will soon become, the place where the largest minority is Hispanic, not black.

We wrote a five-part series about this and were nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Then other reporters started seeing things that way themselves. One reporter saw the Intermountain West as one place and named it the "Empty Quarter" after a region of Saudi Arabia. Another saw the Northwest as "Ecotopia," a string bean shaped affair. Somebody else said, "Miami is turning completely around. It's not looking north for its future anymore; it's looking south. It's the capital of the Caribbean Rim."

This was our own private code to explain events until my boss overheard us one day and suggested that I write an article about it. The article was then reprinted all over North America, and an agent called and suggested that I write a book. I said that sounded like a lot of work. He kept calling back until finally he dangled in front of me the all-American dream. He said, "How would you like to get out from behind that desk and those telephones, stop asking reporters in Kansas City what it's like out there and go out and see it?" Soon I was on the road, wondering what I had done. The result is almost 100,000 miles of travel in over a year and a half, and interviews with hundreds of people. I'm more convinced than ever that the continent really operates this way, as if it were nine separate civilizations.

NEW ENGLAND

Start in New England, but not just the six states that one normally thinks of; this system includes the Maritime Provinces of Canada and Newfoundland.

This is the poorest of the nine nations. When one factors in the cost of home heating oil and food imported from California, the poorest state in the union is not Mississippi but Maine. And all the rest of New England is essentially in the same boat, as are the Maritimes. You would think that a place this poor and this short on resources would be going after every opportunity to move into the future, like oil refineries and nuclear power plants and offshore drilling. Right? Wrong. This is the birthplace of the American antinuclear movement. And the reason, I think, is that New Englanders tend to pride themselves on having the most civilized of the nine nations. There may be something to their claim. This is the oldest Anglo civilization on the continent, and they have had plenty of time to curse it, savor it, love it, and leave it, but, especially, get it pretty much the way they want it. Their essential argument is that a civilized place is more rare on this continent than hydrocarbons, and that the people of Houston will be glad that Boston exists when they finally come to their senses and decide that they want to have their city in a civilized fashion.

QUEBEC

Then there is Quebec, which of course starts off as distinctive by being a French nation – unusual some 200 years after France essentially abandoned it. This place shows what I'm talking about when I call these areas nations rather than regions. There is a sociologist there named Marcel Rioux who says that a nation is "the desire of many individuals to do great things together." That is really what I'm talking about, for each of these nine nations is looking for its own answers to its own problems in its own way, and is crafting its own future. That's why these nations are so distinctive.

THE FOUNDRY

Below Quebec, in that area around the Great Lakes, is the Foundry. That's the industrial Northeast from New York to Chicago and from Cincinnati to Toronto. The Foundry is still the most densely populated of the nine nations. It has almost 30 percent of the continent's workers. Of course it wasn't that long ago that St. Louis had the southwestern-most baseball team, which was an eloquent description of where power was in this continent. The Northeast was it, and everyone else was a bunch of branch offices or colonies.

That is no longer true. In fact, the steel and automobile and the rubber industries that are the bedrock of the Foundry are all in decline. They simply are not so important as they used to be. As we are heading into the 21st century, developments in genetic technology and semiconductors will be the steel of that century. So what you've got in the Northeast is an area that is in decline, and that decline is wrenching.

But remember that this is the only one of the nine nations that is in decline. Places like New England have bottomed out. They have lost everything that they are going to lose and are headed back up with small computers and the exporting of ideas and culture. In some places like Dixie and MexAmerica, the problem is controlling the boom. I won't forget when I heard Jimmy Carter say that the United States was suffering from malaise. I was on the West Coast at the time, and people there felt that what he said had nothing to do with their lives and the ways they were operating. And they were right. That's only the ideas of people, especially newscasters, who have been looking out the windows of the South Bronx for too long. The Foundry is the only one of the nine nations which is in decline.

DIXIE

Dixie, while I use the old name, is by no means the Confederacy. In fact, this is the place that is marked by being the most whipsawn and futureshocked by change. This is the place which has seen so much economic change since the 1960's that people can see the results everywhere. At the same time, the social change is so great that we are seeing an in-migration of blacks to Dixie for the first time in 100 years because they feel it's a better place to live than the Northeast. And they are right.

THE ISLANDS

The Islands, which is hands down the strangest of the nine nations, is the entire Caribbean Rim and what some purists like to think of as the tip of South America, or Venezuela. Its center is in South Florida and Miami. The reason that it is so strange is that its No. 1 industry is drugs: \$35 to \$55 billion a year, pushing Exxon for No. 1 on the Fortune 500 list. There is a \$5 billion surplus of \$100 bills in the Federal Reserve in Miami. No place else has that, including Los Angeles, which has enough drugs and money from tourism. In Miami this is affecting everything because these \$100 bills are coming home and buying shopping centers and office buildings. It's affecting the entire economy. Trade with the rest of the hemisphere – looking south toward South America and Latin America – is the No. 2 industry. There are 94 multinational corporations with headquarters not in some place like Bogota or Rio but in Coral Gables, which is a suburb of Miami. As far as the multinationals are concerned, South Florida is Latin America, and they headquarter themselves accordingly. The No. 3 industry is Hispanic tourism, not Anglo tourism and real estate, the way it was when Jackie Gleason was talking about the southern fun capital being Miami Beach. When Argentineans flee their winter – which

is our summer – they come to Miami and spend two and a half times as much a day as the average Anglo. That’s why you can find mink coats in J.C. Penney’s in Miami in August these days. It is not until you get to No. 4 that you have what we’ve always thought of as the center of Miami – the Anglo trade – a complete change in 20 or 30 years.

MEXAMERICA

As I said, MexAmerica is the most booming area. It goes from Los Angeles to Houston. If you drew a 60-mile circle around Los Angeles and declared it an independent country, it would be the 14th wealthiest country in the world. At the other end of MexAmerica you find Houston. Now here is a town that 30 years ago was, frankly, like Kansas City was, a crossroads that not even a chamber of commerce could love. But like Kansas City, this image has been completely turned around, and now Houston is a world capital. It is now the world capital of oil and gas. They say that the oil business is Houston; and it doesn’t make any difference if the oil is in Siberia or the South China Sea, you can buy your rig in Houston or you can dig for it with a silver spoon – which is what makes Houston such a charming place.

A “booming place” is characterized by a sense of no limits. Take Los Angeles. It has enough natural resources for 200,000 people maximum, and there are 8 million people living there today. The difference is engineering ingenuity of the first order. The idea of a sense of limits does not make any sense here. If they had been paying attention to a sense of limits, Los Angeles would not exist. They say that the only limit to growth is the human ability to dream. By the way, does that sound familiar? Where did our President grow up? In Los Angeles and the Southwest. Reagan’s vision of the world was formed by the way this part of the world works. It’s becoming an economic and cultural center, and since he’s been in the White House, I guess it’s a political center too. This area may be replacing the Foundry as No. 1. Already Phoenix is the 11th largest city in the United States, and San Jose is bigger than St. Louis, which illustrates the population and power shift we are talking about.

ECOTOPIA

Ecotopia, the thin, Chile-like strip, is the one place in the West with enough of everything. Those mountains trap the rain, yielding a completely different kind of western civilization than the ones which surround it. It is the only place with enough water, so you end up with this small-is-beautiful, growth-may-be-bad, don’t-“Californicate”-Oregon, as the bumper stickers say, attitude. There is a tongue-in-cheek, but it’s not all that tongue-in-cheek, organization called the Lesser Seattle Chamber of Commerce. They think that the only logical way to get into the 21st century is to have less growth, fewer cars, less industry. It’s a completely different way of looking at things from the way of the Southwest, and that is why we have clashes between these civilizations.

EMPTY QUARTER

The Empty Quarter wasn’t named derogatorily. There is a region of Saudi Arabia called the Rub’ al Khali, and this is what the Empty Quarter was named for. It is very dry; water is a constant preoccupation; it is very fragile. This is a place where you can still see the wagon ruts of the Oregon Trail 100 years after the wagons went through. It’s incredibly rich in energy resources. It has dozens of times more energy than the Persian Gulf will ever dream of. And it is, in fact, very empty. Very few people live here, and as a result it is politically powerless. This is the last “colony” of the nine nations. The idea is that we are going to chew this up and spit it out

to get us into the next century. But there is one hitch. This is also the place that has the last great stretches of wilderness and quality-one air; so, if we chew this up and spit it out, we can kiss the Rockies goodbye. And of course there is a political context to that too, because there are a lot of people who don't want to see that wilderness despoiled.

THE BREADBASKET

That brings me to the Breadbasket. What characterizes the Breadbasket is that it is the nation that works best in many ways. It is based on an enviable renewable economy, the most fecund agriculture that the world has ever seen. And since, of course, most people in the Breadbasket are not farmers, it is good for the Breadbasket that its industry is complementary. We're talking about firms like John Deere, Caterpillar, Cargill. This is an integrated, stable economy and it is not likely to change any time soon. The other feature of the Breadbasket is that it is the ratifier of social change in this continent. I think Nixon was right about one thing; it is tremendously important whether ideas play in Peoria. Things like opposition to the Vietnam War or being in favor of casual sex are just kinky regional ideas from New England or southern California until they play in the Breadbasket.

Why is Kansas City the capital of this nation? Take a look at the options. First of all, Chicago is the capital of nothing since the Midwest doesn't exist.

Basically, Chicago is best understood as a Foundry town. It has a lot of the decline and industrialization problems and overcrowding and minority problems that are typical of the Foundry. It is an important city, but it can best be understood as a border town between trade and ideas, between the Breadbasket and the Foundry. Border towns can be just as important as capitals. That is the way to understand Chicago.

St. Louis can't be the capital of the Breadbasket because, first of all, it is a border town between Dixie and the Breadbasket. This is the place where a lot of cultural attitudes change between the South and the Plains. Second, it is somewhat of an outpost for the Foundry-like problems. And third, Missouri is such a mixed-up place that even the Federal Reserve recognizes that it isn't one place and has a capital in both St. Louis and Kansas City.

So the only real competition we are left with is Minneapolis. It is not unusual to have a two-city competition. We see it all over North America. We see New York-Chicago, Houston-Dallas, Los Angeles-San Francisco, Anchorage-Fairbanks. So the question then is, why not Minneapolis? I picked Kansas City for several reasons. The first is its sheer centrality. It is not that far from the exact center of the continent. More important, in the last century, if you had drawn a line between New York and San Francisco and had figured out where in mid-America you were going to make your fortune, clearly you would not have picked 400 miles northwest of Chicago, especially if you had experienced its winter. You would have realized that Kansas City or someplace like it was going to be the place to make your fame and fortune.

The second reason for picking Kansas City is that its economic strength is so reflective of this Breadbasket nation. This is a city which has farms within the city limits. At the same time, as someone has said, you manufacture everything here except ships and cigarettes. This is the kind of diversity that we are looking for in a Breadbasket capital.

But for me, more important than the statistics is the way Kansas City reflects a certain bedrock philosophy. This is the most important reason for its selection. Let me try to explain what I mean by that. There are certain holders of the cultural mirrors, like Harold Ross, who used

to be the editor of *The New Yorker*. He made it abundantly clear that he had little use for the “old lady from Dubuque.” As a result, a lot of people in the Breadbasket have developed a certain defensiveness. They think this is the best place in the world to live. But the Breadbasket is by no means parochial. They’ve been internationalists all along. And there is a lot of truth to that.

First of all, this is a great center of learning, with all the land grant universities. This chain of land grant universities is unmatched in educational achievements for everyone. And there is one of the most sophisticated senses of international interdependence here, for two reasons. First, everyone here knows where the Minuteman bases and silos are even if Easterners and Westerners don’t. And on the brighter side, they also know that the weather over Siberia or the political climate in the Middle East is going to have an immediate impact on the Breadbasket. When you see that the Soviet Union is going into its third straight bad harvest, you know that means better vacations, more John Deere equipment, more jobs for union members, more activity for the Fed. What happens in Siberia is almost as important here as what happens in Washington.

Finally, what it boils down to is that Kansas City is the capital because of the nature of its soul. I want to quote from the terrific book *Missouri: Faces and Places*, with photos by Wes Lyle and text by John Hall. Hall writes about Kansas City,

We’re the rivers and the faces and the streets and the straight lines of steel coming together. There is another city rising up from man’s imaginings. The essence of this place is the minglings of its fountains and its jazz. Kansas City is on the edge of the prairie, looking off into the future from different beginnings. It has its own particular sound and light.

And that’s why it is the capital of the Breadbasket.

Now, what does the future hold? I see increased stability. I don’t see any roller coaster rides for the Breadbasket, which of course is appropriate. If you want roller coaster rides, don’t come to the Plains. You are not going to have the decline of the Foundry because of the basic strength of your economy, but you are also not going to see the boom of MexAmerica. And I think that a lot of planners here feel perfectly comfortable with this arrangement. In many ways Kansas City is far better off than the places we think of as boomtowns, like Houston or Phoenix or Denver. These places need 18 more of everything – schools, highways, water mains. They are not staying within the plan. The fact that Kansas City can say that means that Kansas City has fewer problems and ones more appropriate to its location than do the boomtowns.

There is one other intriguing possibility about the future of the Breadbasket. A colleague of mine named Dan Morgan has written a widely acclaimed book called *The Merchants of Grain*, which is probably the best book on the grain trade in existence. He and I are heretics on this issue. We have studied it, and we do not, for the life of us, understand what is wrong with the idea of a bushel of food for a barrel of crude. We do not understand what is wrong with the idea of a grain cartel. Kansas, Nebraska, and Minnesota in 1978 produced 1,261,808,230 pounds of wheat, corn, and pork a day. That’s a meal a day for Canada, the United States, and some left over for Mexico, produced by these three states. The Breadbasket area alone, not the rest of the continent, controls 18 percent of the world’s output of wheat. That compares to Saudi Arabia’s controlling 14 percent of the world’s output of oil.

There are only two explanations of why a grain cartel wouldn't work. One is that we just may be too charitable a continent; we just may be incapable of watching people starve in Bangladesh while our silos burst. The other is that American farmers are a very independent group of people who would find it hard to band together, even for the common good. So basically, I see the future of the Breadbasket as stable unless it decides to do something really exciting – like taking its future into its own hands.

In conclusion, what this nine nations is all about is that what you are looking at is a maturing continent. We are looking at a place where power, money, and influence are being dispersed. People no longer look to Washington or Los Angeles for solutions to their problems, so that in the best tradition of North America, you are seeing tough, resilient, imaginative people going after their own solutions in their own ways. And I'm very optimistic about this. I'll quote my friend Charlie Kimball in *Advertising Age* [August 31, 1981] about this:

Once Kansas Citizens looked East, to Europe or New England, for their values, but now realize the strength of our own unique agricultural heritage.

We have turned our backs on our former idols. We are not New York. We are not Boston. We are Kansas City. We have identified our specific problems and opportunities, then planned and designed for them.

And that is what is going on in each of these nine nations. Each of them is doing its own thing in its own way. I find this a tremendously reassuring point of view as we go into the 21st century. It's not that old social arrangements are dying. It's not that someone who operates differently is wrong or confused. It's just that they are operating within their own context, the way you are here.

In policy trends, there are three things that can be done. You can say, "Okay, we are all becoming different and so we are going to slug it out, north against south, east against west." This seems to be what we have decided to do right now. We have decided that we are going to slug it out, between the Empty Quarter and the Breadbasket, over mineral rights and water rights. And the Southwest is saying, "Let the Northeast slide. Who cares?" But I think that there is a better way of doing this, which is one of the reasons I wrote the book. To get into the 21st century properly, maybe we ought to understand these people and try to cooperate. The third thing you can do is to ignore it, to say that it doesn't exist; and that, I can guarantee, leads to a situation in which you can get blind-sided by events which appear to come out of nowhere. I can testify to that from my position, sitting on a news desk for 2-1/2 years and having that happen to me before I began to understand how things work.

There is also a personal level to this nine nations thing. I am really convinced that where you are from tells a lot about where you are coming from. I think people are really influenced by their surroundings, where they are, and I think ultimately that's why we are nine nations. We do have a certain dual allegiance. While we have passports that say United States or Canada or Mexico, we somehow feel some allegiance to the Plains or to South Florida or to the Northeast. That's why we are nine nations, because, basically, when we're from one and we're in it, we know we're home.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

QUESTION: What do you foresee happening if the areas you describe become more and more distinct, with more power to manipulate their own economies and political ambitions?

ANSWER: That's a real problem. I think you can understand a lot about the paralysis in Washington by understanding how things are working out this way. The irony is that you get polls that say, "What do you think of Washington?" "Oh, terrible." "What do you think of the members of Congress?" "Oh, completely out of their minds." "What do you think of your Congressional representative?" "A nice guy. Really pretty smart." So you ask, now how can this be? What's happening is that they are representing us almost too well. You wind up with a situation where you want to do something as simple as standby gasoline rationing, for example, and you can't get it through the Congress. The reason is that you have the Wyoming contingent who, in representing that area's people, thinks that the 55-mile-an-hour speed limit is nuts because, as is true for Wyoming, of the vast distances between everything. Wyoming also sits on all the oil in the world. Meanwhile, New England thinks conservation is dandy. What they think is crazy is nukes. In Dixie, they think nukes are wonderful. They spread it on their cornflakes. And there is a good reason for it. They are committed to growth, because the last thing they want to go back to is palaver, and they don't have a lot of alternatives.

Our problem is not that we don't have an energy policy, for example. Our problem is that we have nine of them up and functioning right now, and they are competing. In World War II we could have standby gasoline rationing because we could fashion a way of doing it that was fair to the Northeast and then ram it down the throats of the rest of the country. You can't do that now because of these contending forces. The only bright spot I see in this is that intuitively – I'm not a Reaganaut one way or the other – I do see some promise in the way Reagan is talking about decentralizing power and handing decisions back to localities. I don't know how in the face of this diversity you could fashion a policy down to the very last nickel and dime that would work for these nine regions and have it all come out of Washington.

QUESTION: Do you think the other extreme could happen, where you would end up with nine different political entities?

ANSWER: I'm not a secessionist. In fact, if we ever end up as nine nations, you'll have to put a statue of me up in the park, scratching my head, wondering what I've done. But I do think this is really the way things are operating right now. We ought already to be seeing new political alliances which reflect these realities. For example, if you look at the 1976 electoral map, you could see my map here. Basically what happened was that the Empty Quarter, MexAmerica, and Ecotopia went Republican, while Dixie, the Foundry, New England, and the Islands went for Carter. Interestingly enough, the Breadbasket was undecided. I could have predicted this because, after all, the Breadbasket is the final arbiter of social change in the continent and it couldn't make up its mind. This is why it was such a squeaker.

And in the Reagan election you can't tell much in the way of regional distinctions until you start averaging in and discounting things like fringe candidates. Then you discover that the only place in the West that was very close to going for Carter was, in fact, the Pacific Northwest.

QUESTION: You see a lot of people in Wyoming and Montana putting enormous taxes on their resources. What is going to happen to the have-not states?

ANSWER: I'm sympathetic to states like Montana and their 30 percent severance coal tax. They have seen what has happened in the last century to resources like copper in Butte, Montana. There, enormous wealth was taken out of their hills and the people of Montana had nothing to show for it. All they had were the problems. They are determined that it is not going to be that way this time. When the minerals are gone, they will have roads, schools, great universities, and art galleries, and they are going to be in the 21st century just like everybody else. This does not resolve the problem about the have-nots. One consideration is that every one of these schemes in the Intermountain West requires vast amounts of water. So, something the Breadbasket is capable of, for example, is pointing out that if they want to divert the Missouri – which is what they want to do for the oil shale – the Breadbasket will sell them all they want. One can make a lot of money selling the water which comes out of this part of the world.

The real problem that I see for the Breadbasket is the pollution associated with this energy development. You are talking about vast quantities of burned material, and the biggest problem is going to be how tall the smokestacks are in Colorado and Utah and Wyoming. The taller they are, the farther into the atmosphere they inject the pollutants. The higher they are, the farther downwind they come down; and, of course, they come downwind from the Empty Quarter to the Breadbasket. If you are talking about bringing acid rain to the most fecund agriculture the world has ever known, you are talking about a massive threat to this part of the world and, for that matter, the whole world's food chain. That's one of the things that I am more worried about than severance taxes.

QUESTION: How do you account for the fact that with all this network television, we haven't seen a greater leveling influence?

ANSWER: Basically, there was a leveling that went on when television first made its impact. But what we are seeing now is a second level of maturity in the continent. Back in the 1930's regionalism was very hot, but it was a different kind of regionalism. Back then the idea was that the Ozarks were special because they had special ways, they talked funny, and they could play basketball. What happened was that you had the introduction of interstates and McDonald's and network television and that fostered the idea that we had all become homogeneous and bland like tapioca pudding. What that was really all about was that backwater places could then gain power and influence and money, because it didn't really make any difference anymore where you were in order to get power. You didn't have to be a Boston Brahmin or a New York financier to have power. Thirty years ago it was unthinkable that you could elect a President from Atlanta, Georgia. Of course today you discover that the critical mass of power and influence and savvy is there to do that kind of thing, and that's because of this first wave of maturity, which is the ability to disperse intelligence and smarts and money. What happens after that first wave is that you hit the second wave, which is after they've got the capacity to exercise power, they start wondering, "Why should we do it the way Washington wants us to do it? We have a better idea. Why don't we do it our own way?" And that, of course, is what you are seeing all over the continent.

QUESTION: Would you say a little about Maine and its being our poorest state?

ANSWER: When you think of Maine, usually the image is of the beautiful areas along the coast and the islands. It really is God's country, with some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. But it is also true that Maine has some of the worst rural poverty that you will ever see in your life. If you get out of the groovy ski resorts in places like Vermont, for example, there is

a surefire way to tell the locals from the immigrants. Not one of the locals has good teeth. That's an eloquent statement about a diet that is based on doughnuts and potatoes. There are people in northern Maine and New Brunswick who still pick potatoes with their hands. Cotton isn't even chopped with the hands anymore!

QUESTION: How long do you see the migration to the Sunbelt lasting, and what would this tie-in be?

ANSWER: Basically, the biggest limit to growth in the West is water. In most places like the front ranges of the Rockies where Denver is, you are relatively lucky. There are four things you can do with water. You can either do agriculture or do industry, you can build cities with swimming pools and toilets, or you can leave it right where it is and build wildernesses. In places like the front range of the Rockies, you are relatively lucky because you can pick three out of these four futures. In some places like Lynndyl, Utah, it is so dry that you can only pick one out of four. In eastern Colorado, where you have the choice of wilderness, agriculture, industrialization, or cities, probably what is going to go first is agriculture because it just can't pay. That is one of the real threats to the way of life west of the 100th meridian. Am I going to bet against continued growth in this part of the world? No. Basically, people who would bet against that have been losing money for a long time.

You've seen the central Arizona project, where water was taken hundreds of miles from the Owens Valley to flood a lake. I've met growers in the central valley of California, the San Joaquin Valley, who are quite seriously talking about diverting the Yukon River. On the face of it, is this nuts? Am I going to bet against it? With their track records, not any time soon.

The thing about the Northeast which is hemorrhaging the worst is that it lost 17 members of Congress in the 1980 census, seats going to the South and West. But I am less pessimistic about that than are a lot of people I meet in places like Cleveland. They see just a straight downhill curve, which I don't think is going to happen. What is going to happen is just like what happened in the Northeast, which used to be a center of power and influence. It declined, the textile mills left, and, finally, they got to the point where everything that could go wrong already had. They leveled out, and now their future is actually looking bright in that they are not undergoing decline the way the Foundry is. They are looking to export ideas and culture from the universities and educational centers that exist because of the preincome tax days. And now, of course, the Merrimack Valley in Lowell, Massachusetts, is really a boomtown in terms of the semiconductor industry, which comes from all these smart people being here. So I think the Foundry is going to do the same thing. It will level off, and then everyone will discover that there is a lot of water in those Great Lakes and maybe we ought to locate some industry there.

QUESTION: Does this lead to a leveling of all these different nations? Or, will they become more solidly entrenched?

ANSWER: Basically, if you are looking at a mature continent, it's just like a mature product, like Coca-Cola. If you are the creature from Mars and you are taken all over North America to try to figure out how you are going to allocate jobs and industry, you would not logically, by anybody's standards, stick 30 percent of the work force in the Northeast between New York and Chicago and Cincinnati and Toronto. The reason they are there is because of a number of well-known historical accidents, and they stayed there for reasons like, it's handy to have water to move steel around with. Now people are noticing that power is dispersed and that

you can logically pick up and move to Phoenix, even though you will be in a desert. So, you are seeing some of this shifting, and I think the maturing process does involve some shaking up.

For example, 30 years ago, Houston could not have existed as a world capital. No air conditioning. Houston could not exist until it was possible to air condition your car, your garage, your baseball stadium, your bar, your office, and everything else. Now who knows what is going to happen in the 21st century; whether there might not be something similar. The air conditioning revolution is one of the least thought about social revolutions in the world. Politically, it's messed up our lives in Washington a lot because it means that Congress can stay there all summer long and do no end of damage. Before, they had to leave, because the city is a semi-drained swamp.

I think I've drawn a pretty good map of how things will be looking into the 21st century or at least for the next 20 years. What this map does is anticipate the news, and the news, as someone once said, is the first rough draft of history. So, in some ways I was in the unnerving position when I was writing the book of saying something that would be more true when you read it than when I wrote it.

QUESTION: What about the regional commissions of the Department of Commerce?

ANSWER: In the case of the Appalachian Regional Commission, they have poured a heck of lot of money into the Appalachias. I'm not as familiar with the Ozarks Regional Action Planning Commission, but the Appalachian Commission was the granddaddy of them all. In terms of pork-barrel bucks, that was a very successful – if that's how you measure success – regional commission. Basically I view those regional commissions as pork-barrel operations. And there is nothing wrong with that. Political is what we are in this world. In a lot of places like the Ozarks and Appalachia, God knows they needed the money. They had to figure out a way of doing this. The regional commissions as such don't strike me as being reflective of that kind of reality. I'm talking about things like WESTPO, which is the Western Governors' Policy Office. It could be the government of the Empty Quarter. It does not include Oregon or Washington or California, but it does include Alaska, which is an eloquent description of the new realities I am talking about here. The sparsely settled places are facing the most disparate assault on their ways and means that we have ever seen. So what happens is that the governors, who are wanting to keep their prerogatives just where they are, have bound together so that their voices are louder. They are all sharing the same problems, which is this assault on the Intermountain West.

QUESTION: What has been the reaction in Canada to your thesis?

ANSWER: I don't know what it takes to get those people excited. Actually, I was more pleased with the review in *Le Devoir*, which is the kind-of *New York Times* of Montreal. They said, "Well, he's not Quebecois and so he doesn't really understand, but for an American, he's not so . . ." That kind of qualified review meant more to me than the positive review in the *New York Times*.

QUESTION: I think you said in your book that if this country had been settled from west to east, Maine would still be uninhabited.

ANSWER: I've put a lot of thought into that. What would have happened if the Japanese had gotten here first, instead of the Europeans? The first thing that would have happened is that the Japanese would have walked across 1,500 miles of desert, and by the time they had gotten out to the midcontinent and the East, they would have become rain worshipers. They would have

been saying, “Look at all this water! It just falls from the sky” – instead of being sun worshipers the way we are now.

The other thing is that there is some question whether there would be anyone in New England because, first of all, the land is rock. Second, it is at a 45-degree tilt to the horizontal. The standing joke in Vermont is that they are going to design cows with the right side leg two feet shorter than the left leg so that they can negotiate their pastures. All New England has is just achingly beautiful countryside and a lot of pre-income tax endowed cultural and educational institutions which now make it so attractive that people stay and are willing to accept starvation wages because they can’t imagine living in some place less civilized, as they pick up their food stamps.

QUESTION: You damned Dallas by omission. Would you like to deal with Dallas at all?

ANSWER: I cut the boundary between the Breadbasket and Dixie right down Runway 17 Left at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport. Basically, I consider Fort Worth to be a part of this colorful tradition of north Texas with Breadbasket influences, the cattle influences. Dallas historically has always been where the South peters out. This is where the railroad ended. And that is why I have it marginally in Dixie.

But if I were to be really candid, what I would be talking about is one of the most interesting triangles in the continent, the one between Dallas-Fort Worth in the north, Houston in the southeast, and San Antonio to the west. These three are among the 10 largest cities in America. And there is a great battle going on for who is going to be the dominating influence in this triangle. San Antonio is clearly MexAmerica. This is a majority Hispanic town. It has just elected Henry Cisneros mayor. He is one of the tallest Mexicans in the world, also Harvard educated.

Dallas-Fort Worth has some of the charm so that you could marginally consider it Dixie, but it also has this cheerful arrogance that marks it to a certain extent Breadbasket. Don’t stone me. And there is Houston, where you have the Dixie influence in that there is still a very large black minority. In Houston, you can find shacks that are right in the shadow of some of the high-rises. And of course you also have the Hispanic influence. And so these three nations – the Breadbasket, Dixie, and are warring over this important triangle. To be perfectly honest, I’m not sure who is winning.

QUESTION: It occurs to me that you might be able to predict some population trends from the 1980 census. Can you see them?

ANSWER: When I was writing the book, it was before the 1980 census came out, and I predicted that 11 Congressional seats would be lost by the Northeast to the South and to the West. I thought, “Think of that, 11 members of Congress.” As it turned out, when the figures came out, they had lost 17. Every one of the estimates – and I was able to catch them on page proofs – every one of the estimates that I made in terms of change and growth and transfer of influence I had estimated too conservatively. It was all happening faster than I suspected.

There are a couple of myths. People talk about people pouring out of the Foundry and all that stuff. That’s not, strictly speaking, true. The Foundry has not been losing population overall. Some of the cities – Detroit and the South Bronx, yes – but basically it’s stable. In the Southwest and the Southeast, that’s where you are seeing the staggering growth rates. On the first cut of the census, they discovered that they had missed three subdivisions, two trailer parks, and a church

because these weren't there six months the before. That kind of growth is happening in the Southwest. And especially now in the Intermountain West, in little towns like Evanston, Wyoming. This is where the Overthrust Belt is, where the oil play is happening.

QUESTION: How did you choose Kansas City over Minneapolis as capital of the Breadbasket?

ANSWER: While Cargill and the grain traders and General Foods are in Minneapolis, it's a close call, granted. You do have this one-two situation. I was doing it on several parameters, not just strictly on grain. The Breadbasket is, of course, not just farms. It is manufacturing centers, it's trade centers, distribution networks. It's TWA being here, and AT&T being here. I'm also talking about emotionally. Minneapolis doesn't strike me as being emotionally in tune with the sense that the Breadbasket is the ratifier. I find Kansas City more down to earth than Minneapolis – in its people, in the way it operates.

Take the fact that Hallmark is here, for example. What really struck me is that these people have made a big point in all their work to say Hallmark of Kansas City. They were telling me that they don't go after the gay market, for example, but if you are a liberated gay who wants to communicate with another one, if you have something you want to express that is very personal and emotional, then you can find a card that will match any situation. The implication is that Hallmark knows who we are and where we are coming from and has known for a long, long time. And they are from Kansas City.

QUESTION: Do you think emotions rather than corporations shape these boundaries?

ANSWER: It's a combination. Let me give you an example outside of this area. Next week, just north of Santa Barbara they are going to try to fire up the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant. It is on the southern edge of Ecotopia, this place which has an anti-nuke, small-is-beautiful idea. The estimation is that there are going to be 10,000 people trying to stop that plant. Now I am not pro-nuke, anti-nuke, pro-demonstration, or anti-demonstration. I'm just saying that I would be much more surprised at a low turnout than at a high turnout. And it is for emotional reasons. It is not just a nuclear stand. It is not just anti-nuke. They are anti a whole range of 21st century options that they see as being essentially destructive. They see a lot of the growth ethic, the anything-is-possible ethic, as being destructive. It's a fundamentally different concept from that in the Southwest. So, if you in fact see an enormous turnout, this will be a political fact that will have to be dealt with. It will be an economic fact that will have to be dealt with. If this plant is delayed, that is dollars and cents that will have to be dealt with. Those are very hard concrete facts, but a lot of the reason – if this happens – will be charged by emotions. What this points up is ways of doing things, ways of seeing. It is what you consider ordinary and what you consider weird. That's as important as the Cargills and the Hallmarks and the oil shale.

QUESTION: For the last four years we have been pushing Kansas City as the world's wheat capital or the agribusiness capital. We feel that is correct. Can we defend this title?

ANSWER: Be my guest.



JOEL GARREAU. A native of New England, Joel Garreau is assistant national editor of *The Washington Post*, in charge of the bureaus and stringers who collect out-of-town news. Along with five reporters, two researchers, and a photographer, he was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for a series about MexAmerica, one of the nine nations. His book grew out of a widely reprinted and much debated article he wrote for *The Post* in 1979. Since that time, Garreau has traveled almost 100,000 miles throughout North America.

Joel Garreau is author of [The Nine Nations of North America](#), published in 1981 by the Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

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Midcontinent Perspectives was financed by the Kimball Fund, named for Charles N. Kimball, President of MRI from 1950 to 1975, Chairman of its Board of Trustees from 1975 to 1979, and President Emeritus until his death in 1994. Initiated in 1970, the Fund has been supported by annual contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations. Today it is the primary source of endowment income for MRI. It provides “front-end” money to start high-quality projects that might generate future research contracts of importance. It also funds public-interest projects focusing on civic or regional matters of interest.

Initiated in 1974 and continuing until 1994, the sessions of the Midcontinent Perspectives were arranged and convened by Dr. Kimball at four- to six-week intervals. Attendance was by invitation, and the audience consisted of leaders in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The lectures, in monograph form, were later distributed to several thousand individuals and institutions throughout the country who were interested in MRI and in the topics addressed.

The [Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City](#), in cooperation with MRI, has reissued the Midcontinent Perspectives Lectures in electronic format in order to make the valuable information which they contain newly accessible and to honor the creator of the series, Dr. Charles N. Kimball.