The Independents Strikes Back : The Energy Crisis of the 1970s and the Forging of a New Chapter in the Environmental History of the Oil Industry

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Abstract
This article explores the relationship between the U.S. oil industry and environmentalism in the 1970s. In doing so it pays particular attention to the independent oil industry in the U.S. and how this segment of the industry interpreted growing environmental concerns within a larger context provided by an ever-expanding federal government. Ultimately, it was the independents and not the majors that established the industry's response to environmentalism over the past half century.

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INTRODUCTION

1 On Monday morning, January 21, 1974, the Senators of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations took their seats amid a crowded room filled with television cameras and reporters. Senator Henry Jackson (D-WA), the committee's chairman, called the hearing to order. Seated before him were senior executives from the largest American oil companies: Exxon, Mobil, Gulf, Texaco, Amoco, Standard Oil of California (later renamed Chevron) and the American branch of Shell.

2 Four months after the initiation of an oil embargo by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) that disrupted the international oil markets, Senator Jackson set the tone by beginning the hearing not with a series of questions, but a set of demands.

> The American people want to know if there is an oil shortage.
> The American people want to know why the prices of home heating oil and gasoline have doubled when the companies report record high inventories of these stocks.
> The American people want to know whether oil tankers are anchored offshore waiting for a price increase or available storage before they unload.
> The American people want to know whether major oil companies are sitting on shut-in wells and hoarding production in hidden tanks at abandoned service stations.
> The American people want to know why oil companies are making soaring profits at a time when the Government contends that only costs of production are allowed to be passed through to the consumer.
> The American people want to know if this so-called energy crisis is only a pretext, a cover to eliminate the major source of price competition- the independents, to raise prices, to repeal environmental laws, and to force adoption of new tax subsidies.[1]

The energy crisis is remembered in the United States as an oil crisis characterized by rising prices and motorists anxiously waiting in long gasoline lines. Following conventional memory much of the existing historical scholarship focuses on the diplomatic challenges, economic dislocation, policy innovations and political changes produced by the crisis.[2] 3

However, an environmental history of the energy crisis prompts an entirely different set of questions. One such question: how did the energy crisis shape the oil industry's relationship to environmentalism? This paper will argue that the energy crisis set and intensified the oil industry's opposition to environmentalism. To focus on the green technologies that may have fallen out of the industry's research labs, or the odd oil company executive sympathetic to environmentalism is to miss the bigger picture: in the United States, over the past forty-five years, the oil industry is the largest, most organized, most effective opposition to environmentalism. Understanding that opposition must first begin with an examination of the oil industry. 4

THE INDEPENDENT OIL INDUSTRY

In the public imagination the oil industry is characterized as a monolithic entity comprised of large vertically integrated international oil companies capable of engaging in conspiracies (i.e. "Big Oil"). This point was most famously advanced by the Italian businessman Enrico Mattei who in the 1950s labelled these companies: the seven sisters. They were Exxon, Mobil, Chevron, 5

1 U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, *Current Energy Shortages Oversight Series, The Major Oil Companies: Hearing before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 113-114.

2 For recent examples see: Bini et al., *Oil Shock: The 1973 Crisis and its Economic Legacy*; Garavini, *The Rise and Fall of OPEC in the Twentieth Century*; Graf, *Oil and Sovereignty: Petro-Knowledge and Energy Policy in the United States and Western Europe in the 1970s*; Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s*; Lifset ed., *American Energy Policy in the 1970s*; Wellum, *Energizing Neoliberalism: The 1970s Energy Crisis and the Making of Modern America*; on the energy crisis as more than an oil crisis see Hakes, *Energy Crises: Nixon, Ford, Carter and Hard Choices in the 1970s*; and Lifset, "A New Understanding of the American Energy Crisis of the 1970s".

Texaco, Gulf, BP and Shell. Five of these companies are American with three (Exxon, Mobil and Chevron) descending directly from the break-up of Standard Oil by the U.S. government in 1911. By applying this metaphor Mattei argued that not unlike family members, they don't effectively engage in arm's length negotiations or competition.[3]

6 While these companies, or "majors" as they are often referred to in the U.S., have long held dominant positions in the production, transportation and refining of oil, the U.S. oil industry has always included a large and vibrant "independent" sector. Independent oil companies, first so named because they were not part of Standard Oil, thrived throughout the 20th century under the umbrella of protection afforded by the strict application of anti-trust laws in states with considerable oil reserves. Indeed, well into the 20th century, many of the international majors were effectively barred from openly doing business in Texas and Oklahoma.[4] The existence of the independents is also made possible by the private ownership of subsoil mineral rights in the United States. In most countries the state owns the subsoil mineral rights. As a result, virtually every significant oil producing country in the world boasts a state-owned oil company. The United States does not.[5]

7 While two independents grew to become vertically integrated international majors (Gulf and Texaco which were later acquired by Chevron in 1984 and 2000), most remained far smaller focusing on one or two activities, typically centered in the "upstream" part of the business (exploration and production). While there were seven sisters, there exist thousands of independents. And while the majors with their large overseas investments exerted influence over the State Department and intelligence services, the independents almost exclusively focused on US domestic oil and gas production, were more influential with Congress and within American politics.[6] There is also a geographical profile to the independents. A large number are headquartered in the "oil patch" or mid-continent oil field: a stretch of territory in the United States encompassing Texas, New Mexico, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Kansas. The heart of the oil patch consists of a string of cities that run from Tulsa in the north down through Oklahoma City, Dallas and Houston.[7] To describe the oil industry in the United States as "Big Oil," as nothing more than the large vertically integrated international majors, headquartered in New York (Mobil until 1987, Exxon until 1989) or San Francisco (Chevron until 2025) is to miss an important and arguably more influential component of the industry.[8] By the late 1970s, independents drilled eighty percent of all the oil wells in the US, they accounted for one-fourth of US oil production and one-third of US natural gas production. In any given year they drilled eighty to ninety percent of all wildcat

3 See Sampson, *The Seven Sisters: The Great Oil Companies and the World They Made*; Yergin; *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power,* 513.

4 The application of anti-trust laws were uneven as some majors successfully operated in the oil patch through companies with different names and some independents grew to become majors. See Pratt, "The Petroleum Industry in Transition: Antitrust and the Decline of Monopoly Control in Oil"; Singer, *Broken Trusts: The Texas Attorney General Versus The Oil Industry, 1889-1909*.

5 The Roosevelt administration briefly thought about a state-owned Petroleum Reserve Corporation which would buy options on foreign oil produced by American firms. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes even imagined that it would acquire managerial control of foreign operating companies (i.e. ARAMCO). See Randall, "Harold Ickes and United States Foreign Petroleum Policy Planning, 1939-1945"; Stoff, *Oil, War, and American Security*, 73-88.

6 Dochuk traces the connections between the majors, Arabists and the Department of State and CIA. See Dochuk, *Anointed With Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America*, 301. See also Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking On The Saudi Oil Frontier*; and Painter, *Private Power And Public Policy: Multinational Oil Corporations And U.S. Foreign Policy 1941-1954*.

7 It should be noted that California was cut off by the Rocky Mountains from midwestern and east coast markets, and yet it was the largest oil producing state from 1914 to 1936 and the largest consumer of primary petroleum products until 1968. Independent oil companies in California emerged without anti-trust protection and were opposed to prorationing throughout the 1930s. California's isolation produced a different set of economic and political conditions. See Sabin, *Crude Politics: The California Oil Market 1900-1940*.

8 In the 21st century the largest oil companies by almost any measurably metric are state owned.

wells and found half the oil and gas discovered.[9] In 1957 there were 20,000 independent oil companies in the United States. By 1973, following a long period of cheap oil, there were 10,000.[10]

8 This influence is clearly visible in the now forgotten policies of pro-rationing and the oil import quota. When oil prices crashed in the Great Depression of the 1930s the independent oil industry faced an existential crisis. Under the existing legal regime (known as the rule of capture), a company only owned the oil it brought above ground. In a field with several different company's producing oil, to stop production was to hand that oil to one's competitor. Yet this rendered oil production insensitive to the price signal of the market, which with the decline in demand in the 1930s resulted in oil being sold for less than the cost of its production. The independent oil industry survived the Great Depression because a majority of independents in the 1930s successfully lobbied the government to restrict production to match projected demand thereby placing a floor beneath domestic US oil prices; this was known as pro-rationing.[11] As a result, oil prices in the United States were higher than anywhere else in the world. After World War II, the majors responded by importing oil produced in the Middle East into the United States thereby taking market share from the independents. The independents were outraged. Their oil production was restricted to increase oil prices and secure the viability of an independent oil industry. By importing cheaper foreign oil, the majors were undercutting their market share and financially benefitting from their sacrifice. The government responded with a series of voluntary agreements with the majors before imposing an oil import quota in 1959. The majors were now restricted in the amount of oil they were allowed to import into the United States. This all became ancient history when US consumption outpaced domestic production and pro-rationing was ended in March 1972.[12] The floor beneath oil prices was replaced with a ceiling when President Nixon imposed a moratorium on all wages and prices in August of 1971. After ninety days President Nixon lifted price controls on all goods, except for oil; price controls on oil lasted for the remainder of the decade.[13]

9 To be sure, there was always a degree of heterogeneity within the ranks of the independent oil industry (how could there not be in an industry sector comprising thousands of companies?). Some independents fought against pro-rationing on ideological grounds.[14] A few independents invested in overseas oil production (i.e. Occidental Petroleum). And historians, among others, have noted that the relationship between independents and majors were not always contentious, they could also be symbiotic, with the majors essentially supplying capital by purchasing the wells in new fields discovered by risk-taking independents.[15] Many independent oil men got their start in the business working for a major; much of the oil they discovered made its way into the hands of the majors. One magazine writer described the relationship between independents and majors as similar to that of "the old, pre-farm-club minor leagues of baseball, Off-Off-Broadway in the theater, or state legislatures in national politics- they produce many of the discoveries that keep the large dominant

9 "Blow Aimed at Majors Hurt Independents, Too".

10 Lemann, "Independent Oilman: Why They Take the Risks".

11 Nash, *United States Oil Policy, 1890-1964*, 113-156; While the opposition to pro-rationing was led by independents so was the effort to realize pro-ratioing. Wirt Franklin, President of the IPAA supported pro-rationing. E.W. Marland, a former independent oil man and member of Congress in the early 1930s supported pro-rationing; there was a deep bench of independents leading the pro-rationing effort. John Clark writes, "a large group of independents, termed the 'majority independents' by Rene de V. Williamson and best represented by the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA), actively supported Icke's campaign for direct federal controls". Clark, *Energy and the Federal Government: Fossil Fuel Policies, 1900-1946*, 223.

12 Vietor, *Energy Policy in America Since 1945*, 91-135.

13 Waterhouse, "Mobilizing for the Market: Organized Business, Wage-Price Controls, and the Politics of Inflation, 1971-1974"; there is a longer, more complicated story on how and why the federal government placed price controls on natural gas. See Blanchard, *The Extraction State*, 103-171.

14 See Malavis, *Bless the Pure and Humble: Texas Lawyers and Oil Regulation, 1919-1936*.

15 See Hinton and Olien, *Oil In Texas: The Gusher Age, 1895-1945*; Hinton and Olien, *Wildcatters: Texas Independent Oilmen*.

institutions strong."[16] And yet in the 1970s, after pro-rationing and the oil import quota was gone there still existed issues which fostered important divisions between the independents and majors.[17] Speaking at the Independent Petroleum Association of America's annual 1979 meeting in Reno, Nevada, Lloyd Unsell, the IPAA's Executive Vice-President declared:

> I think the goals of this association are unrelated to what the majors do or don't do...there is a basic conflict of interests between what is good for our members and what is good for the Seven Sisters. They are global, worldwide corporations. Exxon, for example, the last time I had an accounting, operates in 105 countries. And, I'm afraid, the political community tends to judge what should be done affecting the domestic oil and gas producing industry based on the earnings and incomes of these large corporations...their interests are separate and entirely distinct from those of independent, domestic petroleum producers.[18]

10 The larger point is this: while the majors could exert their political influence to secure favorable tax treatments (i.e. a foreign tax credit), the influence of the independents was critical to pulling the domestic oil market away from its laissez-faire capitalistic moorings for an entire generation.[19] And when the interests of the majors and independents clashed, as they did on the issue of oil imports, the independents prevailed.

11 When Senator Jackson called the oil industry into the dock at that hearing in January of 1974 it was the majors, not the independents, who were called to testify. It was the majors who imported oil from the Middle East and it was the majors who never possessed the political muscle enjoyed by the independents.

GROWING ENVIRONMENTAL CONCIOUSNESS

Senator Jackson was not alone. His colleagues also accused the oil company executives of misleading the public, creating a false crisis, obtaining 'unconscionable profits' and of disloyalty for not supplying the United States Armed services. For these oil industry leaders, the answers to Senator Jackson's questions were simple and straightforward. Yes, there were real shortages of oil. This began to materialize in 1972 but was rendered far worse and more visible by the OAPEC embargo. These shortages were produced by a growing demand coupled with their difficulty in growing the supply. No, they were not hoarding oil. In an early sign of what was to come, Exxon blamed environmentalism for the energy crisis. A Vice-President for Exxon testified that environmental laws and regulations: required consumers to switch from coal to oil, reduced automobile fuel efficiency and slowed the construction of nuclear power plants. At the same time inadequate economic incentives (a reference to price controls) and "environmental obstructions" disincentivized new oil production. Environmentalism worked to raise oil demand and lower oil supply. In this understanding of the energy crisis the oil embargo created an unexpected shock. But it shocked a system stressed by environmentalism.[20] 12

The oil company executives who believed they were there to discuss oil supply and inventory problems, left the hearing angry, feeling as though they had been subjected to a "criminal trial."[21] The executives appeared genuinely surprised that Senator Jackson, long considered an industry ally and well informed on energy issues, began the hearings by giving credibility to a series of conspiracy theories regarding the companies role in the economic dislocation clearly caused, in their minds, by OAPEC. 13

16 Lemann.

17 In the 1970s these issues included the Natural Gas Policy Act (1978), repeal of the depletion allowance, and legislative proposals to eliminate the lease lottery system and replace it with competitive bidding for leases on federal land among others.

18 Gouldy, "Reno" 8.

19 US oil companies gained the ability to deduct fifty percent of their foreign taxes from their US tax liabilities. See Blair, *The Control of Oil*, 193-204.

20 U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, *Current Energy Shortages Oversight Series*, 142.

21 Smith, "Angered Oil Men Dispute Charges of Senate Critics".

Senator Jackson was an astute politician with Presidential ambitions. The public anger over the gasoline lines and increasing energy prices was directed at the Middle Eastern oil producers, western oil companies and the government. By attacking the industry, Jackson was getting ahead of the issue and developing the political capital to place himself in a stronger position to broker the reforms that might land him the credit for solving the energy crisis.[22] And in the 1970s, the energy crisis put everything up for grabs. The oil industry had to worry about a windfall profits tax, the imposition of new price controls limiting the wholesale price of domestically sold oil, the loss of the depletion allowance (an important tax break) and new environmental regulations. In a sign that the prevailing winds of public opinion did not favor the industry, President Nixon (hardly a critic of corporate America), in a special message to Congress issued the day before, asked for new legislation to end the industry's foreign tax credit.[23]

14 Even before the OAPEC embargo and resulting problems, the reputation of the industry suffered from a growing environmental consciousness which identified the oil industry as a principal cause of the nation's environmental problems. Vertically integrated oil companies engage in five activities: exploration, production, transportation, refining, and marketing. Three of these activities (production, transportation, and refining) have historically produced significant air and water pollution.[24] The consumption of oil in homes and apartment buildings that burn it to produce heat or as gasoline in automobiles also produces air pollution. Between Rachel Carson who drew new attention to how pollution was endangering human life in *Silent Spring* (1962) and the Club of Rome which argued that present growth trends were economically and ecologically unsustainable in the *Limits to Growth* (1972), an environmental consciousness reshaped, for a time, American law, politics and culture.[25]

15 Complementing these critiques, several events in the 1960s and early 1970s galvanized environmental consciousness while implicating the oil industry. In January 1969 a blowout at an offshore oil platform off the coast of Santa Barbara spilled an estimated 100,000 barrels of oil in a ten-day period making it, at the time, the largest oil spill in U.S. waters.[26] In June of 1969 a spark from a passing railroad car ignited an oil slick on the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio. This was not the first fire on the river, lax pollution control efforts had led to thirteen fires on the river since 1868. As a result, the fire initially did not attract much attention. But an article in *Time* magazine about America's polluted rivers framed the incident as an environmental catastrophe. *Time* described the river as "chocolate-brown, oily, bubbling with subsurface gases, it oozes rather than flows. 'Anyone who falls into the Cuyahoga does not drown,' Cleveland's citizens joke grimly. 'He decays.'"[27] Now seen as an environmental catastrophe, the oil industry could be blamed for setting the nation's rivers on fire.

16 Environmentalism implicated more than the problems with oil production, it also cast the *consumption* of oil and oil related products in a new more critical light. Indeed, oil is critical to the construction of what came to be seen as a modern western lifestyle. Any critique of the environmental consequences of that lifestyle was bound to implicate oil. Let's look at the most famous lines in John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, a 1958 effort to set a liberal agenda for the 1960s:

22 According to Jackson's biographer, this strategy backfired see Kaufman, *Henry M. Jackson: A Life in Politics*, 308.
23 The credit allowed all foreign taxes paid by the industry to be credited against US taxes owed. Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on the Energy Crisis", 27; on the depletion allowance see Shulman, "The Making of a Tax Break: The Oil Depletion Allowance, Scientific Taxation, and Natural Resources Policy in the Early 20th Century."
24 This pollution did not go unnoticed in the past. See Pratt, *Black Waters: Responses to America's First Oil Pollution Crisis*.
25 Carson, *Silent Spring*; Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*; there is a large scholarship on the emergence of environmentalism, for one example see Lifset, *Storm King Mountain and The Emergence of Modern American Environmentalism*.
26 See Spezio, *Slick Policy: Environmental and Science Policy in the Aftermath of the Santa Barbara Oil Spill*.
27 "Cities: the price of optimism".

> The family which takes its mauve and cerise, air-conditioned, power-steered, and power-braked automobile out for a tour passes through cities that are badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted buildings, billboards, and posts for wires that should long since have been put underground...They picnic on exquisitely packaged food from a portable icebox by a polluted stream and go on to spend the night at a park which is a menace to public health and morals. Just before dozing off on an air mattress, beneath a nylon tent, amid the stench of decaying refuse, they may reflect vaguely on the curious unevenness of their blessings. Is this, indeed, the American genius?[28]

17 Galbraith was not an environmentalist (or even a conservationist) but it's not hard to notice the environmental critique. And beneath that critique is the impact of a consumerism made possible by oil: the automobile, the packaged food (with its plastic), the polluted stream, the nylon tent. This would not go unnoticed by a new generation. Oil, cars and the pollution they created became a particular focus during the first Earth Day in 1970.[29]

18 In Mike Nichols 1967 classic film "The Graduate," Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) is at a cocktail party his parents throw celebrating his college graduation when he is taken aside by a family friend who says, "I have one word of advice for you. Just one word. Plastics.... there is a great future in plastics. Will you think about it?" To an older generation, plastics were the miracle product made possible by oil. To baby boomers, they were cheap, sterile, and ugly. Environmentalism recast the blessings of oil as something more sinister.[30]

19 All of this contributed to a change in public opinion. If oil was generally recognized as helping the United States and its allies win World War One and Two (a member of the British War Cabinet, Earl Curzon famously remarked in 1918 that the allies, "floated to victory on a wave of oil"), by the 1970s oil was increasingly implicated as an environmental pollutant.[31] And a growing percentage of the public found credible the most fantastic conspiracy theories about the industry's willingness to manufacture a crisis that would cripple the nation; in public opinion polling no other group or institution was cited more frequently as responsible for the oil crisis. In the late 1970s most Americans opposed giving oil companies tax breaks and a large majority favored a windfall profits tax.[32]

20 If oil abundance was a source of pride, patriotism, and optimism for the industry in the first half of the 20th century then scarcity invoked a much different reaction. In 1956 the Shell Oil geophysicist M. King Hubbert famously predicted the U.S. would reach peak oil production in 1969. When this came to pass in 1970 it lent credibility to predictions that the rest of the world would soon follow.[33] President Jimmy Carter crafted a national energy plan that, for the first time, emphasized conservation while displaying an interest in developing alternative forms of energy. These features were not justified by the environmental benefits they would produce; they were viewed as a necessity. At a press conference in April 1977, President Carter announced that a classified CIA study predicted sharp reductions in Soviet oil production (turning the Soviet Union into a net oil importer); that new production from Alaska and the North Sea would only help for a few years; and that the Saudi's would be unwilling or unable to make

28 Galbraith, *The Affluent* Society, 253; for greater context see Rome, "Give Earth a Chance": The Environmental Movement and the Sixties".

29 See Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day: How a 1970 Teach-In Unexpectedly Made the First Green Generation.*

30 *The Graduate*, directed by Mike Nichols (United Artists, 1967).

31 "'Floated To Victory On A Wave Of Oil'" ; Yergin, 183, 328-88.

32 Nivola, *The Politics of Energy* Conservation, 35-36; the idea that the energy crisis was the result, in part, of an industry conspiracy has a long history. For example see Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power In The Age of Oil*; for a polemic on how a moral critique levelled at the Standard Oil Company, survived its dissolution in 1911 and came to be applied to the entire industry see Olien et al., *Oil & Ideology: The Cultural Creation of the American Petroleum Industry.*

33 For a history of the peak oil debate see Priest, "Hubbert's Peak: The Great Debate over the End of Oil".

up the difference.[34] The President of the United States was convinced that the world was running out of oil, with the possibility of running out of all proven reserves by the end of the 1980s.

21 If there is a moment in modern American history where the oil industry was it lowest ebb of influence, respect, and social capital, this is it.[35] The irony is that it was this moment when the oil industry was imagined in the wider culture as deftly manipulating events to its own advantage at the expense of the public. Yet the company's themselves never felt more powerless, buffeted between the rising producer nationalism in the Middle East and the anger of western publics at the higher prices, gasoline lines and environmental pollution.[36]

22 And it was at this moment where we see a significant expansion of environmental law and policy. Between 1969 and 1981 the U.S. Congress passed more than forty environmental laws. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) required an environmental impact statement before any part of the federal government could issue a permit that would result in a change to the landscape. The Clean Air Act (1970) handed the newly created Environmental Protection Agency authority to establish and enforce stricter air quality standards for several pollutants discharged by refineries.[37] The Clean Water Act (1972) regulated discharges into the nation's rivers and lakes.[38] The production and storage of oil commonly resulted in small (and not so small) discharges.[39] P. N. Gammelgard, Vice-President of the American Petroluem Institute testified before Congress that the oil industry spent approximately $4 billion complying with environmental laws and regulations between 1970 and 1973. Over that same period of time it was estimated that about 10% of the cost of new refineries could be attributed to complying with new environmental requirements. Gammelgard testified that environmental regulations had created extensive delays in the construction of new refineries and offshore exploration and production.[40] Of course, the most famous environmental delay of an oil industry project in the 1970s was the Alaskan oil pipeline. British Petroleum, Humble Oil and ARCO hoped to begin construction of an eight hundred mile pipeline in 1970 to take oil produced in northern Alaska to the port of Valdez in southern Alaska. In the spring of that year a federal judge issued an injunction stopping the project for lack of an environmental impact statement. Congress passed a bill declaring the pipeline proposal had fulfilled all the requirements of environmental law in November 1973; construction began in January with the first oil flowing in 1977. Gammelgard speculated that absent the fight over the pipeline, the energy shortages of 1973 might not have occurred.[41] Environmentalism challenged the perogatives of the oil and gas industry. The movement made it more difficult to build infrastructure by forcing the industry to reckon with new concerns and stakeholders.

It was also in this moment of weakness that the majors began to think perhaps they were more than simply oil and gas companies. Perhaps they could be energy companies? But the investments in solar and wind projects in the 1970s need to be seen in a context where all the majors were diversifying into alternative energy (and nuclear 23

34 Central Intelligence Agency, "The Impending Soviet Oil Crisis" March 1977, April 1977, PHF, Box 19, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library; Hakes, Energy Crises, 211.

35 See Lutz, "*The Formula* (1980): Corporate Villains, Synthetic Fuel, and Environmental Fantasies", 243-256.

36 See generally, Bamberg, *British Petroleum and Global Oil, 1950-1975: The Challenge of Nationalism*; Wall, *Growth in a Changing Environment: A History of Standard Oil Company (New Jersey) Exxon Corporation* 1950-1975, 812-894.

37 See Dewey, *Don't Breadth the Air: Air Pollution and US Environmental Politics, 1945-1970*.

38 See Milazzo, *Unlikely Environmentalists: Congress and Clean Water, 1945-1972*.

39 Lifset, "'Lord, We Don't Want to Hurt People,' The Decline and Fall of the American Electric Utility Industry in the 1970s", 469-471.

40 See U.S. Congress, *Hearings Before the Joint Economic Committee on The Economic Impact of Environmental Regulations*, 46.

41 While this was a common argument at the time, historians have since demonstrated that the original designs did not to take into account the challenges of moving oil through an arctic environment. See Coates, *The Trans-Alaskan Pipeline Controversy: Technology, Conservation, and the Frontier*.

and coal) as well as in business lines outside of energy. These investments were driven by enormous cash flows produced by high prices, a belief in peak oil (or at least it's possibility) and the popularity of the conglomerate model of corporate organization.[42] All of these ancillary businesses were sold off in the 1980s when oil prices declined (a pattern that repeated itself thirty years later). The benefits of diversification ran into a hard reality: when it comes to profitability, as one Shell executive put it, "there simply is no other business like the Oil business."[43]

THE INDEPENDENT OIL INDUSTRY ON ENVIRONMENTALISM

24 If the Exxon executive at Senator Jackson's hearing viewed environmentalists as misguided but well-intentioned, the view from the oil patch was less forgiving. A few quick examples will illustrate a growing anti-environmentalism bubbling up within the midcontinent region of the oil industry. In a 1975 speech to the Oklahoma Bankers Association in Tulsa, Robert E. Thomas, President and CEO of MAPCO (primarily a pipeline company) described the root causes for the "mess we have in energy...and politics." He identified an oil industry unwilling or unable to defend its economic interests as witnessed in the loss of the depletion allowance tax break and environmentalists who stood in the way of energy development. Thomas described a recent trip to Massachusetts where he encountered an unwillingness to drill off the coast. "They feel the beaches of Massachusetts and Cape Cod are sacred and could care less about the beaches of Texas and Louisiana. I told them that if they truthfully feel this way about beaches, they ought to arrive at a decision to live in splendid, isolated purity— to give up modern energy." Residents on the eastern seaboard won't allow drilling off their beaches. They don't want their coastlines "defiled" by oil refineries "all they want is the pleasure of burning energy that is produced in places like Oklahoma, Texas and Louisiana."[44] It was widely believed within the oil industry at the time that deposits of oil and natural gas existed off the east coast and could be produced if only environmentalists stepped aside.[45] The implication is that large parts of Oklahoma, Texas and Louisiana have been polluted and rendered less attractive by energy development. If attractive landscapes like Cape Cod are not willing to suffer the same than they are not entitled to the benefits of fossil fuel energy. Thomas goes on to describe his simple solution for doing away with all pollution in the environment: "every single one of us human beings should take a gun and go out and shoot ourselves tomorrow morning...and pollution would be gone." Eliminating pollution is impractical, therefore improving the environment is a goal not worth pursuing. In this formulation environmentalists can't be pragmatists; they can only be idealists and dreamers. This is usually accompanied with sympathy for the dream. Thomas explains, "I love the environment. I am a yachtsman, I love the water, I love pure water, I love pure air..." But the dream is unrealizable and therefore, should not be pursued. It's a perspective conditioned by the fact that the activities drawing the unwanted scrutiny of environmentalists are also making the speaker a fantastically wealthy individual.[46]

Horacy Spiller was a gruff, straight talking independent Austin oilman who began working in the fields as a teenager in 1919. In a 1979 profile, the 25

42 Pratt, *Exxon: Transforming Energy, 1973-2005*, 167-168.
43 Sluyterman, *Keeping Competitive in Turbulent Markets, 1973-2007: A History of Royal Dutch Shell*, 155.

44 "Oklahoma's State In Energy" Speech of Robert E. Thomas, Chairman and President, MAPCO Inc., 14 May 1975, Oklahoma Bankers Association, RD 8-T-5-5 Box 2 Folder 1, Boren Papers.
45 This was a view increasingly echoed by oil patch politicians. Governor Edwin Edwards (D-LA) opened a special session of the Louisiana legislature in November 1973 with an attack on the east: "They cannot sit on five billion barrels of oil on the Atlantic Seaboard because they are afraid it might cause some problems on the shoreline, and gleefully applaud while we puncture holes in the Gulf of Mexico and lace our fertile lands with pipelines to bring them oil." Time would reveal that this assumption was erroneous. Yet there exists a clear subtext to many of these complaints: the environment of the oil patch is being sacrificed for the benefit of consumers in the east. Bob Hamm, "We must now look to the good state of Lousiana", 14
46 Ibid.

now seventy-six year old described "government strangulation" as the industry's biggest problem. "There are too *damned many* bureaucratic operations going on...And these environmentalists- they hinder things terribly. They have now become a special interest group themselves, and are drunk with power. Everywhere you turn, look, or listen, oilmen are treated like criminals! Movie stars make anti-oil speeches, and the whole country is upset because there *is* some spillage, there *is* some waste, there *are* some accidents. But good Lord, don't they have the vaguest idea of the enormity of oil drilling in these days of fast-fading energy supplies?"[47]

26 In March 1978, Paul Stark, a consulting petroleum chemist and corrosion engineer based in Tulsa, wrote a letter to Governor David Boren (D-OK) faulting environmentalism for a shortage of "horse sense." Environmentalists hold up the Alaskan pipeline but don't protest a pipeline from Cushing, OK to Freeport, TX designed to bring in foreign oil; hence environmentalists don't really care about the environment. Oklahoma produces coal that must be shipped out of the state while more expensive coal must be imported from Wyoming because of its low sulphur content, which makes little sense since refineries already burn acid sludge with high sulphur content. The argument is that since refineries release sulphur into the environment there is no point in reducing this form of air pollution. Finally, the 55-mph speed limit "makes a law violator of everyone from the mayor to the preacher and causes a national disrespect for law and order." Speed limit laws, designed to save gasoline, are simply not going to be respected.[48]

27 In a revival of an old populist critique from the late 19th century, one constituent wrote to Governor Boren complaining that ever since the Civil War (1860-1865) the northeast has regarded the West and South "as colonies to be exploited." He describes a mercantilist relationship: the prices of products from states like Oklahoma "has been kept down to a subsistence level, while the price of manufactured articles has consistently supported a handsome style of living in the Northeast. Anything the northeast sells has built-in the price fractions for welfare, pensions, guaranteed annual wages, etc. These objectives have been achieved by various stratagems, quotas, loans, strikes, direct pricing by law etc. And all the while they ram their social experiments down our throats."[49] From the perspective of the energy producing states the country only needed to return to a greater respect for the basic tenets of capitalism, throw off price controls, eliminate environmental restrictions and the problems of energy shortages would disappear. In their darker moments, industry leaders and politicians from states like Oklahoma, entertained their own conspiracy theories. Deregulation would come after the oil and natural gas in their part of the country was depleted and new reserves were discovered off the northeastern coast of the Atlantic. This fired up some of the energy behind the anger found in bumper stickers beginning to appear in west Texas in 1974 that read: "Let the bastards freeze in the Dark!" The "bastards" are northerners holding back the Texas and Oklahoma economy.

This critique was also applied to the greater west. 28 *Petroleum Independent*, the magazine of the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA), closely followed the federal government's expansion of the national wilderness system. In 1977 the Department of Agriculture ordered the Forrest Service to begin conducting a Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (known as Rare II) to be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This was the second round of review (hence the moniker Rare II) and was conducted along side similar reviews by the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management on National Park land (which largely effected Alaska and was known as D-2). Rare II would add 15 million acres to the NWPS, this was on top of the 12 million designated in the first round of wildnerss designation. To oil

47 Childress, "Horace Spiller Industry Pioneer", 52.

48 Paul H. Stark to David Boren, 27 March 1978, RG-8-T-11-3 Box 1, File 8, Boren Papers.

49 John H. Case to David Boren, 18 February 1977, 8-T-11-4 Box 2 Folder 3, Boren Papers.

industry advocates this was a land grab that violated the old-fashioned multiple-use tenets of early 20th century conservation and could therefore lend itself to being interpreted through a conspiratorial lens. Robbie Fullerton, an activist with a group called "Outdoors Unlimited" described Rare II as an effort to make the land "inaccessible to producers in industry. And when we aren't able to produce, the government will step in to take over the natural resource industries, saying 'they have not performed well.'" The article describes how the "eastern establishment has everything to gain by locking up western land, by encouraging and financing the environmentalists who try with great success to push acre after acre into limbo." Exactly what the east has to gain by locking up western resources is left unexplained, but the issue became yet another source of anger at how environmentalism expanded the reach of the federal government.[50]

29 In a profile of the independent oil man Jack G. Jones, the journalist Nicholas Lemann described a widely shared hatred of the federal government. "Independents complain bitterly about being bogged down in a sticky morass of paperwork and regulations, in a tone that would be familiar to readers of Ayn Rand novels." Independents saw themselves as, "self-reliant, tremendously productive people under constant attack from lily-livered parasitic bureaucrats."[51] The growing reporting demands were not only viewed as burdensome by small independents. In 1976, Exxon's Assistant Controller, C. L. Zody testified before Congress that Exxon was filing 409 reports to 45 different federal agencies, requiring a staff of 112.[52] The National Environmental Policy Act (1969) and its requirement that the government collect environmental impact statements before issuing permits was identified as a primary reason for the increased paperwork burden. But it wasn't the only reason. Price controls on oil and natural gas created several different prices for those commodities (i.e. old oil v. new oil) producing enormous reporting requirements for oil and gas companies. Environmental reporting requirements were yet another additional burden, and an example of an ever expanding federal government.[53]

The perspective of the majors was more nuanced. 30
In 1972 the Ford Foundation initiated a study of energy policy. The Energy Policy Project (EPP) produced a report in 1974 that emphasized conservation.[54] In a written 1974 dissent to the Project's conclusions, William P. Tavoulareas, President of Mobil Oil Corporation, articulated a position more representative of the perspective taken by the majors. While recognizing that environmentalism could challenge the perogatives of the industry, Tavoulareas called for the timetable on environmental objectives to be

> carefully reviewed in relation to the energy needs. Here I particularly emphasize I am refering to the timetable and not to the objectives themselves. I continue to believe that the advance of technology and the development of clean energy sources will permit us to realize our environmental objectives.

Neither environmental objectives nor environ- 31
mentaists are attacked; with the right balance we can achieve both a clean environment and plentiful supplies of energy. Tavoulareas goes on to critique the EPP for calling for a reduction in consumption while failing to seek an increase in energy supply. He advocates a return to a surplus

50 Gouldy, "Instant Wilderness", 23.

51 Lemann.

52 U.S. Congress, House of Represenatives, Committee on Apropriations, *Hearings Before the Subcommittee of the Department of the Interior,* 124.

53 All of these examples are anecdotal. I have found no evidence of the IPAA directly attacking environmental legislation. When IPAA officials testified before Congress they refrained from blaming environmentalists for the energy crisis. In the 1970s, the IPAA focused on eliminating price controls on oil and natural gas. There is evidence of state chapters, such as the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association, voicing opposition to new environmental regulations. See for example, "Group Brands Oil Spill Rules As Stringent".

54 *A Time To Choose: America's Energy Future; Final Report*.

of energy, along with a "reasonable preservation of our environmental objectives."[55]

32 At about the same time J. K. Jameson, Chairman of Exxon Corporation, wrote to his employees in *The Lamp*, the company's in-house magazine, that:

> we recognize that the natural environment has been damaged by the operations of our own industry, along with many other activities that are a part of an urban and industrialized society. We realize that cleaner operations are healthier and safer, for the public and for our employees. To these ends, we support efforts to prevent and repair environmental damage.

33 Jameson went on to describe how in 1974 Exxon employed over 300 full-time employees (and more than a 1,000 part-time) while spending $575 million to improve the company's environmental impact. While ackowledging that this was a response to new environmental legislation, Jameson recounted (and the company later detailed in a shiny 130-page booklet) the many real and substantive changes that were reducing Exxon's environmental footprint.[56]

34 But like Tavoulareas, Jameson also argued that this need not come at the cost of expanding energy production. With their armies of employees and enormous capital the majors could afford this type of détente with environmentalism. This nuanced perspective was not shared by independents who charted a different path forward.

35 Two years later, the independent oil man D. K. Davis of the Pitts Energy Group from Dallas, Texas was scheduled to meet Governor Jimmy Carter (D-GA) in Plains, Georgia. The Democratic Convention had officially made Carter the Party's nominee for President in mid-July. Now in August, Davis records his solution to the energy crisis in preparation for his meeting with Carter: "THERE IS NO SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM EXCEPT TO STATE IT IN ITS PUREST FORM: PRODUCE MORE AMERICAN ENERGY."[57] The energy is there. Federal policy is what prevents companies from producing it. The frustration jumps off the page. He represents a strident perepsective, consistent with the voices emerging from the oil patch. Even though environmentalism is not directly implicated, producing more energy will come with an environmental cost; yet there is no acknowledgement of a balance between the goals of energy production and the preservation of a clean and healthy environment. Listening to the voices from the oil patch leaves one with the impression that the government is the problem and it needs to stop interfering with the prerogatives of the oil and gas industry; whether they take the form of price controls, unfavorable tax changes or environmental concerns.

CONCLUSION

36 All of this might be a historical curiosity if it didn't form the foundation of a new conservatism that defined the politics of the Republican Party for the next forty-five years.[58] Meg Jacobs argues that the energy crisis served as a proof of concept, a dry run, for neoliberal policy that was then more widely applied in the 1970s and '80s.[59] The force and persuasiveness of neoliberalism dismantled price controls on oil and natural gas; but the impact on environmentalism was less clear. If price controls and other forms of government interference in the energy markets were justified as efforts to promote economic justice or correct market failure, environmentalism was justified as an effort to improve the quality of the environment. Neoliberalism effectively argued that pulling back state involvement

55 *A Time to Choose: America's Energy Future*, *Petroleum Independent*, 40.
56 "Exxon and the Environment", December 1975, Series D, Box 52, Folder: Energy, National Audubon Society Records, New York Public Library.
57 Davis, D.K., "Opening Statement by D.K. Davis to Jimmy Carter for President, Energy Conference," Carlton Neville Papers, Box 45, Folder: Transition Planning- Energy, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 2.
58 On how the Republican Party in the south was bankrolled in the middle decades of the twentieth century with independent oil money see Burrough, *The Big Rich: The Rise And Fall Of The Greatest Texas Oil Fortunes*.
59 Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump*, 6-10.

in the market would more effectively achieve the very same ends that liberals claimed to want: efficiency and prosperity.[60] Could neoliberalism be harmonized with environmentalism? To some environmentalists the answer was clearly yes. Command and control regulation (however popular and effective in 1970s Washington) could be replaced by market-friendly regulations for pollution control (i.e. cap and trade). To many in the oil patch the answer was no. This is a point echoed by the historian Caleb Wellum who found that industry representatives (specifically the American Petroleum Institute, the lobbying arm of the majors) simply blamed environmental legislation for the impending energy crisis in 1972 and 1973. The energy crisis then became an opportunity to discredit environmentalism.[61] But the view expressed by Tavoulareas more accurately depicts what one finds when viewing Congressional testimony and press releases from the majors. The language often reflects the idea that the tension between energy and the environment needed to be rebalanced in a manner that better favors energy production. As the above examples make clear, the voices from the oil patch did not recognize that balance, often attacking environmental concerns as illegitimate or misguided.

37 To be clear, there were many forces contributing to a growing anti-environmentalism on the right. James Turner and Andrew Isenberg trace how anti-environmentalism became more dominant within the Republican Party of the 1980s; that the larger Republican reversal on environmentalism owes something to ideology, political calculation and business interests.[62] This short article places business interests at the center of this reversal.

38 But the embrace of a small government, neoliberal politics by a Republican Party which took a hard right turn in the late 1970s was also a gift to those in the oil industry. For it could be deployed to sweep away or push back against all government regulations, including those designed to improve the environment. As such it helped paper over the differences between independents and majors as both could unite around a common anti-environmentalism. The oil industry's business interests lined up neatly with a politically ascendent neo-liberalism.

39 The sporadic initiatives by the oil industry to appear green, as detailed in the articles this piece appears along side of, can then be read as cynical efforts by the oil industry not to lose its social license or, in the 1970s, part of a larger diversification effort that took many different forms); an effort to avoid becoming so toxic that it might lose its subsidies, political influence and eventually, domestic customers (i.e. the tobacco industry).[63] The problem isn't just that the oil industry contributes to environmental degradation, it's that a large and influential segment of the oil industry, beginning in the 1970s, viewed environmentalism itself as a threat to be confronted. The relationship between the oil industry and environmentalism (which increasingly and enthusiastically dreams of a future without fossil fuels) is *inherently* antagonistic. This dynamic describes both the history and future of that relationship.

60 This was an argument advanced by Ronald Reagan. See Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan*, 435-440; examples include the self-defeating nature of welfare and the Laffer Curve.

61 Wellum, 43; the anti-environmentalism of Fred Ikard and the API tended to run a bit ahead of the majors themselves.

62 Turner and Isenberg, *The Republican Reversal: Conservatives and the Environment from Nixon to Trump*, 36-48.

63 For many environmentalists, this has already happened. See Mark, "Abolish Fossil Fuels: A moral Case for ending the age of coal, oil, and gas" 20-25.

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