

ALSTON CHASE

Dark side of science exposed

Is there a Dark Side? You don't have to be Luke Skywalker to know the answer is "yes." African Americans are often victims of the Dark Side — the stealth racism that pervades America. Loggers and ranchers encounter the Dark Side when they are driven off the land by the coordinated maneuvers of greens and their bureaucratic allies. Corporate and government whistle-blowers meet the Dark Side when they dare to expose their employers' follies.

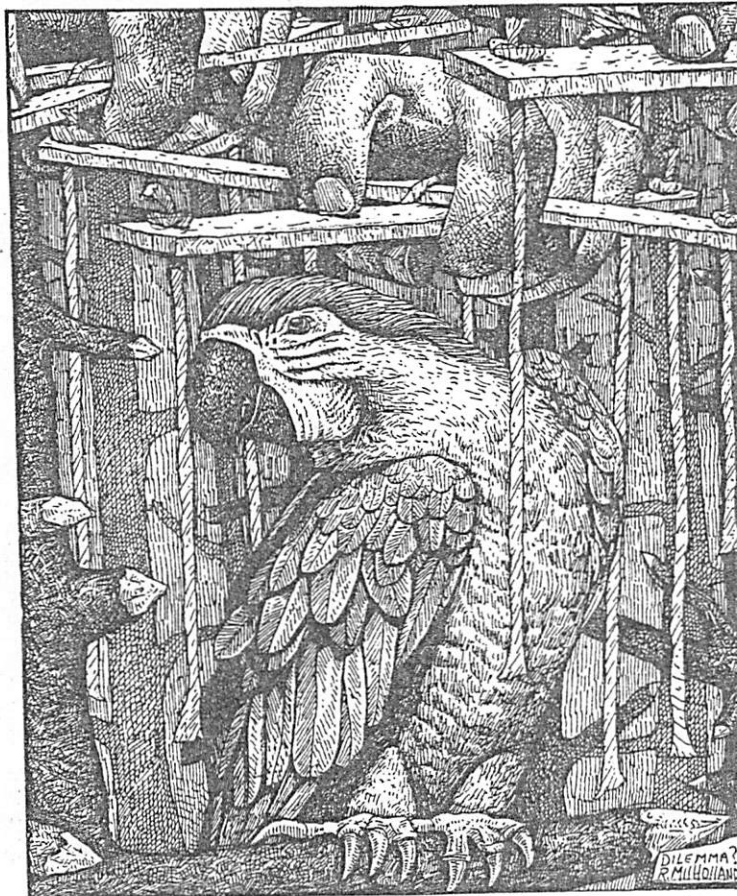
The Dark Side is silent conspiracy, accomplished with nods, winks and confidential memos that seek to harm individuals whose actions are troublesome to the powerful. And it could not exist without the tacit acquiescence of the majority. When it strikes, most folks look the other way.

Many believe in a Dark Side, but selectively. Liberals see it only in big business, conservatives just in government. But some institutions remain above suspicion by nearly everyone. Such is the status of science, which enjoys such a lofty reputation that few challenge its authority.

But science has a Dark Side, too, that lurks in the shadowy realm of environmental research. In this fecund habitat it thrives, shielded from exposure to the bright light of truth. But occasionally the covers are pulled back, revealing this nether world of false scholarship.

Such was the experience of attentive observers at recent congressional oversight hearings on National Park Service science. This event revealed that not only is the agency's poor research a national tragedy, but that this failed effort is corrupting the institution of science itself.

The meeting began ordinarily enough. A gentleman from the general accounting office testified to what experienced observers already knew: that service science is grossly inadequate. This presentation was followed by the usual self-aggrandizing testimony of the feds' favored scientists who said, in effect, that if Congress would give them more money everything could be fixed. To this they added a now-familiar twist: that parks should be maintained as laboratories for themselves, where they can satisfy their curiosity at taxpayers'



expense.

Then, the deliberations got interesting. Three scholars testified that the service was allowing overly abundant elk and deer to destroy biodiversity throughout the park system. One of these individuals, Richard Keigley of the Biological Resources Division of the U.S. Geological Survey, then added a zinger: His work, he said, is being thwarted by park authorities.

Fearing elk are eliminating critical vegetation in Yellowstone National Park, Mr. Keigley sought to investigate whether this is so. But officials wouldn't let him. They even tried to prevent his testifying at this hearing.

Another witness had analogous experiences. Although an indepen-

dent researcher, he told the congressmen how influential scholars, co-opted by Park Service monies, regularly suppress articles in supposedly "independent" journals that do not support federal management.

Thus, the lawmakers got a peek at perhaps the greatest scientific fraud in American history. Rather than pursuing preservation as required by law, the service has allowed grant-grabbing "experts" to redefine the mission of the parks, thereby transforming these areas into experimental laboratories. And their experiment is failing.

The experiment in question is called "natural regulation." The idea is to see what will happen when everything is left alone. This pleas-

es greens, who want to maintain the parks as "wilderness." But it is pseudoscience that ignores the fact that true wilderness — a place isolated from human impact — has not existed since people first arrived in America 12,000 years ago.

Consequently, the service has illegally abandoned its mission of preservation and substituted a policy that has no goals at all. According to natural regulation, whatever happens — even the ongoing calamitous overgrazing and local extinction of animals — is deemed "natural," and therefore OK.

In this way, the science establishment has become another interest group feeding at the public trough, and it exercises considerable influence over how the parks are managed and what research gets published. It is also paid to keep its mouth shut. Individuals who accommodate policy-makers benefit handsomely from federal largess and therefore rise to prominent positions in their profession, where they suppress the views of scholars with whom they disagree. Empowered to help disburse federal millions, they are the gatekeepers of politically correct research.

The victims of this corrupt system are legion. In my 1986 book, "Playing God in Yellowstone," and subsequent writings, I've documented scores of cases where the service and its research flunkies ruin the careers of honest scholars who oppose bogus science. As a result, the parks are dying.

Such affronts to freedom and nature represent the Dark Side of environmental science. Thankfully, these hearings brought it to light. Let's hope that now, after decades of indifference, Congress and the administration will finally do something about it. Otherwise, we can only surmise that government has joined the Dark Side, too.

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