

TAX FACTS

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NORMA COOLEY - - - - - EDITOR

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OUR PUBLIC DOMAIN

We might ask ourselves, not only where is our country going, but where has it gone? In the United States proper, the area that was once public land or in the control of the federal government, includes all of the states north and west of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, except Texas, and includes the states of Mississippi, Alabama and Florida—1,442,200,320 acres.

"Exclusive of Alaska and the public lands included in Indian reservations, national forests and national parks and withdrawn for water power, stock drives and other purposes or withdrawn as valuable for mineral or for prospective mineral value or classified as mineral, the area of the public domain subject to disposal under applicable land laws on June 30, 1934, was 165,695,479 acres, of which 119,341,782 have been surveyed.

"During the fiscal year 1935 all public land in the United States proper was withdrawn from entry, except under the mineral laws, for classification and in aid of the Taylor grazing act of June 28, 1934."—*Chicago Daily News Almanac*, 1936.

In 1859, Mr. Grow, of Pennsylvania, proposed that Congress should amend the Homesteading laws by adding the following section:

"Be it further enacted, That from and after the passage of this act, no public land shall be exposed to sale by proclamation of the President, unless the same shall have been surveyed, and the return of such survey duly filed in the Land Office, for ten years or more before such sale."

Horace Greeley, writing in the old *Tribune Almanac* for 1860, explains this proposal by saying: "With the addition of Mr. Grow's amendment to the existing laws and regulations touching the Public Lands, they would be open to preemption ten years before they could come within the grasp of the speculator, thus giving the poor, industrious settler ample time to 'clear up' his farm and pay for it from the proceeds of the soil."

In the same publication and on the same subject, Mr. Greeley wrote an article, "Land for the Landless."

"The Public Domain of the United States is still immense," wrote Mr. Greeley in 1860, "notwithstanding the millions upon millions of acres which have been squandered or passed over to the hands of speculators and monopolists, by the action of the National Government, during the past few years. It is estimated by intelligent persons, who have given their attention to the subject, that lying within the States and Territories of this government there are now about one thousand millions of acres of public lands, still unentered. 'What shall be done with this immense domain?' is a question which has for years occupied the minds of thoughtful men, who have the best interests of society at heart. At length, the great question of the proper disposition of these lands has become one of party, and may be stated as follows: 'Shall the Public Domain be open to monopoly by speculators, leading inevitably to a landed aristocracy? or shall it be reserved for actual occupants in small quantities, at a nominal price, or without price?' There would be no difficulty whatever in adjusting this question at any time and in the right way, if the Negro question, which, in National Administration, absorbs or overrides all others, were not behind it. . . . That interest, which is ever vigilant, understands that it cannot well exist where small freeholds prevail and hence it opposes, with all its great power, all Preemption and Homestead laws, knowing well that if our new States and Territories are to be occupied in quarter-sections, they will be occupied by working farmers, and not by speculators and great planters."

The Epics and their friends have raised a cry that sounds like much and means nothing: "Production for use." Whether a manufacturer makes skillets or sprocket-wheels, he does so with the firm conviction that some people want to use those things, and with the sublime hope that they will buy their supply from him. When the demand falls off, he cuts down production. He doesn't keep on making those articles just for the fun of the thing. Production for use has been his guiding principle for many a year.

If the Epics would change their slogan to: "Land for use," they would have an idea worth developing. If a man were not allowed to hold land or if it were made unprofitable for him to do so, unless he used it to the best advantage, town lots and country acres now being held for speculation would be released for the use of those who wanted to build homes or places of business. Production would be stimulated all along the line.

Horace Greeley's objection to land speculators and monopolists was well founded. It is absurd that a country as vast and as rich in natural resources as the United States cannot support the people who inhabit it.