

Tuning out society's spending for land was gradual, then worsened. Now it's complete.

CHAPTER 19

COLLUDING OR NOT – THEY CENSOR RENTS

People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do.

– Isaac Asimov

Do too many people want to know the worth of Earth in America and secrets must be kept? Or do not enough people want to know and paltry demand elicits no response? Whichever, those with the resources to measure natural value in America, but don't, have made it exceedingly difficult for those who don't know that value, but want to find it out. In a perversely ironic way, data centers have made it harder than ever for the inquiring public to access what should be public records.

JUST LIKE CENSORSHIP

Used to be, you could turn to the county register and learn the value of never-produced land apart from human-produced buildings. But not anymore. Economics' drift toward a landless discipline has culminated in a rent-less database.

How can economists and statisticians not burn with curiosity to know how much their society spends on the nature it uses? Alas ...

- Many county assessors no longer separate the values of locations and improvements.
- When they do, they do not bother to be precise.
- Some counties don't forward their assessments to states. States, in turn, pass on the deficient stats to the Census Bureau. That bureau, despite being bereft of all counts, is the source for the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the Uber Bank – the US Federal Reserve – *et al.*

When local assessors quit giving a total for land, so did the Census Bureau. And so did the pseudo public Federal Reserve. And so did the truly private Zillow.

- States contract out penitentiaries.
- The army hires mercenaries.
- The Senate and House of Representatives debated privatizing the Federal Aviation Agency.
- Media commentators proposed selling off the TSA and the Post Office.
- Congress gave the power to issue new money to a consortium of private banks. And ...
- They, Federal Reserve, outsources to private corporations for the statistics that they themselves used to collect, collate, and package in quasi-intelligible form (Ch 26).

If you ask, the Fed introduces you to the private firm that they use. If you want those values for the surplus the economy generates from natural inputs, you have to pay. For the middle man Fed, it's pennies. But for your average quenter on a shoe-string budget, it's more than a researcher can typically afford.

Another user of public assessor numbers, the private Lincoln Institute, after all these years, still won't expand their total from residential land to all land in any use.

Turn from public assessors to private appraisers. Bankers accept property as collateral. When they foreclose, they resell the land plus building. Eventually their borrowers resell or refinance. As sound business people, bankers might like to anticipate their prospects – how much profit they can expect in the future from the grand total of all land.

The American Bankers Association has the statistics. Until recently, a researcher could visit or ask the librarian for answers. But no more; the ABA closed their library along with its research service.

This official tuning out of Earth's worth has been a gradual transition. It just got really bad lately. Now it's complete.

NOTHING PERSONAL

The number-crunchers' failure to meet the needs of we total-doters is not to be taken personally. Being mighty, those specialists need not bother with rebuffing a curious gadfly. Indeed, given the influence of rentiers, it was inevitable.

Getting *any* response assumes you actually reach an official statistician. "Hello, can you tell me the worth of Earth in America?" Usually it's like calling a big corporation – a runaround. You get transferred so many times that ultimately you end up talking to the same person you started with.

Public servants in charge of public information don't have to serve the public useful answers.

- They can give unrelated facts and figures.
- They can say the total of land value is not known and is not knowable. And...
- They can just not reply to requests at all.

It's the bureaucratic version of W.C. Fields', "Go away kid, you bother me." Even longer ago, having to dish out such futility at his job is what supposedly drove bureaucrat and absurdist writer Franz Kafka, author of *Metamorphosis*, mad. If their goal was to utterly derail any inquiry into the value of land and resources, officials have come close.

The indifference of established academics dampens any interest of newcomers, who could become potential researchers. Which is sad, because breakthroughs usually come from newcomers. That leaves turning economics into a science up to outsiders.

Face it. Statisticians are a speed bump; economists a road block. The elite benefactors are a dead end. So, Do it Yourself?

No problem. We'll make the most sense possible out of the best numbers available. And conjure a total that perhaps the specialists will stoop to critique.