

**THIS AMERICA OF OURS:**  
**Bernard and Avis DeVoto and The Forgotten Fight to Save the Wild**  
by Nate Schweber

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Bernard and Avis DeVoto were married for 33 years. How did they bring out good in each other? How did they struggle? Have you experienced similar benefits or challenges in a relationship of your own, or observed them in that of a loved one?
2. Some of Bernard DeVoto's best writing was inspired by family trips to public lands. Have you been inspired by visiting America's public lands? If so, how? Where did you go?
3. In 1935, Bernard called the U.S. West a "plundered province" because Easterners had raided its natural resources. His 1947 anti-"landgrab" *Harper's* article "The West Against Itself" blamed Westerners too for this plunder. Is the West still being plundered? If so, how, and by whom? If not, why not? Has the plunder changed?
4. "McCarthyism" is the act of accusing people of disloyalty and conspiracy based not on facts but instead on innuendo, inference, allusion, and gossip. Did McCarthyism exist only in the era of its namesake, Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy, and his role model, Nevada Senator Pat McCarran? How did the DeVotos fight McCarthyism?
5. Bernard DeVoto wrote that "the place to fight censorship is whatever place it appears in." He defended the Bill of Rights for allowing him to read and write what he wanted. But he also knew the First Amendment allowed McCarthy to smear him. Why did the DeVotos believe the First Amendment does more good than harm? Do you agree?
6. The DeVotos ritualistically observed "The Hour," when they would enjoy evening cocktails and camaraderie. Do you have a favorite ritual? Why is it important to you?
7. Water is the West's most precious natural resource and the DeVotos feared that too many dams would not only ruin the National Park System, but also over-allocate a finite resource. Is the West using its water more wisely today than in the DeVotos lifetimes? If so, how? If not, why not – and what can be done?
8. As the DeVotos worked to save Dinosaur National Monument they built a coalition of strange bedfellows -- conservationists who loved wilderness and fiscal conservatives who didn't want to pay for wasteful dams. Are there opportunities today to build environmental coalitions among people who have different values and perspectives? What groups of strange bedfellows could share ultimate interest in conservation? How might they be brought together?
9. Julia and Paul Child came into the DeVotos' lives at a low point in their McCarthy-era fight to save national parks and public lands. How did the friendship between the Childs and the DeVotos affect both families – particularly Avis and Julia?
10. Both Bernard and Avis DeVoto believed he would be best remembered. Instead, the most celebrated DeVoto in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is Avis, because of her extraordinary friendship with superstar Julia Child. Are there other people in history, partners to someone prominent, who ought to be better remembered? Who are some examples?