The George Mason Experience

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Henry G. Manne became Dean of the George Mason University School of Law ("GMUSL") in 1986. He retired in October 1996, after serving as Dean for ten years. During Manne’s tenure, the school was transformed from an institution that had just been accredited to one with a national reputation for innovation and scholarly purpose. This paper chronicles the highlights of Manne’s experience at George Mason.

For many years before Henry Manne arrived at GMUSL, he envisioned creating an interdisciplinary law school that would take other academic disciplines into account in analyzing legal issues. In 1968, Allen Wallis, who was then president of the University of Rochester, brought Manne to Rochester as the William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of Law and Political Science. Manne’s principal assignment was to develop plans for a new law school. He produced an ambitious plan for an interdisciplinary school with a curriculum that would focus largely, but by no means exclusively, on law and economics ("L&E"). Wallis was enthusiastic about Marine’s plan, but he could not implement it. The cost of the project in financial terms was high, and the University could not obtain sufficient financing, especially in the face of considerable opposition from both the existing faculty at the University and members of the Monroe County, New York, Bar.

Manne left Rochester to found at the University of Miami the first Law & Economics Center ever to be established. After six years at Miami, during which the Center became the subject of considerable national attention, Manne moved with it to Emory University Law School, where he and the Center remained until he left to become the Dean at GMUSL.

The first incarnation of GMUSL was as the International School of Law that was founded in the District of Columbia in 1972. For many years, the school had been unaccredited, poorly funded, and lacking in academic distinction. Its primary asset was its lease of the

Virginia Square Shopping Center, which gave it an option to purchase the entire center. In 1979, George Mason University acquired the school, changed its name, and exercised its option. At the time, the University was only thirteen years old itself, but it was already becoming one of the major universities in the Virginia state system.

Shortly after the University acquired the law school, the school received provisional accreditation by the ABA. The school's new affiliation with the University gave it a new source of financing, a greater potential to attract faculty and students, and the possibility of improving its reputation as an academic institution.

By 1985, the school had hired several well-qualified new faculty members; however, the dean and most of the faculty members remained as they had been when the University first acquired the school. This made it difficult for the school to attract distinguished faculty candidates or superior students. Although the school finally achieved full accreditation in 1986, it continued to struggle with low academic standards and a mediocre reputation. It seemed obvious that without some kind of fairly dramatic change, further improvement would be slow and painful—if not impossible.

Sometime in 1985, George Johnson, the University's president, decided that increasing the stature of the law school deserved high priority. Using funds gleaned from the sale of unimproved land surrounding the law school, the University initiated this improvement program.¹

Obviously, the first step was to attract a dean with vision who could give the school a new purpose and attract serious scholars to the faculty. Manne was the perfect candidate for the post. He had been one of the founders of the L&E movement; he had a national reputation as a scholar; and he had demonstrated his educational creativity. Throughout his career, he had been a tireless promoter of economic analysis in legal education. Since 1971, he had conducted intensive programs providing instruction in economics to law professors and later to federal judges. Manne had stimulated L&E scholarship by law professors and economists through numerous seminars designed to introduce economic analysis to law professors and legal analysis to economists. At these seminars, L&E scholars presented papers for

¹ The school was located in a three-story building at the corner of Fairfax and Kirkwood Drives in Arlington, Virginia, about 18 miles from the University's main campus. The building had once housed a department store. The law school occupied the two lower floors. Apart from the building's excellent location on the Washington Metro Orange Line, its main distinction was that it had escalators. When the University exercised its option to purchase, it acquired the building and a large tract of valuable unimproved land fronting on Fairfax Drive. The University sold a large part of the land to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.
discussion by small groups of law professors and economists. Manne's activities in promoting L&E had a significant impact on serious legal scholarship. They had also given him a large following among law professors and judges who had participated in his programs.

Henry Manne also had experience as an administrator, a record as a successful fundraiser, and, most importantly, a unique albeit controversial vision of the kind of curriculum a modern law school should offer. Manne was exactly the kind of person Johnson was looking for. He could attract highly qualified faculty members and improve the school's reputation as an academic institution. Moreover, his promotional ability together with his innovative but controversial approach to legal education would ensure that changes he made in the school would receive widespread publicity.

The agenda Manne presented to Johnson for GMUSL was not quite as ambitious as his plan for Rochester. It called for an interdisciplinary law school that would emphasize legal theory and focus on L&E. However, unlike most law schools that, largely due to Manne's previous educational efforts, had recently instituted courses in L&E, GMUSL would not offer a separate L&E course. Instead, the entire curriculum would be informed by economic analysis.

As anyone could have expected, the plan was controversial. Many traditional lawyers, including many members of the then-existing faculty, could not see how knowledge of economics could help students become lawyers. Others opposed the increased emphasis on abstract theory of any kind, believing that law students needed a more practical curriculum. Existing faculty members who knew little about L&E could justifiably feel threatened and defensive. Many liberal observers considered that an economic approach to analyzing legal issues was little more than right-wing indoctrination.

An ordinary person could not have successfully promoted the plan Manne offered. In most institutions, an ordinary candidate with Manne's ideas could not have survived the selection process, and even if he were selected, he would have failed in his first year as a dean. Three factors enabled Manne to achieve a degree of success that an ordinary person could not have hoped for. The first factor was that James M. Buchanan, a member of the George Mason University faculty, had received the 1986 Nobel Prize in Economics. The resulting publicity probably motivated University President George Johnson to build further on the University's reputation for economic scholarship. The second major factor was President Johnson's vigorous support. The final factor was Manne's own attitude and determination to implement his vision of what a law school should be.
Traditional university and law school governance practices tend to frustrate initiative and originality, but Johnson was an educational autocrat. He liked Manne’s plan and made it clear that he would brook no administrative interference from faculty members. Johnson is said to have told the University Provost that even if Manne did not come to George Mason, he would see to it that Manne’s plan for the law school was implemented.

Fortunately, Johnson did not have to follow through on his resolve to implement the Manne Plan without Manne. The strength of Johnson’s support withered the opposition, and after a perfunctory faculty process, Manne was offered the deanship.

Although bureaucratic barriers make it difficult to hire a new dean bent on dramatic change, the hiring process is only the first step. Once a dean is in office, he must overcome even greater obstacles. Tenure, university rules, and the tradition of faculty self-governance effectively block most attempts to achieve major educational reforms. Johnson’s continued support during the next few years helped Manne navigate through the obstacles and make GMUSL one of the fairly rare educational institutions that has actually changed direction in a significant and positive way.

Manne’s idea of leadership was the same as Johnson’s. He made it clear from the beginning that he would not accept the deanship unless he was given a substantially free hand in making the major changes he believed were needed. Johnson strongly backed him in this, committing to the law school money that Manne needed to upgrade the faculty. A majority of the faculty also acquiesced in the conditions that Manne imposed.

What ensued was a remarkable transformation of the faculty. Manne announced that, with few exceptions, non-tenured faculty contracts would not be renewed the next year. Then he embarked upon the task of convincing some members of the tenured faculty that their lives would be more rewarding at other institutions. By refusing to renew contracts of non-tenured faculty members and buying out contracts of a few members of the tenured faculty, Manne eventually opened fourteen faculty positions. He set about to fill those positions by persuading distinguished L&E scholars to join him in creating a new law school that would provide an unabashedly theoretical education grounded on L&E.

Manne was selected too late to make faculty changes before the 1986 academic year began. Only two new members, Henry N. Butler
and William E. Kovacic, joined the faculty at the beginning of the 1986-87 academic year.²

During 1986-1987, Manne hired at least six new full-time faculty members to begin the following year: William Bishop,² Steven M. Crafton,⁴ Steven J. Eagle,⁵ Michael I. Krauss,⁶ Timothy J. Muris,⁷ and Larry E. Ribstein.⁸ Each of the new hires had both an L&E orientation and a substantial reputation for legal scholarship in his field. Manne made the hiring decisions with only minimal faculty involvement. Manne also brought on board as distinguished part-time faculty members former United States Circuit Judge Robert Bork and United States Circuit Judge Douglas H. Ginsburg.

Attracting these scholars to GMUSL was a remarkable achievement. The law school had been fully accredited for only about a year. Faculty members at other schools who considered moving to GMUSL risked significant damage to their future careers. They would be leaving secure positions at established schools to join the faculty of a school with a poor reputation that they could only hope would become nationally recognized for positive achievements. If it did not become recognized, they could be stigmatized. Those willing to take the risk did so because they knew Henry, admired his scholarship, shared his vision, and had confidence in his ability to create a new kind of law school that would eventually be recognized for its academic excellence.

Manne strongly encouraged the members of the tenured faculty whom he did not ask to leave to learn something about L&E. Many attended Manne's summer L&E Program for Law Professors. Those

² Butler, who had a Ph.D. in Economics, was an Olin Fellow under Manne at the University of Miami Law School. Even though Manne had not yet assumed the Deanship when Butler was appointed, he had been able to influence Butler's appointment. Kovacic came to the law school from the Washington office of a national law firm. Previously, he had been an attorney in the Planning Office of the FTC's Bureau of Competition and a legal assistant to a member of the Securities and Exchange Commission.
³ A British L&E scholar.
⁴ Crafton had a Ph.D. in Economics, had been an Olin Fellow under Manne at Emory University Law School, and was in the litigation department of a national law firm for the previous three years.
⁵ Eagle moved to George Mason from the University of Toledo Law School where he had been a tenured professor and an Associate Dean.
⁶ Krauss, a Yale educated L&E scholar, came to George Mason from the University of Sherbrooke.
⁷ After leaving a professorship at the University of Miami Law School, where he wrote extensively on the Federal Trade Commission, Muris had been a director of both the Bureau of Consumer Protection and the Bureau of Competition of the Federal Trade Commission. He came to George Mason after serving for three years as Executive Associate Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in the Executive Office of the President of the United States.
⁸ Ribstein, a prolific author of works on business organization and securities, had been a professor of law at Mercer University from 1981-1985.
who did not were assigned to teach courses in which economic analysis had little relevance.

Two tenured faculty members accepted offers to go on half-time teaching for two years during which they would use their remaining time to pursue Ph.D.'s in economics at the law school's expense.

In order to ensure that students would be exposed to L&E from their first days in law school, one of the new faculty members was assigned to teach each of the traditional first year courses. It was also understood that new members would work toward establishing a collegial environment in which remaining members of the old faculty could be exposed to economic analysis and its application in analyzing legal issues.

One of Manne's first acts was to establish a weekly workshop series at which L&E scholars from GMUSL and other law schools would present papers for faculty discussion. This program continued through all of Manne's tenure as Dean, and it still continues today.

One of the central features of Manne's plan for the law school was an emphasis on specialization. Manne envisioned a series of specialty "tracks," which would represent the first systematic curriculum giving law school students an opportunity to specialize during their three years before graduation in some broad field which required an understanding of economic analysis.

Under the track system, first year law students would be given the choice, upon their matriculation, of pursuing their studies through either a traditional law school curriculum or a specialty track curriculum. Students who chose a specialty track would take an intensive series of courses in which, with the exception of only one or two electives, courses for all three school years would be prescribed in advance. The number of hours required for graduation from a track would be significantly greater than the number usually required for graduation.

Students who elected a track would take a series of courses in different aspects of the field that was the subject of the track. The first course would begin in the student's first semester of law school, and later courses would be designed to build on the information covered in earlier courses. In this way, students would study issues in the subjects covered by the tracks in considerably more depth than is normally the case in law school courses. In their third year, track students would be required to write a lengthy thesis.

During the 1987-1988 academic year, Manne appointed a curriculum committee chaired by Henry Butler. The new faculty members constituted a majority of the committee. The committee ap-
proved the track system, identified the broad subjects of the first tracks as Patent Law, Corporate and Securities, and Banking, and created a general outline of the courses students in each track would be required to take. After the required courses, there was little time left for track students to take elective courses.

In discussing with Manne courses that would make up the curriculum, it became immediately apparent that track students would need to have an understanding of economics, finance, and accounting. A course covering these subjects in the first year would give students the basic understanding they would need and enable faculty members teaching track courses to assume that their students had that understanding. For example, those who taught corporate law could assume that students knew the basics of portfolio theory.

Because the entire curriculum would focus on L&E, the curriculum committee, with Manne's strong support, decided to require all first year students to take a course in what was to be called Quantitative Methods. The quantitative methods course would be designed to give students formal instruction in microeconomics, probability and statistics, finance, and accounting. Steven Crafton accepted responsibility for developing the course, which he first offered in 1989. By 1991, he had written a casebook in which the quantitative subject matter of the course was presented in the context of decided cases. Crafton's casebook demonstrated not only the relevance of L&E to judicial decision-making in a variety of different fields, but also how poorly judges and lawyers sometimes handled these fundamental issues.

The track program was formally instituted in 1989. Irving Kayton, who had taught courses in Patent and Intellectual Property at the George Washington University Law School since 1964, moved to GMUSL and created the first track. Larry Ribstein created a Corporate and Securities Track, and I was brought in to coordinate the Banking Track. In later years, tracks were instituted in Real Estate, International Trade, Litigation, and Regulation.

The changes Manne made in his first few years received considerable publicity in the academic world, and the reputation of the law school demonstratively improved. In 1989, the U.S. News & World Report survey of law schools listed GMUSL in the second tier of law

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9 I audited this course and can testify to its excellence. The course gave students much more than knowledge of quantitative methods. The instructional materials that Crafton, a former litigator, selected required students to read cases carefully and critically, to understand the procedural posture in which quantitative issues arose, and to use their knowledge of economics, portfolio theory, or accounting to assess how the parties and the courts had handled those issues in actual litigated cases.
Manne's innovations did not end with the creation of the track program. He recognized that law students throughout the country were graduating without writing skills, and he was determined to do something to improve the writing of all George Mason graduates, whether or not they had elected a track. He ordered faculty members in all small classes after the first year to require students to submit a paper, and he instituted a policy of giving students two grades in each course—one grade would measure the student's grasp of the subject and the other his writing.

Unfortunately, before Manne could fully implement his plan for the school, state revenues declined dramatically. The decline forced the state to reduce expenditures for higher education. The Governor ordered a ten-percent across-the-board cut in the funds allotted to universities. Older state universities that had built a degree of fat into their budgets were better able to accept the cut than George Mason. It was new and was already operating at a bare-bones level. Anticipating that funds would be available later to build the school's infrastructure, the University had spent most of its funds to hire the new faculty that was critical to its overall improvement. For the law school, particularly, a ten-percent cut was debilitating. It made it impossible to hire needed additions to the faculty, to have more than two or three faculty secretaries, to buy new books for the library, and to make other basic expenditures that were essential to its operation. The cut had a serious negative impact on faculty morale.

Manne pressed the University administration for a greater allocation of funds, but the administration was not nearly as forthcoming as he or the faculty thought it should be. At about this time, University President Johnson began to withdraw his support of Manne and the law school. Why he did this is unclear. Perhaps Manne's continued demands for more funds began to wear thin with an administration that was faced with similar claims from every division of the institution. Because the law school was located some fifteen miles from the president's office, perhaps it was easier for the president to ignore the dean of the law school than the division heads who were closer at hand. Another possible reason was that, although the law school taught law with a focus on L&E, it was still a law school, the goal of which was to produce lawyers. Johnson had a well-known

antipathy to lawyers, whom he tended to lump together as group. In
fact, he seems to have viewed educating lawyers as somewhat akin to
breeding rats. Whatever the reason, the law school’s funding never
reached the level that Manne was led to expect when he came to
George Mason, and Manne’s relationship with the administration be-
came seriously strained.

The George Mason Law Review was not a distinguished publi-
cation. Manne decided that something should be done about it. But,
like many law reviews, it was published by a student organization and
funded by student fees. It operated quite independently of faculty
supervision. Student control meant that students with little more than
two years experience in addressing legal issues were selecting and
editing articles submitted for publication by far more experienced
lawyers, including sometimes judges and distinguished faculty mem-
bers from other law schools. Student control of law reviews often
leads to a poor choice of articles and an editing experience that many
legal writers are unwilling to endure.\(^{11}\)

Law reviews are one of the few kinds of academic publications
that are run by students. In other disciplines, publications are con-
trolled and edited by faculty members. A few of the more sophisti-
cated law reviews are also under faculty control.\(^{12}\)

Having long been critical of student-controlled law reviews,
Manne concluded that the George Mason Law Review could not be
significantly improved unless it could be converted from a student-
run publication to one controlled by the faculty. Unfortunately, he
announced this change as he was leaving for a four-month sabbatical
in Italy.

When the students learned that Manne had decided to bring the
law review under faculty control, they erupted angrily. Membership
on a student-run law review is both an honor for the student and a
credential that many prospective employers consider critical. Mem-
bers of the law review had worked diligently to achieve their mem-
bership, and the threat of having the significance of that achievement
diluted struck deep. They strenuously objected to Manne’s decision.
Even students who had nothing to do with the Law Review considered
the change an unwarranted interference in student affairs and a taking

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\(^{11}\) Shortly after Manne arrived at George Mason, Judge Frank Easterbrook, most of whose
previous articles had been published in the most distinguished law reviews, desiring to help
GMUSL, submitted an article to the George Mason Law Review. A student editor made sub-
stantial changes in the article. Judge Easterbrook was furious and came close to withdrawing
his submission.

\(^{12}\) Examples are the Journal of Law and Economics, the Journal of Legal Studies, and
Law & Contemporary Problems.
of students’ property rights. Many of them joined in the protest, which escalated to a point where it was covered by the outside media and went as far within the University as a petition to the President, who supported Manne’s decision.

When the students insisted on continuing to publish the student law review, Manne created another law review edited by a member of the faculty with the assistance of some of the students who had sided with Manne’s decision. But the unseemly picture of two competing law reviews coupled with the strength and bitterness of student resistance eventually forced Manne to give up the effort. The law review controversy went away, but it had a serious long-term negative impact on student and faculty morale.

Manne’s plan for the George Mason Law Review had been a good one, and he might have succeeded in implementing it if he made a more determined effort to lay the groundwork for the change and if he had been more willing to negotiate either a transition or a solution that had more student support. Perhaps he could have convinced the students of the long-term benefit to them and the school that could come from making the improvements he suggested. But there was no way he could have solved the problem by long distance telephone.

Manne implemented other new programs for the law school. One was the Supreme Court Economic Review.\(^\text{13}\) Another was the Robert Levy Fellowship Program which was modeled after the highly successful Olin Fellowships that had made it possible for Manne to attract outstanding students to his programs when he taught at Miami and Emory. Robert Levy, who funded the fellowships, was a 1994 graduate of GMUSL. Before coming to the law school, he had been a successful entrepreneur. He was attracted to the school by its unique L&E curriculum.\(^\text{14}\)

Despite Manne’s enormous achievements, his relationship deteriorated, not only with the administration, but also with the law school faculty. The causes were no doubt complex, and no one can be sure of all of the factors that contributed to the deterioration. My own view is that the reasons Manne’s relationship with the University administration deteriorated were different from the reason for his problems with the faculty.

As I have noted, Manne may have alienated the administration by his demands for funds. He believed that the law school was the

\(^{13}\) Manne started the Supreme Court Law Review when he was at Emory. It was not published for several years. It was revived at GMUSL.

\(^{14}\) After graduating from GMUSL, Levy served as a law clerk for United States Circuit Judge Douglas Ginsburg. He is now a policy analyst at the Cato Institute.
only educational division of George Mason University that had made major improvements and was achieving national recognition for the University. It followed logically that the only sensible decision the administration could make was to provide the funding that Manne expected so that GMUSL could continue to improve. If money was short, it would be better to reduce the budgets of some of the University's less successful divisions.\(^{15}\)

But Manne's demands put the law school in direct competition with other University divisions. The heads of those divisions were on the same campus with the President, saw him frequently, and probably had a closer relationship with him than Manne did. They were aided by the perception in the other divisions that Manne's emphasis on L&E had made the law school a right-wing bastion. In almost any university community, such a perception can have a deadly effect. That perception of the law school probably increased President Johnson's problems with legislative leaders in negotiating for funding for the University and defending the law school against demands by competing units that the law school's funding be further reduced. All this, of course, is supposition. It is not supposition to say that, for whatever reason, Manne lost favor with the administration and never received the funding he was striving to get for the law school.

The school's continued funding deficiencies, in turn, caused a gradual drop in the high levels of morale and enthusiasm that had characterized the faculty in the early days of Manne's administration.

The strength and determination that had made Manne's success possible also caused resentment that grew until his relations with the faculty ultimately broke down. Manne's autocratic approach to making decisions within the law school did not help promote the morale of either faculty or the students. Manne's superb intellect, his abiding confidence in his own decisions, and his determination to overcome any obstacles in implementing them gave him a formidable potential. When he fully understood the facts, he could make unexceptionable decisions. But sometimes he was not aware of critical facts that he needed to take into account in his decision-making. He could have learned them if he had consulted faculty members and students who would be required to implement the decisions. But on many occasions he sought little or no input before he acted, and once he acted, he seldom looked back.

\(^{15}\) The law school was generating a positive cash flow for the University and thus was helping to finance other departments. In a sense, Manne only wanted more of the funds the law school was providing.
More importantly, his attitude toward members of the faculty who disagreed with him or whose actions did not meet his approval led an increasing number of them to believe that he did not respect them or their opinions. In reaction, they gradually volunteered less information.

As relations became strained, Manne gave his two associate deans increasing responsibility for dealing with the faculty, and his direct communication with individual faculty members declined even more. Although faculty members dealt with the associate deans, they believed that Manne made most decisions and that their views were not considered.

Manne did not seem to recognize that agency costs can be created by low morale as well as by more traditional economic factors and that if the school were to continue its upward progress, his role as Dean required him to communicate with the faculty, be willing listen to their concerns, and encourage their suggestions. His failure to do this well led to a growing resentment among many faculty members who had come to GMUSL because they wanted to work with him. The accumulated resentment was no doubt a major factor that combined with the school’s financial problems in leading to Manne’s resignation.

Before coming to George Mason, Henry Manne had had a long record of success in raising funds. When he moved to GMUSL, the demands of his role as dean restricted the time he could devote to fund raising. He appointed a succession of directors for the Center and turned over primary fund-raising responsibility to them. But Manne continued to be involved and to make some efforts to raise funds for the Center.

The profit from Center programs helped to provide summer research grants to members of the faculty. Faculty members had great confidence in Manne’s ability to raise funds for the law school, and they believed that with sufficient effort he could raise the funds the school needed. Their expectations were probably unrealistically high, and when the profit from the Center’s programs decreased and

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16 Most faculty members were grateful that Manne was willing to make administrative decisions without involving them in the endless committee work that is found on most faculties. Their primary complaint was that he often acted without the benefit of knowledge that would have improved the quality of his decisions.

17 It is difficult to raise funds for any law school. Most contributions to a law school are made by graduates of that law school. Some of the contributions come from practicing lawyers, but the largest come from graduates who have created successful businesses. GMUSL was a new law school with few alumni able to make contributions. Moreover, Manne had never raised funds for a law school. His fundraising success came in the form of contributions from foundations and businesses who were willing to fund the programs he had created that provided eco-
funds for summer faculty grants had to be cut, Manne got the blame. The personal loss of expected research funds coupled with the resentment that members of the faculty had accumulated over several years sparked the faculty revolt that ultimately led to Manne’s resignation.

In spite of the unfortunate ending of Manne’s George Mason experience, his accomplishments at GMUSL were truly enormous. In a few years, he transformed a barely-accredited, struggling law school into a nationally-known and highly respected educational institution whose faculty members published in the most highly regarded law reviews and whose better graduates were sought as judicial clerks and associates in major law firms. Although GMUSL’s rating in U.S. News & World Report was recently downgraded to the third tier, the core faculty that Manne brought together is still in place and, with good leadership, the school still has the potential to continue the upward progress that Manne began.

In social settings, no one could be more gracious than Manne. But his working personality was like that of many dedicated and creative people who, through their single-minded vision, strength of will, and inflexibility create new enterprises which they are ultimately forced to leave. These unforgiving personal qualities contribute mightily to their creative success, but the same qualities often prevent them from developing organizations in which the actors function together effectively as a team. If Manne had been a more flexible person, he might not have transformed GMUSL as he did, and there would have been no significant creation for him to leave.

Although Manne is no longer associated with GMUSL, the school and its faculty should be forever in debt to him for the solid foundation he has left for them to build on.

18 George Mason was recently ranked within the law schools whose graduates are most frequently employed by the 100 largest law firms in the country.
