

# “Give Earth a Chance”: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties

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In 1969 the Environmental Action for Survival Committee at the University of Michigan began to sell buttons with a slogan that played off a rallying cry common in the protests against the Vietnam War. Instead of “Give Peace a Chance,” the buttons urged Americans to “Give Earth a Chance.” *Newsweek* soon asked if the buttons might be symbols of a new age of conservation. By spring 1970, when the nation celebrated the first Earth Day, the slogan was ubiquitous. In an Earth Day march in the nation’s capital, for example, thousands of people joined the folk singers Pete Seeger and Phil Ochs in a great refrain: “All we are saying,” they sang, “is give earth a chance.”<sup>1</sup>

The popularity of the “Give Earth a Chance” slogan was not happenstance. The rise of the environmental movement owed much to the events of the 1960s. Yet scholars have not thus far done enough to place environmentalism in the context of the times. The literature on the sixties slights the environmental movement, while the work on environmentalism neglects the political, social, and cultural history of the sixties.

For most historians of the sixties, the basic framework of analysis derives from the concerns of the New Left. Although scholars have begun to incorporate the rise of the New Right into the narrative of the period, the issues that preoccupied the decade’s radicals still receive the most space. Because relatively few new leftists cared about the environment until 1969 or 1970, the literature on the sixties overlooks the growing concern about environmental issues before then. Several histories of the decade fail even to mention Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*—a best seller in 1962.

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<sup>1</sup> “Needed: A Rebirth of Community,” *Newsweek*, Jan. 26, 1970, p. 47; John G. Mitchell and Constance L. Stallings, eds., *Ecotactics: The Sierra Club Handbook for Environment Activists* (New York, 1970), back cover; Peter R. Janssen, “The Age of Ecology,” *ibid.*, 60; Lamont Cole, “In Unison,” in *Earth Day—The Beginning*, ed. Environmental Action (New York, 1970), 38; Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (New York, 1995), 349.

Though a few scholars claim environmentalism as a major legacy of the sixties, some works treat the rise of the movement as a postscript to the decade, a sign of fade-out rather than a vital expression of the protest spirit of the time. No history of the sixties considers in detail what the environmental movement shared with the antiwar movement, the civil rights movement, or the feminist movement.<sup>2</sup>

For environmental historians, the rise of the environmental movement comes at the end of a story that begins before 1900. The first protests against pollution, the first efforts to conserve natural resources, and the first campaigns to save wilderness all occurred in the late nineteenth century. By the end of the Progressive Era, environmental problems were on the agenda of a variety of professions, from civil engineering to industrial hygiene. To explain why a powerful environmental movement nonetheless did not emerge until the decades after World War II, environmental historians have pointed to three major changes. First, the unprecedented affluence of the postwar years encouraged millions of Americans to reject the old argument that pollution was the price of economic progress. Second, the development of atomic energy, the chemical revolution in agriculture, the proliferation of synthetic materials, and the increased scale of power generation and resource extraction technology created new environmental hazards. Third, the insights of ecology gave countless citizens a new appreciation of the risks of transforming nature. Yet those explanations—the willingness of newly affluent Americans to insist on environmental quality, the increased destructiveness of modern industry, and the popularization of ecological ideas—make clear only why environmentalism was a postwar phenomenon, not why it became a force in the sixties.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The best attempt to integrate environmentalism into the story of the 1960s is Anderson, *Movement and the Sixties*. For works that give little or no attention to environmental issues, see Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (New York, 1998); David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton, 1996); Dominick Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past: The Sixties in American History* (New York, 1999); David Chalmers, *And the Crooked Places Made Straight: The Struggle for Social Change in the 1960s* (Baltimore, 1996); David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York, 1994); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York, 1987); Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York, 2000); and David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of Modern America* (New York, 1995). For a detailed argument that the environmental movement was a major legacy of the decade, see Edward P. Morgan, *The 60s Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America* (Philadelphia, 1991), 217–62. More typical is a nearly eight-hundred-page history of postwar America that devotes only a handful of pages to environmental issues, even though the author concludes that environmentalism “stood out as a legacy of the reform spirit of the 1960s.” See James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York, 1996), 729. On the sales of *Silent Spring*, see Linda Lear, *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature* (New York, 1997), 426. See also Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> The first explanation comes from Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985* (New York, 1987), 13–39; the second from a classic work of environmental criticism: Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York, 1971). For the popularization of ecological ideas, see Thomas R. Dunlap, *DDT: Scientists, Citizens, and Public Policy* (Princeton, 1981); and Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (New York, 1994), 340–87. On the 1960s roots of environmentalism, see Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, 1993), 81–114; Warren J. Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took On the Food Industry* (Ithaca, 1993), 15–28; Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States since 1945* (Fort Worth, 1998), 83–107; and Christopher Sellers, “Body, Place, and the State: The Makings of an ‘Environmental’ Imaginary in the Post–World War II U.S.,” *Radical History Review* (no. 74, 1999), 31–64. See also Stephen Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Madison, 1985), 322–25; Susan R. Schrepfer, *The Fight to Save the Redwoods: A History of Environmental Reform, 1917–1978* (Madison, 1983), 163–69; and Thomas Raymond Wellock, *Critical Masses: Opposition to Nuclear Power in California, 1958–1978* (Madison, 1998), 92–102.

The interpretive challenge is evident in two statistical trends. One is the trend in Sierra Club membership. Founded in 1892, the club had only seven thousand members in 1950. Membership doubled in the 1950s, doubled again from 1960 to 1965, and then tripled from 1965 to 1970. Though the environmental cause began to loom larger in the 1950s, the figures suggest, the breakthrough came in the 1960s. The trend in magazine coverage of environmental issues was similar. According to one survey, the number of environmental articles went up slightly from 1955 to 1957, then fell back to the level of the early 1950s. (The peak probably was due to a celebrated campaign by the Sierra Club to stop the construction of a dam in the Echo Park Valley of Dinosaur National Monument.) After 1960, however, the number of environmental articles rose sharply, and the sharp rise continued throughout the decade: From the late 1950s to the late 1960s, the increase in coverage was more than 300 percent.<sup>4</sup>

What caused the explosive growth of concern about the environment after 1960? To point the way toward a more contextualized history of the environmental movement, this essay will consider the relationship between the rise of environmentalism and three important developments of the sixties—the revitalization of liberalism, the growing discontent of middle-class women, and the explosion of student radicalism and countercultural protest. The environment never was the foremost concern of a majority of liberals, women, or young critics of the nation's institutions. Yet members of those three groups contributed in key ways to the emergence of environmentalism. An analysis of their involvement helps explain why the movement came together in the 1960s.

By tying the history of environmentalism to political, social, and cultural history, this essay also adds to recent efforts to reconceptualize the sixties. Though concern about the environment was an integral part of the decade, environmental activism was not simply a form of radical protest. To incorporate the environmental movement into the basic narrative of the sixties, we need to think in fresh ways about the driving forces of change in the period.

### The Liberal Environmental Agenda

In the mid-1950s, a handful of Democratic intellectuals began to reconsider the liberal agenda, and their efforts intensified after Adlai Stevenson's defeat in the presidential election of 1956. What could liberalism offer in a time of unprecedented affluence? Many Democratic policy advisers and elected officials soon concluded that one answer to that question was a commitment to environmental protection. In coming to that conclusion, they were influenced by experts in a growing number of professions concerned about the environment. They also were responding to growing grass-roots activism. But the Democratic intellectuals and politicians were leaders as

<sup>4</sup> Fox, *American Conservation Movement*, 279, 315; James McEvoy III, "The American Concern with Environment," in *Social Behavior, Natural Resources, and the Environment*, ed. William R. Burch Jr., Neil H. Cheek Jr., and Lee Taylor (New York, 1972), 218. On the controversy over the Echo Park dam, see Mark W. T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Albuquerque, 1994).

well as followers. By making environmental issues part of a broad new liberal agenda, they fundamentally changed the terms of debate.

The most influential advocates of the new liberalism were the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and the economist John Kenneth Galbraith. The two Harvard University professors were unusually well positioned to shape political debate. Both wrote speeches for Stevenson in 1952 and 1956, and both were founders of Americans for Democratic Action. Both also served on the domestic policy committee of the national Democratic party. In the late 1950s, both men became advisers to John F. Kennedy, and their influence in Democratic politics continued into the 1960s.<sup>5</sup>

For Schlesinger and Galbraith, a liberal agenda for the 1960s followed from two related ideas about the nation's postwar prosperity, and both ideas provided a powerful new justification for expanding the role of government in protecting the environment. First, liberals needed to move beyond the basic goals of the New Deal. In an age of abundance, government could and should do more than ensure that Americans enjoyed a minimum of material comfort. Schlesinger put the point succinctly: "Instead of the quantitative liberalism of the 1930s, rightly dedicated to the struggle to secure the economic basis of life, we need now a 'qualitative liberalism' dedicated to bettering the quality of people's lives and opportunities." Second, liberals needed to address what Galbraith called "the problem of social balance." Though the postwar economic boom enabled people to buy more and more consumer products, the private sector could not satisfy the increasing demand for vital community services. Accordingly, the challenge for liberals was to offer a compelling vision of the public interest.<sup>6</sup>

Though neither Schlesinger nor Galbraith was a noted conservationist, both pointed to environmental problems to support their argument for a new liberalism. The state of the environment clearly affected the quality of life. If the nation's streams were polluted, then fewer people could enjoy the pleasures of fishing or boating. The quality of the environment also was a classic example of a public good, since consumers could not simply buy fresh air, clean water, or a sprawl-free countryside.

Schlesinger addressed the issue first. "Our gross national product rises; our shops overflow with gadgets and gimmicks; consumer goods of ever-increasing ingenuity and luxuriance pour out of our ears," he wrote in a 1956 essay on the future of liberalism. "But our schools become more crowded and dilapidated, our teachers more weary and underpaid, our playgrounds more crowded, our cities dirtier, our roads more teeming and filthy, our national parks more unkempt, our law enforcement more overworked and inadequate."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "The Future of Liberalism: The Challenge of Abundance," *Reporter*, May 3, 1956, pp. 8–11; Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "Where Does the Liberal Go from Here?," *New York Times Magazine*, Aug. 4, 1957, pp. 7, 36, 38; Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "The New Mood in Politics," *Esquire*, 53 (Jan. 1960), 58–60; John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston, 1958). For the political involvement of the two men, see John Kenneth Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times: Memoirs* (Boston, 1981), 289, 340, 357–59; and Steven M. Gillon, *Politics and Vision: The ADA and American Liberalism, 1947–1985* (New York, 1987), 124–27.

<sup>6</sup> Schlesinger, "Future of Liberalism," 9; Galbraith, *Affluent Society*, 255.

<sup>7</sup> Schlesinger, "Future of Liberalism," 10.

In *The Affluent Society*—a best seller in 1958—Galbraith used more evocative language.

The family which takes its mauve and cerise, air-conditioned, power-steered, and power-braked automobile out for a tour passes through cities that are badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted buildings, billboards, and posts for wires that should long since have been put underground. They pass into a countryside that has been rendered largely invisible by commercial art. . . . They picnic on exquisitely packaged food from a portable icebox by a polluted stream and go on to spend the night at a park which is a menace to public health and morals. Just before dozing off on an air mattress, beneath a nylon tent, amid the stench of decaying refuse, they may reflect vaguely on the curious unevenness of their blessings. Is this, indeed, the American genius?

Those lines would become the most famous in the book.<sup>8</sup>

The fame of the passage was not due simply to Galbraith's acerbic style. In a few nauseating images, Galbraith had caught a growing concern about the deterioration of the nation's environment. By the time *The Affluent Society* appeared, many Americans no longer could take for granted the healthfulness of their milk, because radioactive fallout from nuclear testing had contaminated dairy pastures. Across the country, people had begun campaigns to save "open space" from the sprawl of suburbia. The smog over California's exploding cities had become a symbol of the perils of progress, and federal health officials had organized a national conference on the hazards of air pollution. Thousands of homeowners in new subdivisions had watched in shock as detergent foam came out of their kitchen faucets. As Galbraith suggested, countless families also had come face-to-face with pollution while trying to enjoy new opportunities for outdoor recreation.<sup>9</sup>

*Sputnik* also gave bite to Galbraith's words. Even before the Soviet satellite orbited the earth in 1957, a handful of social critics had begun to question the fruits of abundance, and the stunning Soviet success turned those lonely voices into a resounding chorus of self-doubt. Had the United States become too comfortable? The question helped provoke a spirited, end-of-the-decade debate about the nation's mission. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund commissioned studies of "the problems and opportunities confronting American democracy," and the studies appeared with great fanfare under the title *Prospect for America*. In 1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed a presidential commission on national goals. The editors of *Life* and the *New York Times* asked Americans to reflect on "the national purpose."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Galbraith, *Affluent Society*, 253. Few historians have noted the environmentalist argument in this passage. For an exception, see Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (Middletown, 1989), 169.

<sup>9</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *Life under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Atom* (New York, 1993), 84–108; Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York, 2001), 119–52; Scott Hamilton Dewey, *Don't Breathe the Air: Air Pollution and U.S. Environmental Politics, 1945–1970* (College Station, 2000), 37–110; Richard H. K. Vietor, *Environmental Politics and the Coal Coalition* (College Station, 1980), 131–32; Donald E. Carr, *Death of the Sweet Waters* (New York, 1966), 157–80.

<sup>10</sup> In the second edition of *The Affluent Society*, Galbraith noted that the uproar over *Sputnik* had helped sales of the book. See John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston, 1969), xxviii. For the response to Galbraith's work, see Charles H. Hession, *John Kenneth Galbraith and His Critics* (New York, 1972), 66–68, 110–13.

Much of the debate focused on the Schlesinger/Galbraith argument about the imbalance between private wealth and public poverty. In a series of articles early in 1960, the *New York Times* reported that many officials in Washington had concluded that “the most important continuing issue of American policy and politics over the next decade will be the issue of public spending—what share of America’s total resources should be devoted to public as distinct from private purposes.” Though Americans enjoyed more consumer goods than any people in the history of the world, the newspaper summarized the liberal side of the argument, the public sector of society was impoverished: “Education is underfinanced. Streams are polluted. There remains a shortage of hospital beds. Slums proliferate, and there is a gap in middle-income housing. We could use more and better parks, streets, detention facilities, water supply. The very quality of American life is suffering from these lacks—much more than from any lack of purely private goods and services.”<sup>11</sup>

As the *New York Times* summary suggests, the problem of pollution was cited again and again by the advocates of a more expansive public sphere. Suburban sprawl also figured often in the debate about the nation’s mission. In the *Life* series on the national purpose, two of the ten contributors wrote about the deteriorating environment. The political scientist Clinton Rossiter argued that the private sector was not equipped to deal with “the blight of our cities, the shortage of water and power, the disappearance of open space, the inadequacy of education, the need for recreational facilities, the high incidence of crime and delinquency, the crowding of the roads, the decay of the railroads, the ugliness of the sullied landscape, the pollution of the very air we breathe.” Adlai Stevenson agreed. Though the nation’s manufacturers were providing cars and refrigerators in abundance, the booming private economy could not protect against

the sprawl of subdivisions which is gradually depriving us of either civilized urban living or uncluttered rural space. It does not guarantee America’s children the teachers or the schools which should be their birthright. It does nothing to end the shame of racial discrimination. It does not counter the exorbitant cost of health, nor conserve the nation’s precious reserves of land and water and wilderness. The contrast between private opulence and public squalor on most of our panorama is now too obvious to be denied.<sup>12</sup>

In the report of the presidential commission on national goals, the urbanist and housing advocate Catherine Bauer Wurster highlighted the problems of “vanishing open space and spreading pollution.” Wurster also offered a shrewd psychological

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*Sputnik* was only one cause of the change in mood at the end of the 1950s. See Pells, *Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*, 346–99. Essays from *Life* and the *New York Times* were reprinted as John K. Jessup et al., *The National Purpose* (New York, 1960). For the other core texts in the debate, see President’s Commission on National Goals, *Goals for Americans: Programs for Action in the Sixties* (Englewood Cliffs, 1960); and Rockefeller Brothers Fund, *Prospect for America: The Rockefeller Panel Reports* (Garden City, 1961). See also John W. Jeffries, “The ‘Quest for National Purpose’ of 1960,” *American Quarterly*, 30 (Autumn 1978), 451–70.

<sup>11</sup> *New York Times*, March 13, 1960, sec. 4, p. 5. See also *ibid.*, Feb. 7, 1960, sec. 1, pp. 1, 42. Those stories were cited by other participants in the debate. See Eric Larrabee, *The Self-Conscious Society* (New York, 1960), 157; and Vance Packard, *The Waste Makers* (New York, 1960), 296.

<sup>12</sup> Adlai Stevenson, “Extend Our Vision . . . to All Mankind,” in *National Purpose*, by Jessup et al., 27; Clinton Rossiter, “We Must Show the Way to Enduring Peace,” *ibid.*, 88.



explanation for the reluctance of taxpayers to accept a rise in community spending. Because the average citizen often had no chance to participate directly in the large-scale decisions that shaped the public environment, she argued, the public world was less satisfying than the private sphere. "Since he has more sense of personal power and choice in the consumer goods market, he tends to spend more money on . . . automobiles than on public services, and is likely to vote down higher taxes even though a park, or less smog, might give him more personal pleasure than a second TV set."<sup>13</sup>

The best-selling social critic Vance Packard made similar arguments about pollution, sprawl, and national purpose in *The Waste Makers* (1960). Packard had already questioned the consumerism of the 1950s in *The Hidden Persuaders* and *The Status Seekers*, and *The Waste Makers* extended the critique. In addition to the insights of conservationists, Packard drew on the arguments of both Schlesinger and Galbraith. As the nation entered a new decade, Packard wrote, the great unmet challenges all involved the provision of public goods. "A person can't go down to the store and order a new park," he explained. "A park requires unified effort, and that gets you into voting and public spending and maybe soak-the-rich taxes." But the effort was essential. The consumption of ever greater quantities of "deodorants, hula hoops, juke boxes, padded bras, dual mufflers, horror comics, or electric rotisseries" could not ensure national greatness. Instead, Americans needed to improve the quality of the environment, to stop the spread of pollution and "the growing sleaziness, dirtiness, and chaos of the nation's great exploding metropolitan areas."<sup>14</sup>

Though the national-purpose debate was bipartisan—the conservative columnist Walter Lippmann wrote often about the need to give a higher priority to public goods—the Democrats seized the issue of the deteriorating quality of the environment. When *Life* asked both presidential candidates in 1960 to define the national purpose, only John Kennedy mentioned environmental problems. "The good life falls short as an indicator of national purpose unless it goes hand in hand with the good society," Kennedy wrote. "Even in material terms, prosperity is not enough when there is no equal opportunity to share in it; when economic progress means overcrowded cities, abandoned farms, technological unemployment, polluted air and water, and littered parks and countrysides; when those too young to earn are denied their chance to learn; when those no longer earning live out their lives in lonely degradation."<sup>15</sup>

In the White House, Kennedy's top domestic priority was a growth-boosting tax cut. But he took a few important steps to address the issue of environmental quality.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Bauer Wurster, "Framework for an Urban Society," in *Goals for Americans*, by President's Commission on National Goals, 239–41, esp. 228.

<sup>14</sup> Packard, *Waste Makers*, 294–300, 307, 313; Vance Oakley Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York, 1957); Vance Oakley Packard, *The Status Seekers: An Exploration of Class Behavior in America and the Hidden Barriers that Affect You, Your Community, Your Future* (New York, 1959). For the response to Packard's trilogy, see Daniel Horowitz, *Vance Packard and American Social Criticism* (Chapel Hill, 1994), 132–222.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Lippmann, "National Purpose," in *National Purpose*, by Jessup et al., 132–33; *New York Times*, March 13, 1960, sec. 4, p. 5; *ibid.*, Feb. 7, 1960, sec. 1, p. 1; John F. Kennedy, "We Must Climb to the Hilltop," *Life*, Aug. 22, 1960, pp. 70B–77, esp. 75; Richard M. Nixon, "Our Resolve Is Running Strong," *ibid.*, Aug. 29, 1960, pp. 87–94.

He supported a new federal program to assist local and state governments in acquiring open space, and he endorsed a measure to preserve wilderness. In 1962 he held a White House Conference on Conservation, the first since Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency. After the publication of *Silent Spring*, Kennedy instructed his science advisers to report on the use of pesticides. He also appointed an activist secretary of the interior, Stewart L. Udall, who energetically promoted the cause of environmental protection.<sup>16</sup>

Like Kennedy, Udall borrowed from Schlesinger and Galbraith. He argued again and again that "the new conservation" was a vital effort to improve "the quality of life." He also argued that the nation's deteriorating environment was a sign of "the disorder of our postwar priorities." In *The Quiet Crisis*—a 1963 call to action—he began by pointing out the stark contrast between the economic and environmental trends of the postwar decades. "America today stands poised on a pinnacle of wealth and power," he wrote, "yet we live in a land of vanishing beauty, of increasing ugliness, of shrinking open space, and of an overall environment that is diminished daily by pollution and noise and blight."<sup>17</sup>

The growing Democratic interest in the environment went beyond the Kennedy administration. Gov. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin made land and water conservation the centerpiece of his reelection campaign in 1960. By 1961, the California chapter of Americans for Democratic Action had deemphasized the old economic issues of unemployment and workmen's compensation. Instead, the group was focusing on quality-of-life issues, including the preservation of open space and the planning of metropolitan growth. In the early 1960s, a new breed of policy entrepreneurs in Congress sought to establish national reputations by championing consumer and environmental legislation, and Sen. Edmund Muskie of Maine soon earned the nickname "Mr. Pollution Control."<sup>18</sup>

After Kennedy's assassination, Lyndon B. Johnson resolved to finish the unfinished environmental business of the Kennedy administration. But he hoped to do more. Johnson had a more personal stake in the issue than Kennedy. His wife had a keen interest in nature. In the field of conservation—as in so many areas of policy—Johnson sought to surpass the achievements of Franklin Roosevelt. Like his mentor, Johnson wanted to go down in history as a great conservation president.<sup>19</sup>

The decision to give a higher priority to environmental protection made perfect sense to Johnson's domestic advisers. Early in Johnson's presidency, they proposed "the Great Society" as the overarching theme that would give historic weight to the 1964 campaign, and the roots of their vision lay in the Schlesinger/Galbraith call for

<sup>16</sup> Thomas G. Smith, "John Kennedy, Stewart Udall, and New Frontier Conservation," *Pacific Historical Review*, 64 (Autumn 1995), 329–62.

<sup>17</sup> Stewart L. Udall, *The Quiet Crisis* (New York, 1963), viii, 189; Martin V. Melosi, "Lyndon Johnson and Environmental Policy," in *The Johnson Years: Vietnam, the Environment, and Science*, ed. Robert A. Divine (Lawrence, 1987), 117; Stewart L. Udall, "To Elevate the Life of the People," in *To Heal and to Build: The Programs of President Lyndon B. Johnson*, ed. James MacGregor Burns (New York, 1968), 290.

<sup>18</sup> Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 152; Thomas R. Huffman, *Protectors of the Land and Water: Environmentalism in Wisconsin, 1961–1968* (Chapel Hill, 1994), 26–27; David Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes: The Political Power of Business in America* (New York, 1989), 32, 39.

<sup>19</sup> See Melosi, "Lyndon Johnson and Environmental Policy," 119–23.



a qualitative liberalism. The historian Eric F. Goldman and the speech writer Richard N. Goodwin, especially, found inspiration in the arguments of the late 1950s about the challenge of abundance.<sup>20</sup>

As the president's house intellectual, Goldman asked Galbraith to serve as "the quality of American life" adviser to the Johnson brain trust. He had written admiringly of Galbraith's contribution to the debate on national purpose in 1960, and he spoke several times in the next few years about the proper goals of a "post-affluent" society. "Material concerns were still pressing—particularly the disgraceful and dangerous economic position of the Negro—but the nation had reached a general affluence which permitted it to give attention not only to the quantity but to the quality of American living," he argued in 1964. The next generation of Americans at last could escape the burdens of the "dull society," the "overmaterial society," and the "ugly society."<sup>21</sup>

Goodwin recognized that the Johnson agenda needed to do what the New Deal had not done to guarantee a modicum of comfort and security for all Americans. But he concluded that the great opportunity for going beyond the old liberalism lay in acknowledging "that private income, no matter how widely distributed, was only a foundation; that private affluence, no matter how widely distributed, could not remedy many of the public conditions that diminished the possibilities of American life." For Goodwin, that meant tackling pollution, suburban sprawl, and environmental health.<sup>22</sup>

In a speech written by Goodwin, President Johnson spoke to those issues in May 1964. The speech was the president's first attempt to define the Great Society, and he addressed only a few points. The Great Society required the abolition of poverty and racial injustice, he argued, "but that is just the beginning." The Great Society would spark the imagination, offer stimulating forms of leisure, and provide the satisfactions of true community. "It is a place where man can renew contact with nature," the president continued. "It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods." Perhaps because the occasion for the speech was a college graduation, the president spoke passionately about the need to ensure that "every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and enlarge his talents." But the rest of the speech focused on problems of the metropolis and the countryside. The president decried the social and environmental costs of suburban growth, including the loss of open space. He also called for action to protect the natural splendor of the nation. "We have always prided ourselves on being not only America the strong and America the free, but America the beautiful," he explained. "Today that beauty is in danger. The water we drink, the food we eat, the very air

<sup>20</sup> On the role of Lyndon B. Johnson's advisers in defining the Great Society, see Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York, 1998), 80–84. Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin note the connection between the Schlesinger/Galbraith arguments about qualitative liberalism and the environmental initiatives of the Great Society. See Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided*, 112.

<sup>21</sup> Eric F. Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (New York, 1969), 130, 164. See also Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade—and After: America, 1945–1960* (New York, 1960), 345.

<sup>22</sup> Richard N. Goodwin, *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties* (Boston, 1988), 273. See also *New York Times*, July 25, 1965, p. 51.

that we breathe, are threatened with pollution. Our parks are overcrowded, our seashores overburdened. Green fields and dense forests are disappearing.”<sup>23</sup>

The speech was not mere talk. Johnson made the environment a major focus of the Great Society. Though scholars have paid much more attention to the civil rights acts, the War on Poverty, and the expansion of health and education programs, Johnson himself considered the environmental agenda no less important. As the historian Robert Dallek concludes, “he had no real priority” among the Great Society initiatives—“he wanted them all.” Johnson aggressively used the power of the presidency to draw public attention to environmental problems. He convened a White House Conference on Natural Beauty, and he asked the President’s Science Advisory Committee to report on ways to restore the quality of the environment. He devoted several major addresses to his environmental proposals. The result was a torrent of legislation: Johnson signed almost three hundred conservation and beautification measures. The most important bills addressed the problems of air and water pollution, solid-waste disposal, wilderness preservation, and endangered species. The Johnson initiatives also created national lakeshores and seashores, increased the number of national parks, and provided funds to state governments for land and water conservation.<sup>24</sup>

To be sure, the legislation of the mid-1960s was not enough to solve the most serious environmental problems. In the fight against pollution, the truly landmark acts did not come until the early 1970s. But the achievements of the Great Society were critical in the evolution of the environmental movement. Before the 1960s, the problem of pollution was not a principal concern of the federal government. In 1960—just before leaving office—President Eisenhower vetoed a clean-water act with a blunt declaration that water pollution was “a uniquely local blight.” John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson both rejected that view, and the legislation of the mid-1960s firmly established the principle of federal responsibility for the quality of the nation’s air and water. That responsibility was institutionalized in two new agencies able to research and publicize environmental problems. Indeed, the new bureaucracies were agenda setters: The Federal Water Pollution Control Administration and the National Air Pollution Control Administration both helped strengthen the demand for tougher legislation to protect the environment.<sup>25</sup>

### The Grass-Roots Activism of Middle-Class Women

The environmental activism of middle-class women did not begin in 1960. In the Progressive Era women actively supported the conservation movement. They also

<sup>23</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at the University of Michigan, May 22, 1964,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963–1964* (2 vols., Washington, 1965), I, 704–5.

<sup>24</sup> Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 229. On the Johnson initiatives, see Melosi, “Lyndon Johnson and Environmental Policy,” 113–49; and Irving Bernstein, *Guns or Butter: The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson* (New York, 1996), 261–306.

<sup>25</sup> James L. Sundquist, *Politics and Policy: The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Years* (Washington, 1968), 323. On the agenda-setting role of the new pollution agencies, see J. Clarence Davies III, *The Politics of Pollution* (New York, 1970), 23.

lobbied for smokeless skies, clean water, pure food, and urban parks, and they often justified their efforts as “municipal housekeeping” and “civic mothering.” Women continued to press for environmental protection in the decades after World War I. For several reasons, however, the number of women active in the environmental cause increased dramatically in the late 1950s and 1960s. Some activists worked through old conservation or women’s organizations. More often, women formed ad hoc groups to stop pollution, save open spaces, or protect wildlife. The activism of women was crucial in making the environment an issue in communities across the nation.<sup>26</sup>

The League of Women Voters played a vital role in the battle against water pollution. One of the first popular books about the issue—Donald Carr’s *Death of the Sweet Waters* (1966)—was dedicated to the league’s members. The national league made water a focus for education and activism in 1956, and many local chapters soon launched clean-water campaigns. To win support for a sewage treatment plant in Idaho Falls, Idaho, league members put flyers about polluted drinking water on every restaurant menu in town, convinced milkmen to distribute leaflets to every milk box, painted slogans on sidewalks, and erected road signs to direct people to the Snake River sewage outlet: “It’s a shocker!” By 1960 the league had become a major player in the debate about the federal responsibility for water quality, and league members continued to lobby for government action throughout the 1960s. Their effectiveness was especially evident at the end of the decade, when the league organized a coalition of almost forty labor, municipal, and conservation groups to wage a “Citizens Crusade for Clean Water.”<sup>27</sup>

Activist women often became identified with the rivers and lakes they sought to save. In the mid-1960s, Marion Stoddart of Massachusetts earned the epithet “Mother Nashua” after forming a group to save one of the nation’s most polluted rivers: The Nashua River Cleanup Committee played a key role in the passage of the Massachusetts Clean Water Act in 1966. The campaign of Verna Mize to stop a mining company from polluting Lake Superior became a national symbol of effective citizen action. In one account of her campaign, the author imagined the lake offering Mize words of thanks.<sup>28</sup>

In many cities women worked aggressively to stop air pollution. The New Yorker Hazel Henderson organized Citizens for Clean Air by passing out leaflets to mothers during her daily walks in the park with her infant daughter. The group soon had

<sup>26</sup> On women’s antipollution efforts at the start of the twentieth century, see Suellen M. Hoy, “Municipal Housekeeping: The Role of Women in Improving Urban Sanitation Practices, 1880–1917,” in *Pollution and Reform in American Cities, 1870–1930*, ed. Martin V. Melosi (Austin, 1980), 173–98. On the contribution of women to the conservation campaigns of the Progressive Era, see Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (New York, 1995), 109–36.

<sup>27</sup> Carr, *Death of the Sweet Waters*, 12; Louise M. Young, *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920–1970* (Westport, 1989), 174–77; League of Women Voters Education Fund, *The Big Water Fight: Trials and Triumphs in Citizen Action on Problems of Supply, Pollution, Floods, and Planning across the U.S.A.* (Brattleboro, 1966), 5–8, 34–77; Alvin B. Toffler, “Danger in Your Drinking Water,” *Good Housekeeping*, 150 (Jan. 1960), 130; Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman’s Voice: A History* (Albuquerque, 1996), 199–200; Davies, *Politics of Pollution*, 87; Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 460.

<sup>28</sup> John J. Berger, *Restoring the Earth: How Americans Are Working to Renew Our Damaged Environment* (New York, 1979), 9–25; Odom Fanning, *Man and His Environment: Citizen Action* (New York, 1975), 1–24.

more than twenty thousand members—roughly 75 percent were women. Despite the obstacles to success, Henderson wrote in a 1966 article in *Parents' Magazine*, the work was satisfying for a young mother. "You are exercising the responsibilities of citizenship, and you are setting an example to your children, at the same time that you are working for their health and welfare," she explained. "Best of all, you are learning firsthand about one of the most exciting frontiers of our growing knowledge and technology—how to manage our natural heritage so that it can support the needs of our increasing population, and at the same time remain orderly and beautiful, a fitting and joyous setting for future generations."<sup>29</sup>

Women also organized in the 1960s to address new forms of pollution. On November 1, 1961, approximately fifty thousand "concerned housewives" went on strike to protest the hazards of the arms race. Instead of cooking and cleaning, the women lobbied elected officials, picketed nuclear installations, and marched in the streets. In all, the founders of Women Strike for Peace organized events in sixty cities, including New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, St. Louis, Denver, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Many of the marchers pushed baby carriages or held photographs of children. Though a number of the women called for a ban on nuclear weapons and a halt to the arms race, the immediate goal was to stop atmospheric weapons testing, since radioactive fallout from nuclear tests posed a threat to life. "This movement was inspired and motivated by mothers' love for children," one Women Strike for Peace member explained. "When they were putting their breakfast on the table, they saw not only the Wheaties and milk, but they also saw strontium 90 and iodine 131." In the months after the strike, the membership of Women Strike for Peace grew rapidly, as women rallied to the cause: "Pure Milk," they demanded, "Not Poison."<sup>30</sup>

Like nuclear fallout, the wanton use of pesticides inspired women to act. Women's organizations helped make Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* both a best seller and a political force. Though Carson took pains not to appeal solely to women—she used a variety of arguments and rhetorical strategies—she recognized that women were likely to be quicker to share her concerns. "I believe it is important for women to realize that the world of today threatens to destroy much of that beauty that has immense power to bring us a healing release from tension," she argued in a speech to Theta Sigma Chi, a national sorority of women journalists. "Women have a greater intuitive understanding of such things. They want for their children not only physical health but mental and spiritual health as well. I bring these things to your attention because I think your awareness of them will help, whether you are practicing journalists, or teachers, or librarians, or housewives and mothers." Carson cultivated a network of women supporters, and women eagerly championed her work. They used *Silent*

<sup>29</sup> Mrs. Carter F. Henderson, "What You Can Do to Combat Air Pollution," *Parents' Magazine and Better Homemaking*, 41 (Oct. 1966), 76–77, 96–98; Mary Joy Breton, *Women Pioneers for the Environment* (Boston, 1998), 193. See also Charles O. Jones, *Clean Air: The Policies and Politics of Pollution Control* (Pittsburgh, 1975), 149–51; and Dewey, *Don't Breathe the Air*, 97–98, 191–92, 201–2, 234.

<sup>30</sup> Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago, 1993), 83, 111. Because historians invariably describe Women Strike for Peace as a pacifist or antiwar group, the environmentalism of the organization has received little attention.

*Spring* as a basis for educational pamphlets, wrote letters to the editor, and lobbied politicians. The most active were the American Association of University Women, the National Council of Women, the Garden Club of America, and the general Federation of Women's Clubs. Carson also had support from members of the League of Women Voters and from women in wildlife conservation and animal-rights groups.<sup>31</sup>

In many communities, women also led campaigns to preserve open space. Often, the activists sought to save undeveloped woods or fields where children played. But some of the open-space campaigns were more ambitious. Three women married to faculty members at the University of California, Berkeley—including Catherine Kerr, the wife of the university's president—organized the Save the San Francisco Bay Association in the early 1960s. To prevent development projects from filling in the bay, the group soon helped secure passage of one of the first state laws regulating land use. Because the open-space campaigns often succeeded, journalists in the mid-1960s began to point to women's activism as a model for a new kind of conservation. A short guide to open-space preservation published in 1964 began with the story of one woman's successful campaign to preserve a marsh from development. "The war Ruth Rusch has been waging in her little corner of suburbia contains immense significance for all of us," the author wrote. "For it shows not only that we can win the fight to save our landscape from the despoilers but also specifically how to go about it."<sup>32</sup>

The list could go on and on. As First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson worked to protect and restore "natural beauty," and her efforts led to the Highway Beautification Act in 1965. After the Santa Barbara, California, oil spill in 1969, women were the driving force behind Get Oil Out (GOO), a grass-roots group that sought to end offshore drilling. A Seattle housewife collected over 250,000 signatures on a petition to halt the development of the supersonic transport plane. From New York to California, activist women campaigned to stop construction of power plants in scenic areas. No matter what the issue, environmentalism at the grass roots depended on a volunteer corps of women.<sup>33</sup>

Often, women were attracted to the environmental cause for the same reasons as men. But the predominance of women at the grass roots was very much a function of gender expectations. Though women's historians have paid little attention to environmentalism, the history of the movement offers new insight into the concerns of one important subgroup of women.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Vera Norwood, *Made from This Earth: American Women and Nature* (Chapel Hill, 1993), 147–48, 153–57, 162–64, 167–68, esp. 153.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945–1980* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 46–76; Ann Vileisis, *Discovering the Unknown Landscape: A History of America's Wetlands* (Washington, 1997), 212–15; Cam Cavanaugh, *Saving the Great Swamp: The People, the Powerbrokers, and an Urban Wilderness* (Frenchtown, 1978), 97–110; Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice*, 187–93, 197–206; Fanning, *Man and His Environment*, 193–98. For the statement about Ruth Rusch, see James Nathan Miller, "To Save the Landscape," *National Civic Review*, 53 (July 1964), 355.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis L. Gould, *Lady Bird Johnson and the Environment* (Lawrence, 1988); Robert Easton, *Black Tide: The Santa Barbara Oil Spill and Its Consequences* (New York, 1972), 46, 222; Mel Horwitch, *Clipped Wings: The American SST Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 284; "Women of the Month: Environmental Life Preservers," *Ladies' Home Journal*, 93 (April 1976), 59; Wellock, *Critical Masses*, 49–51; Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*, 46–76.

<sup>34</sup> Because many women in environmental organizations did not directly challenge traditional gender roles, they are missing from standard accounts of the women's movement. They also receive little attention in scholarly

The women active in the environmental movement were hardly homogeneous, yet a few demographic patterns stand out. The grass-roots activists were overwhelmingly white. More often than not, they were in their thirties and forties, they lived in metropolitan areas or college towns, and they were well educated. Most were married to white-collar or professional men, and most had children. At a time when the percentage of married women working outside the home was rising sharply, the women activists usually described themselves as housewives.<sup>35</sup>

Why did so many women in that demographic group become environmental activists in the 1960s? As their children grew older, many sought new ways to use their talents, and the environmental cause seemed to some more challenging and important than traditional volunteer work. Many other women became active in response to an environmental threat that hit home. That was especially true in suburbia—the most rapidly changing environment in the nation.

Every year in the 1950s and 1960s, a territory roughly the size of Rhode Island was bulldozed for metropolitan development. Forests, marshes, creeks, hills, cornfields, and orchards all were destroyed to build subdivisions. Though some of the environmental consequences of suburban development were invisible to untrained observers, others were obvious. Again and again, the destruction of nearby open spaces robbed children of beloved places to play. The suburbs also were a kind of sanitation frontier. Beyond the range of municipal sewer systems, the residents of postwar subdivisions often depended on septic tanks for waste disposal, and widespread septic-tank failures in the 1950s and 1960s caused a host of health and environmental problems.<sup>36</sup>

Because the suburbs were domestic places—and women traditionally were caretakers of the domestic—threats to environmental quality in suburbia were threats to the women's sphere. The stakes were the sanctity of the home and the well-being of the family. For many middle-class women, therefore, the environmental cause seemed a natural extension of their concerns as housewives and mothers.<sup>37</sup>

In the early 1960s, for example, the major women's magazines all published pieces about water pollution, and the articles highlighted the threat to domestic life. *Redbook* offered a primer on what readers needed to know “to protect your family,” while *American Home* grabbed attention by describing water-related health problems in

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works about women's lives in the 1960s. See, for example, Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York, 2000); Susan M. Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream: American Women and Politics since 1960* (New York, 1989); Blanche Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green, *Changing the Future: American Women in the 1960s* (New York, 1993); and Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960* (New York, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> In addition to published primary and secondary sources, my generalizations about the backgrounds of women active in the environmental cause in the 1960s come from interviews with the founders of the grass-roots group Salina Consumers for a Better Environment. See Dana Jackson, Penny Geis, Terry Evans, and Ivy Marsh interviews by Adam Rome, 1988–1989, notes (in Adam Rome's possession).

<sup>36</sup> The best example of a mother's dismay at the loss of a child's favorite wild spot is Margo Tupper, *No Place to Play* (Philadelphia, 1966), 18–19. For the impact of septic-tank failure on suburban families, see Frank Graham Jr., *Disaster by Default: Politics and Water Pollution* (New York, 1966), 169–77.

<sup>37</sup> For the role of gender expectations in shaping women environmentalists' activism after World War II, see Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*, 56–57. I also draw on the historical literature on maternalist politics. On that subject just before the 1960s, see Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960* (Philadelphia, 1994).



children. *Good Housekeeping* extolled the antipollution efforts of the League of Women Voters in traditional terms. "Here is where intelligent and aroused women can do the most important job," the magazine concluded. "The clean-up of our rivers to safeguard our precious water supply—this is the biggest housekeeping chore facing the nation today."<sup>38</sup>

Even in 1970—after the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, after the formation of the National Organization for Women, after the first women's liberation protests—women in environmental groups often appealed directly to housewives and mothers. The women who formed the Salina, Kansas, Consumers for a Better Environment were typical. On the first Earth Day, the group sponsored a teach-in at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) to show women how to use their power as household managers to reduce pollution and conserve resources. To maintain the earth's life-support systems, women needed to consider the environment every time they made a choice about what to buy or how to keep house. According to one of the event's organizers, the environmental crisis also required women to rethink the nature of motherhood: "We must be concerned, not that our children have every material convenience, but that they have air to breathe."<sup>39</sup>

In *What Every Woman Should Know—and Do—about Pollution: A Guide to Good Global Housekeeping*, Betty Ann Ottinger, the wife of Rep. Richard Ottinger of New York, likewise tried to build a new movement on old foundations. The environmental cause "is one that the American woman can really sink her teeth into," she argued. As housewives, women determined "how more than two-thirds of our consumer dollars are spent. This in itself is a major weapon which is made even more potent by the influence we exert over the decision as to how most of the remaining dollars are allocated." As mothers, women shaped "the attitudes and lifestyles of the coming generation which will play the key role in choosing whether we follow the road to environmental sanity or strangle in the products of our own affluence." Eventually, Ottinger hoped, women would work to protect the environment as politicians and business leaders. But she concluded that the immediate opportunity to make a difference was at home. In the domestic sphere—unlike the world of politics and business—women did not have to wait for men to lead the way.<sup>40</sup>

Though often attracted to the environmental cause as an extension of their traditional responsibilities as housewives and mothers, many women found the work liberating. Sylvia Troy is a good example. Until her late thirties, Troy was content to be the wife of a doctor. She had little interest in politics. But in 1960 she went to a dinner meeting of the Indiana Save the Dunes Council, and she was impressed by the spirit of the group: "They were all nature lovers—non-political, non-activist, not

<sup>38</sup> Ruth Carson, "How Safe Is Your Drinking Water?," *Redbook*, 117 (Aug. 1961), 47–48, 86; Milton J. E. Senn with Evan McLeod Wylie, "We Must Stop Contaminating Our Water," *American Home*, 66 (Winter 1963), 45–46, 72–74; Toffler, "Danger in Your Drinking Water," 42–43, 128–30, esp. 130.

<sup>39</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1963); *Salina Journal*, April 22, 1970, pp. 1–2. See also Dana Jackson, "Women for the Earth," *Land Report* (no. 8, Fall 1979), 17; and Terence Kehoe, *Cleaning Up the Great Lakes: From Cooperation to Confrontation* (DeKalb, 1997), 110, 144.

<sup>40</sup> Betty Ann Ottinger, *What Every Woman Should Know—and Do—about Pollution: A Guide to Good Global Housekeeping* ([New York, 1970]), 11–12.

organizers, not joiners, not cause-oriented." She became active in the organization, and she soon realized that she had the skills to be a leader. She could network, lobby, recruit, motivate, and negotiate. When the group's first president stepped down, Troy was chosen to succeed her. She then served as president for more than a decade. "The Save the Dunes Council experience changed me dramatically," she recalled. "It became a vehicle for my personal growth. I learned a lot about my own capabilities, my own strengths, and my own assertiveness in behalf of a cause."<sup>41</sup>

Even for women who did not become leaders of organizations, environmental activism often was consciousness raising. In the group Women Strike for Peace, Amy Swerdlow concludes, "thousands of women who had identified themselves only as housewives found to their surprise that they could do serious research, write convincing flyers and pamphlets, speak eloquently in public, plan effective political strategies, organize successful long-range campaigns, and challenge male political leaders . . . to whom they had previously deferred." The result was a new sense of self-worth, a new willingness to take risks, even a new understanding of the ways women were limited by traditional gender roles.<sup>42</sup>

Again and again, women in environmental organizations struggled against the condescension of men in positions of power. When a group of California housewives met with officials in 1966 to argue against the construction of a highway, a project engineer tried to dismiss a member of the group with a blunt put-down: "Get back in your kitchen, lady, and let me build my road!" The comment only intensified one participant's desire to fight on. Because many men considered women irrational, women often found that speaking at a public forum was a trying test. Yet many responded to the challenge with a new resolve. As the clean-air activist Michelle Madoff explained, "I didn't want to go and testify and be branded as another idiot housewife—hysterical Squirrel Hill housewife in tennis shoes, as we're referred to—you know, uninformed, emotional."<sup>43</sup>

Without using the language of feminism, activists such as Madoff effectively called into question the boundaries of the women's sphere. Bargaining with trade associations, wearing gas masks during street demonstrations, testifying at government hearings—all extended the range of the possible. The work of women in the environmental movement particularly challenged the long-standing view of science as a male province. By demonstrating that women could master technical bodies of knowledge, many environmental activists countered the stereotype of female emotionalism, and so they helped create new opportunities for women to define themselves as they saw fit.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Kay Franklin and Norma Schaeffer, *Duel for the Dunes: Land Use Conflict on the Shores of Lake Michigan* (Urbana, 1983), 214–15.

<sup>42</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 4, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Fox, *American Conservation Movement*, 344; Jones, *Clean Air*, 151. In addition, see William O. Douglas, *The Three Hundred Year War: A Chronicle of Ecological Disaster* (New York, 1972), 193–94; and Breton, *Women Pioneers for the Environment*, 89–92. Rachel Carson also faced gender-based charges of hysterical exaggeration. See Michael B. Smith, "'Silence, Miss Carson!': Science, Gender, and the Reception of *Silent Spring*," *Feminist Studies*, 27 (Fall 2001), 733–52.

<sup>44</sup> N. Patricia Hynes argues similarly that Carson's work inspired many women to enter traditionally male arenas in the 1970s and 1980s. See N. Patricia Hynes, *The Recurring Silent Spring* (New York, 1989), 49–50.

The environmental movement also helped women to find vocations beyond the home. For some women, environmental activism led to elected office. Michelle Madoff drew on her experience as a founder of Pittsburgh's Group against Smog and Pollution (GASP) to win election to the city council. The environmental study groups of the League of Women Voters were particularly good jumping-off places for careers in politics. Other activists moved from volunteer work to paid employment. Many became staff members of environmental groups or consultants to government agencies. After a decade of volunteer work with the Sierra Club in California, Claire Dedrick was appointed the state's secretary of resources in 1975. Hazel Henderson's struggle to address the air-pollution issue in New York laid the foundation for a pioneering career in environmental economics.<sup>45</sup>

In complex and even contradictory ways, then, the environmental movement affected the lives of many women. For some college-educated housewives, environmental activism resolved a tension between traditional expectations and unfulfilled ambitions: Because they acted to protect the home and the family, they could enter the public sphere—they could be more than “just” housewives—without rejecting the claims of domesticity. For other women, however, environmental activism was the first step toward new responsibilities outside the home. As they became more involved, they became more confident of their abilities and more determined to change the world. Though many did not consider themselves feminists, they helped advance the feminist cause.<sup>46</sup>

### The Countercultural and Radical Contribution

In the late 1960s, the environmental cause attracted millions of people in their teens and twenties, and the energy of the young helped make environmentalism a mass movement. Young activists formed “eco” organizations in hundreds of cities and college towns. Students and recent graduates were the key force in the mobilization for Earth Day.

The environmentalism of the young owed much to the postwar economic boom. For the first time in American history, millions of children grew up in settings designed to bring people into harmony with nature. In the new suburbs, kids often could play in forests and fields just beyond the edge of development. The newly affluent families of the 1950s often vacationed outdoors—hunting, fishing, and camping became more popular after 1945. Then an unprecedented number of the

<sup>45</sup> Patrick Kiger, “The Perennial Campaigner: Stepping Out with Michelle Madoff,” *Pittsburgh Magazine*, 11 (July 1980), 20, 23; Jackson, “Women for the Earth,” 17; Fox, *American Conservation Movement*, 344; Hazel Henderson, *Creating Alternative Futures: The End of Economics* (New York, 1980), 1–8. For the political careers of League of Women Voters veterans, see Susan Ware, “American Women in the 1950s: Nonpartisan Politics and Women's Politicization,” in *Women, Politics, and Change*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York, 1990), 292–94. I also draw on information about women who won the American Motors Conservation Award from 1960 to 1970. For the list of winners, see *ChevronTexaco* <[http://www.chevrontexaco.com/social\\_responsibility/community/programs\\_conservation.asp](http://www.chevrontexaco.com/social_responsibility/community/programs_conservation.asp)> (May 16, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> My arguments about the complex ways women were affected by environmental activism owe much to Lynn Y. Weiner, “Reconstructing Motherhood: The La Leche League in Postwar America,” *Journal of American History*, 80 (March 1994), 1357–81.

baby boomers went to college, to spend four years walking across tree-lined quadrangles.<sup>47</sup>

The environmentalism of the young also owed much to “the bomb.” Many baby-boom children had nightmares about atomic war. Would humanity survive? The mounting evidence of environmental degradation in the 1960s provoked similar anxieties about “survival,” a word that appeared again and again in environmentalist discourse. In 1969, when Joyce Maynard read the environmentalist Paul R. Ehrlich’s shocking best seller, *The Population Bomb*, she immediately felt the kind of fear she had felt during the Cuban missile crisis: “Not personal, individual fear but end-of-the-world fear, that by the time we were our parents’ age we would be sardine-packed and tethered to our gas masks in a skyless cloud of smog.” Maynard’s response was common. In a 1969 discussion of the generation gap, Margaret Mead argued that growing up in the shadow of the bomb made the young more likely to understand the environmental crisis. “They have never known a time when war did not threaten annihilation,” Mead wrote. “When they are given the facts, they can understand immediately that continued pollution of the air and water and soil will soon make the planet uninhabitable and that it will be impossible to feed an indefinitely expanding world population.”<sup>48</sup>

Though the environmental movement drew young people from all parts of the ideological spectrum, the new cause appealed especially to critics of the nation’s cultural and political institutions. For many rebels against the soul-deadening artificiality of consumer culture, nature became a source of authentic values. For many members of the New Left, the degradation of the environment became a powerful symbol of the exploitive character of capitalism. The horrors of the Vietnam War also led many people to question “the war against nature.” By 1970 the effort to protect

<sup>47</sup> Many members of the 1960s generation ultimately rebelled against the suburbs and universities, but that rebellion often intensified their commitment to the ideal of harmony with nature, as I argue below. For the argument that the suburban ideal shaped the commune movement of the 1960s, see Bennett M. Berger, *The Survival of a Counterculture: Ideological Work and Everyday Life among Rural Communitards* (Berkeley, 1981), 94. The 1967 film *The Graduate* first prompted me to think about the significance of the college landscape: When Dustin Hoffman goes to find his true love at the University of California, the cinematography emphasizes the pastoral harmony of the campus. See *The Graduate*, dir. Mike Nichols (Embassy, 1967). On the place of nature in university design, see Paul Venable Turner, *Campus: An American Planning Tradition* (New York, 1984).

<sup>48</sup> Joyce Maynard, *Looking Back: A Chronicle of Growing Up Old in the Sixties* (Garden City, 1973), 122; Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap* (Garden City, 1970), 58–59. See also Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York, 1968). For the survival rhetoric of the 1950s, see Margot A. Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove’s America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley, 1997), 109, 113. For the nuclear nightmares of the sixties generation, see Landon Y. Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* (New York, 1980), 52–53; Gitlin, *Sixties*, 22–24; and Lawrence Wright, *In the New World: Growing Up with America from the Sixties to the Eighties* (New York, 1989), 53–54. See also William M. Tuttle Jr., “America’s Children in an Era of War, Hot and Cold: The Holocaust, the Bomb, and Child Rearing in the 1940s,” in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ed. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, 2001), 22–26. By 1970 environmental activists were publishing survival readers, demonstrating in survival marches, and teaching courses in survival studies. See John Fischer, “Survival U: Prospectus for a Really Relevant University,” in *The Environmental Handbook*, ed. Garrett De Bell (New York, 1970), 134–46; Cliff Humphrey and Mary Humphrey, “Survival Walk,” *ibid.*, 307–9; Keith Murray, “Suggestions toward an Ecological Platform,” *ibid.*, 319–20; Wes Jackson, *Man and the Environment* (Dubuque, 1971), xvii; Thomas R. Harney and Robert Disch, eds., *The Dying Generations: Perspectives on the Environmental Crisis* (New York, 1971), 298–300; Editors of the *Progressive*, *The Crisis of Survival* (Glenview, 1970); Clifton Fadiman and Jean White, eds., *Ecocide—and Thoughts toward Survival* (Santa Barbara, 1971); Glen A. Love and Rhoda M. Love, eds., *Ecological Crisis: Readings for Survival* (New York, 1970); and Robert Disch, ed., *The Ecological Conscience: Values for Survival* (Englewood Cliffs, 1970).

the environment seemed to many activists to be part of a larger movement to affirm “Life,” a word they often used as a shorthand for everything they valued.<sup>49</sup>

The countercultural roots of environmentalism went deepest. In the late 1950s, the beat writers began to tout the open spaces of nature as an antidote to the poisonous conformity of suburbia. In Jack Kerouac’s 1958 novel *The Dharma Bums*, the narrator joins the fictionalized Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg on a quest for truth in the mountains of California. At one point, the Snyder character, Japhy Ryder, dreams out loud about a new generation refusing to stay “imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume.” “I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution,” he tells his friends,

thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to mountains to pray, making children laugh and old men glad, making young girls happy and old girls happier, all of ’em Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason and also by being kind and by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures.<sup>50</sup>

Within a few years, Ryder’s dream was becoming reality, as thousands of young suburbanites turned their backs on middle-class life. Many fled to countercultural enclaves in cities. By 1967 dozens of hippie communes had sprung up in rural areas, and the number increased dramatically in the last years of the decade. “Right now, I’m trying to keep from being swallowed by a monster—plastic, greedy American society,” a nineteen-year-old wrote to the members of one rural commune. “I need to begin relating to new people who are into taking care of each other and the earth.”<sup>51</sup>

The hippies hoped to feel the flow of the seasons, to grow things, to enjoy the beauty of sunrise, to walk naked. Drugs helped. Indeed, the desire to return to nature was a driving force in the drug culture of the 1960s. In the words of the historians Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, “LSD made it possible to have a decent conversation with a tree.” The experience of the writer Geoffrey O’Brien was typical. On drugs, he went to “the wilderness.” He felt in tune with the rhythms of the “stars, migratory patterns, planting cycles, the chirping of insects.” Nature talked and he listened, in ecstatic communion. “The planet is a sentient companion! Everything that lives is taking in everything and communicating its response *back* to everything, without stopping, constantly!”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> For environmental attitudes among the young, see Daniel Yankelovich, Inc., *The Changing Values on Campus: Political and Personal Attitudes of Today’s College Students* (New York, 1972), 73–74.

<sup>50</sup> Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (1958; New York, 1976), 97–98. According to Allen Ginsberg, the intellectual core of the beat movement was “the return to nature and the revolt against the machine.” See Bruce Cook, *The Beat Generation* (New York, 1971), 104. For the importance of the poet Gary Snyder to young environmentalists in the 1960s, see Pat Smith and Mariana Gosnell, “That Snyder Sutra,” in *Ecotactics*, ed. Mitchell and Stallings, 84–87.

<sup>51</sup> The quotation is from Keith Melville, *Communes in the Counter Culture: Origins, Theories, Styles of Life* (New York, 1972), 134–35. For the urban scene, see Helen Swick Perry, *The Human Be-In* (New York, 1970); Don McNeill, *Moving Through Here* (New York, 1970); and Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York, 1984). On the rural movement, see Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, 1999).

<sup>52</sup> Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided*, 158; Geoffrey O’Brien, *Dream Time: Chapters from the Sixties* (New York, 1989), 74–76. See also Leonard Wolf, *Voices from the Love Generation* (Boston, 1968), 151–52; Stephen Diamond, *What the Trees Said: Life on a New Age Farm* (New York, 1971), 75–89; Nick Bromell, *Tomorrow Never*



Especially in the countryside, however, many of the hippies were not just seeking to commune with nature. They also were motivated by apocalyptic visions of the collapse of industrial civilization. Smog alerts, water shortages, pesticide scares, power outages, traffic tie-ups—all suggested that the urban environment soon would be deadly to both body and soul. As one commune member explained, “our ecological sophistication told us that the cities and everybody in them were doomed. ‘Don’t drink the water and don’t breathe the air’ is pretty sound advice these days in the places where most Americans live.”<sup>53</sup>

Though most of the late 1960s countercultural communities did not last long, the hippies inspired many young people to think more deeply about the earth. Hippie communes typically were open. Anyone could stop by to get a taste of the simple life, and thousands did. According to one scholarly estimate, half a million Americans spent some time at rural communes in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Because the mainstream media gave tremendous attention to the counterculture, the hippie argument that the nation needed to find a less environmentally destructive way of life reached a wide audience. The hippies themselves often sought to spread their gospel. Some started countercultural restaurants, with menus that proclaimed the virtue of natural food. Others performed street theater. In New York, a troupe sprayed black mist and passed out blackened flowers at a “soot-in” in front of the Consolidated Edison building. A group of hippies in Eugene, Oregon, formed CRAP—Cyclists Revolting Against Pollution—to show people there are ways to move other than foul automobiles spewing death.” Throughout the nation, the underground press regularly enjoined readers to “revere nature.” In a variety of ways, then, the counterculture helped to put the environment on the protest agenda.<sup>54</sup>

For the New Left, the path to environmentalism was more difficult. The first student radicals had little interest in the environment. Unlike the hippies, the founders of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were theoreticians: They were inspired by sociology, not poetry. The Port Huron Statement, the 1962 SDS manifesto, did not discuss nature at all. Its only reference to the environment was a warning about the unrestrained exploitation of natural resources at a time of rapidly expanding world population. Even in 1970, as millions of young Americans readied for the first Earth Day, many new leftists dismissed environmentalism as a diversion from the pressing

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*Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s* (Chicago, 2000), 69–71; and David Farber, “The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York, 2002), 27.

<sup>53</sup> Raymond Mungo, *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times with Liberation News Service* (Boston, 1970), 108. Mungo gave no source for the warning not to drink the water or breathe the air, but the phrase probably came from a 1965 song by Tom Lehrer. See Tom Lehrer, “Pollution,” in *The Sierra Club Survival Songbook*, ed. Jim Morse and Nancy Mathews (San Francisco, 1971), 18–21. The apocalyptic vision of many commune members is captured in a 1967 science fiction piece. See Paul Goodman, “Rural Life: 1984,” in “*People or Personnel: Decentralizing and the Mixed Systems*” and “*Like a Conquered Province: The Moral Ambiguity of America*,” by Paul Goodman (New York, 1968), 412–22.

<sup>54</sup> For the estimate of commune participants, see Hugh Gardner, *The Children of Prosperity: Thirteen Modern American Communes* (New York, 1978), v. The examples of hippie activism are from William Hedgepeth and Dennis Stock, *The Alternative: Communal Life in New America* (New York, 1970), 117; McNeill, *Moving Through Here*, 118–20, 123–27; Anderson, *Movement and the Sixties*, 266; and Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville, 1991), 109. On the dissemination of hippie values, see Miller, *60s Communes*, 15–16.



issue of social justice. But the skepticism was not universal. In the course of the 1960s, a minority within the New Left began to articulate a radical interpretation of the environmental crisis.<sup>55</sup>

The young radicals at first followed the lead of Ralph Nader. In a chapter of his 1965 exposé of the automobile industry, *Unsafe at Any Speed*, Nader challenged “the power to pollute,” and a few New Left theorists soon joined Nader in attacking corporate polluters. As long as business interests ruled, the SDS member Richard Flacks argued in 1966, the quality of the nation’s land, air, and water would continue to deteriorate. By the end of the decade, that argument had become more common and more radical. The authors of works about “the politics of ecology” and “the ecology of capitalism” called for assaults on concentrated corporate power. In 1969 a Berkeley activist started “Earth Read-Out,” a radical report on environmental issues that soon appeared regularly in more than fifty underground papers. To save the earth, a typical “Earth Read-Out” report insisted, people needed to challenge a “corrupt economic system” and an “unresponsive, undemocratic government.” The editors of the New Left magazine *Ramparts* also argued aggressively for radical change. “Like the race crisis and the Vietnam War,” one wrote in 1970, “the ecological impasse is not merely the result of bad or mistaken policies that can be changed by a new Administration or a new will to do better. It is, rather, the expression of a basic malfunction of the social order itself, and consequently cannot be dealt with on a piecemeal, patchwork basis.”<sup>56</sup>

The Santa Barbara oil spill prompted many radicals to think harder about the environment. In January 1969 a disastrous leak at a Union Oil well became national news, and photographs and television images of oil-covered beaches outraged people across the country. The angry response of Santa Barbarans suggested that the issue of environmental degradation had the potential to radicalize people. A group of college students attacked the office of a bank with strong ties to Union Oil and a number of gas stations owned by the polluters of Santa Barbara Bay. To many radicals, the response of the city’s adults was even more heartening. In a normally Republican community, thousands of people took part in rallies, pickets, and demonstrations against the unchecked power of “big oil.” As a *Ramparts* writer concluded, “it became

<sup>55</sup> For the Port Huron Statement, see James Miller, *“Democracy Is in the Streets”: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York, 1987), 329–74, esp. 330. The New Left critique of Earth Day is exemplified by James Ridgeway, *The Politics of Ecology* (New York, 1970), 204; “Ecology and/or the Police State,” in *The Movement toward a New America*, ed. Mitchell Goodman (New York, 1970), 519; and Editors of *Ramparts*, *Eco-Catastrophe* (New York, 1970), vii. A few radical writers argued that the New Left needed to pay more attention to environmental issues. See Barry Weisberg, “The Politics of Ecology,” in *Ecological Conscience*, ed. Disch, 159; Ecology Action East, “The Power to Destroy, the Power to Create,” *ibid.*, 167; and Theodore Roszak, ed., *Sources: An Anthology of Contemporary Materials Useful for Preserving Personal Sanity While Braving the Great Technological Wilderness* (New York, 1972), 388.

<sup>56</sup> Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile* (New York, 1965), 147–69, esp. 147; Richard Flacks, “Is the Great Society Just a Barbecue?,” in *The New Left: A Documentary History*, ed. Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, 1969), 194; “Ecology and/or the Police State,” 519; Keith Lampe, “Earth Read-Out,” in *Environmental Handbook*, ed. De Bell, 5–7; Editors of *Ramparts*, *Eco-Catastrophe*, v. See also Ridgeway, *Politics of Ecology*, 208; Weisberg, “Politics of Ecology,” 154–60; and Barry Weisberg, *Beyond Repair: The Ecology of Capitalism* (Boston, 1971). For a contemporary analysis of radical environmentalism, see Walter A. Rosenbaum, *The Politics of Environmental Concern* (New York, 1973), 66–69. The best historical analysis of the New Left critique is Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 96–97.

clear that more than petroleum had leaked out from Union Oil's drilling platform. Some basic truths about power in America had spilled out along with it."<sup>57</sup>

The battle over People's Park in 1969 was also a critical turning point. In April a group of Berkeley students and residents began to plant flowers and trees on a vacant lot owned by the University of California. The site quickly became a rallying place for people trying to imagine alternatives to traditional concepts of property ownership. For many, the park also offered the hope of creating a new kind of relationship with the nonhuman world. "The most revolutionary consciousness," Gary Snyder argued there, "is to be found among the most oppressed classes—animals, trees, grass, air, water, earth." To the university, however, the construction of the park was a form of trespass. When the university used the National Guard to clear the site in May, a young man was killed, and the violence led many radicals to think hard about ecology. For the first time, the state had attacked people attempting to improve the quality of the environment, and the use of force made the environmental fight seem more like the struggles for peace and justice: All challenged the brute power of a repressive establishment. "The park has brought the concept of the Whole Earth, the Mother Earth, into the vocabulary of revolutionary politics," a contributor to the leftist magazine *Liberation* wrote. "The park has raised sharply the question of property and use; it has demonstrated the absurdity of a system that puts land title above human life; and it has given the dispossessed children of the tract homes and the cities a feeling of involvement with the planet, an involvement proved through our sweat and our blood."<sup>58</sup>

The Vietnam War contributed in a very different way to the rise of environmental protest. By the late 1960s, the news media had begun to report that U.S. forces in Vietnam were fighting a war against nature as much as a war against people. American troops had sprayed one-eighth of the country with chemical defoliants. Though much of the herbicide spraying targeted forests, rice fields were targets too. The air war was just as devastating to the landscape. To many observers, the heavily cratered wastelands created by saturation bombing looked like the moon. Automated artillery fire also turned forests into biological deserts. Throughout the field of operations, the military used gigantic bulldozers to clear the terrain of potential cover for enemy troops. Even napalm was used to destroy vegetation. In the view of many scientists and activists, the United States was committing "ecocide."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> "Anti-Oil Crowd Storms a Meeting," in *Movement toward a New America*, ed. Goodman, 518; "Santa Barbara!," *ibid.*, 529; Harvey Molotch, "Santa Barbara: Oil in the Velvet Playground," in *Eco-Catastrophe*, ed. Editors of *Ramparts*, 84–105, esp. 84.

<sup>58</sup> "... just the beginning," in *Movement toward a New America*, ed. Goodman, 509. See also Weisberg, *Beyond Repair*, 166; and Berkeley Tribe, "Blueprint for a Communal Environment," in *Sources*, ed. Roszak, 393. A 1969 poem about People's Park also illustrates the conjunction of radical politics and reverence for nature; see Michael Rossman, *The Wedding within the War* (Garden City, 1971), 349–69. Several historians note the importance of People's Park for radical environmentalists. See Gitlin, *Sixties*, 360–61; Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 102; and Belasco, *Appetite for Change*, 21. For a photographic record of the struggle, see Alan Copeland, ed., *People's Park* (New York, 1969). In 1969 activists at the University of Texas waged a similar struggle over a campus creek, but that battle did not receive national attention. See Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York, 1998), 274–76.

<sup>59</sup> Barry Weisberg, ed., *Ecocide in Indochina: The Ecology of War* (San Francisco, 1970); John Lewallen, *Ecology of Devastation: Indochina* (Baltimore, 1971). See also Schrepfer, *Fight to Save the Redwoods*, 165–66; and Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 96.

For many intellectuals, therefore, the movement to end the war and the movement to protect the environment became aspects of one all-encompassing struggle. Many critics pointed to the complicity of the corporate world in environmental devastation abroad and at home. The same companies that profited from the defoliation campaign in Vietnam also profited from the wanton use of toxic chemicals in the United States. According to some critics, the war and the environmental crisis both followed from the deadly logic of technocracy. In Vietnam, Americans destroyed towns to “save” them; at home, Americans degraded the environment to make “progress.” According to other critics, the heart of the problem lay instead in the Western drive to conquer the world, to remake societies and landscapes at will. The war in Vietnam was kin to the war Americans had waged against Indians and wilderness. “The white race *is* the cancer of human history,” the radical critic Susan Sontag wrote in 1966; “it is the white race and it alone—its ideologies and inventions—which eradicates autonomous civilizations wherever it spreads, which has upset the ecological balance of the planet, which now threatens the very existence of life itself.”<sup>60</sup>

For many activists, too, the war and the environmental crisis were related causes. In 1969 the magazine of the War Resisters League devoted a special issue to the environment. At the November 15, 1969, antiwar rally in Washington, one participant reported, many protesters spent free moments rapping about the environment. The strongest student eco-action groups formed at schools in the forefront of antiwar activism. The first environmental teach-in was held at the University of Michigan. At the University of California, Los Angeles, a group of antiwar activists turned “eco-freaks” staged a sit-in to protest campus interviews for manufacturers of automobiles and chemical pesticides because their products polluted the air and endangered the health of both people and wildlife. At the University of Wisconsin, the Ecology Students Association focused on water pollution and waste disposal in Madison, site of the university—and defoliant use in Vietnam.<sup>61</sup>

The founders of the Youth International Party, more commonly known as the Yippies, also joined antiwar activism and environmentalism. At a news conference early in 1968 to announce plans for a Yippie “Festival of Life” to counter the Democratic “Convention of Death” in Chicago, Allen Ginsberg touted the event as a way to protest the threats of “violence, overpopulation, pollution, [and] ecological destruction.” His comrades Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin spoke about starting ecology schools. Ed Sanders soon suggested that the Festival of Life might include a “Yippie Ecological Conference,” where people would “spew out an angry report denouncing scheiss-poison in the lakes and streams, industrial honkey-fumes from white killer industrialists, and exhaust murder from a sick hamburger society of automobile freaks.” The

<sup>60</sup> Weisberg, ed., *Ecocide in Indochina*, vi–vii; Joseph Shapiro, “Imperialism,” in *Earth Day*, ed. Environmental Action, 86; Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (1969; New York, 1987), 203. See also Morgan, *60s Experience*, 131–32.

<sup>61</sup> Janssen, “Age of Ecology,” 54, 57, 59; ENACT, “Blueprint for a Teach-In,” in *Ecotactics*, ed. Mitchell and Stallings, 161–68; Kenneth R. Bowling, “The New Conservationist,” *Environmental Education*, 1 (Spring 1970), 79. For an argument that the antiwar and environmental movements had “practically nothing in common, despite labored elements to discover common elements,” see Fox, *American Conservation Movement*, 324.

eighteen-point manifesto that the Yippies distributed in Chicago demanded both the end of the war and the elimination of pollution.<sup>62</sup>

Though the Yippie flame quickly burned out, the effort to counter “Death” with “Life” became common. The war machine was just one horrid component of a life-denying “system”—as critics often called the nation’s ruling institutions. What kind of society exalted the deadening cycle of getting and spending? What kind of culture made schools into soul-killing “knowledge factories”? What kind of government relied for national defense on the threat of annihilation? What kind of economy depended on relentless destruction of the environment? For a growing number of people, those questions suggested the overriding importance of protecting all the spontaneous, organic, and creative energies of the world.<sup>63</sup>

To a greater extent than historians of the sixties have recognized, the struggle to affirm life bridged the divide between the counterculture and the New Left. By 1970 several countercultural writers had begun to contemplate radical action to save the planet. In a series of “revolutionary letters,” the poet Diane Di Prima imagined blowing up petroleum lines and destroying Dow Chemical Company plants. At the same time, some radicals began to sound more like hippies. To counter the argument that student protesters were “nihilists,” James Simon Kunen, a participant in the 1968 student upheaval at Columbia University, opened *The Strawberry Statement* with a short affirmation of the blessings of life:

I, for one, strongly support trees (and, in a larger sense, forests), flowers, mountains and hills, also valleys, the ocean, wiliness (when used for good), good, little children, people, tremendous record-setting snowstorms, hurricanes, swimming underwater, nice policemen, unicorns, extra-inning ball games up to twelve innings, pneumatic jackhammers (when they’re not too close), the dunes in North Truro on Cape Cod, liberalized abortion laws, and Raggedy Ann dolls, among other things.

The SDS leader Paul Potter found in the ecological concept of interconnectedness a powerful metaphor for community. Instead of seeing ourselves as independent individuals, Potter argued, we need to acknowledge our dependence on other people and other creatures, so that “all life lives within us”—and so that “we live in all life, seeing with its eyes and feeling with all of its senses.”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Judy Clavir and John Spitzer, eds., *The Conspiracy Trial* (Indianapolis, 1970), 296; Ed Sanders, “Festival of Life,” in *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, ed. Judith Clavir Albert and Stewart Edward Albert (New York, 1984), 429; Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York, 1968), 168.

<sup>63</sup> For examples of life-versus-death rhetoric, see Denis Hayes, “Earth Day: A Beginning,” in *Crisis of Survival*, ed. Editors of the *Progressive*, 211; Tony Wagner, “The Ecology of Revolution,” in *Ecotactics*, ed. Mitchell and Stallings, 45–46; Catherine Harris, “Man in Nature: Model for a New Radicalism,” in *Dying Generations*, ed. Harney and Disch, 354; Tom Hayden, *Trial* (New York, 1970), 37; Clavir and Spitzer, eds., *Conspiracy Trial*, 349; Barbara Reid, “Roots of Crisis,” in *Earth Day*, ed. Environmental Action, 165; and Bertram Garskof, “The Way Out of the Next Few Years,” in *The Hippie Papers: Notes from the Underground Press*, ed. Jerry Hopkins (New York, 1968), 105. The most vivid example, however, is a 1971 movie; see *Harold and Maude*, dir. Hal Ashby (Paramount, 1971).

<sup>64</sup> Diane Di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters Etc.* (San Francisco, 1971), 17, 46; James Simon Kunen, *The Strawberry Statement: Notes of a College Revolutionary* (New York, 1969), 4; Paul Potter, *A Name for Ourselves* (Boston, 1971), 116–17, 205. Potter moved to the country in the late 1960s to be closer to nature. He was not unique. See Diamond, *What the Trees Said*; and Raymond Mungo, *Total Loss Farm: A Year in the Life* (New York, 1970). For a different argument about the ties between the New Left and the counterculture, see Doug Rossinow, “‘The Revolution Is about Our Lives’: The New Left’s Counterculture,” in *Imagine Nation*, ed. Braunstein and Doyle, 99–124.

The increasing overlap between countercultural and radical thinking was part of a larger trend, the acceptance of what the pollster Daniel Yankelovich termed “the new naturalism.” In a series of studies of college students in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Yankelovich discovered a widespread conviction that everything artificial was bad, while everything “natural” was good. Of course, as Yankelovich noted, that ideal was open to many interpretations. For some people, the concept meant rejecting hypocrisy; for others, emphasizing cooperation. But the core ideas clearly included a new wariness about the attempt to master nature—and a new willingness to restrain economic growth and technological development in order to preserve the natural environment.<sup>65</sup>

The most dramatic expression of the new generational sensibility came on Earth Day. Though the impetus for the event was a proposal by Gaylord Nelson for a nationwide teach-in on the environment, Earth Day bore the stamp of the young. Nelson, then a U.S. senator, hired twenty-five-year-old Denis Hayes to lead the charge. Hayes joined a deep interest in the land with a student activist’s sense of justice. As a child growing up in a mill town in Washington, he had reveled in the forests and streams of the Cascade Range, and he deplored the development he saw there. He was powerfully affected by Rachel Carson’s work and by Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb*. But he was as much shaped by the struggles of the 1960s as by his childhood reveries. As president of the student body at Stanford University, he had castigated the trustees for hiring a president with a questionable record on race. He considered the environmental cause and the antiwar movement to be facets of a larger struggle for life, and he drew much of his inspiration as Earth Day coordinator from the 1969 Vietnam Moratorium, a day when millions of Americans demonstrated against the war. At the national Earth Day office, the young staffers wore “Woodstock-approved” clothing, and the walls were covered with protest posters. “War is not healthy for children and other living things,” one proclaimed. Another poster revised a pro-war slogan to define a new patriotism: “Earth—Love it or Leave it!”<sup>66</sup>

To make Earth Day a national event, the organizers relied on campus-based eco-action groups. Some were already well established, while many others had only recently formed. Indeed, the number of student environmental organizations exploded in the fall of 1969. The *New York Times* reported in a front-page story in November that the environment soon might eclipse the Vietnam War as the number one campus issue, and *Newsweek* made a similar prediction a month later. The new concern was visible everywhere—at big and small schools, in every region of the country, in college towns and metropolitan centers. Often the eco-action groups worked beyond campus borders, and student outreach efforts intensified in the months leading up to Earth Day.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Yankelovich, *Changing Values on Campus*, 167–85.

<sup>66</sup> My description of Denis Hayes draws on an Associated Press profile in the *Salina Journal*, April 23, 1970, p. 2. See also Steve Cotton, “Earth Day—What Happened,” *Audubon*, 72 (July 1970), 114–15; *New York Times*, March 2, 1970, p. 18; *ibid.*, Sept. 1, 1968, p. E9; and Hayes, “Earth Day,” 209–14.

<sup>67</sup> *New York Times*, Nov. 30, 1969, pp. 1, 57; “New Bag on Campus,” *Newsweek*, Dec. 22, 1969, p. 72. See also Janssen, “Age of Ecology,” 53–62; and Gladwin Hill, “A Not So Silent Spring,” in *Crisis of Survival*, ed. Editors of



The results were stunning. In April 1970, approximately 20 million Americans joined together to demonstrate concern about the environmental crisis. About fifteen hundred colleges held Earth Day teach-ins. Around the country, people gathered in parks and schools, on city streets, and in front of corporate and government office buildings. In addition to speeches and discussions, Earth Day inspired countless acts of eco-theater. People wore flowers—and gas masks. In San Francisco, “environmental vigilantes” poured oil into the reflecting pool at the headquarters of Standard Oil of California. In New York, marchers held up dead fish to dramatize the pollution of the Hudson River. Though the Earth Day demonstrations drew people of all ages, the young were especially prominent.<sup>68</sup>

The meaning of Earth Day was contested from the start. While some people hoped that environmentalism would unify a divided nation, others feared that the new cause would divert attention from pressing social problems. Hayes and his staff understood the fears as well as the hopes. They wanted people of all political persuasions to participate, and they invited business leaders and conservative officials to speak at Earth Day events. But they defined their task in radical terms. They were not simply organizing “a national antismog campaign or a clean-up-the-rivers day,” one Earth Day staff member proclaimed. Instead, they were building a “movement” to change the direction of society.<sup>69</sup>

“I suspect that the politicians and businessmen who are jumping on the environmental bandwagon don’t have the slightest idea what they are getting into,” Denis Hayes told the Earth Day crowd in Washington, D.C. “They are talking about filters on smokestacks while we are challenging corporate irresponsibility. They are bursting with pride about plans for totally inadequate municipal sewage treatment plants; we are challenging the ethics of a society that, with only 6 percent of the world’s population, accounts for more than half of the world’s annual consumption of raw materials.” “To get at the roots of the environmental crisis we face on this planet,” another Earth Day organizer argued,

we must begin to talk about the decision-making structure of our society. Pollution and the Vietnam war are symptoms of misplaced priorities and a warped conception of human values. To many of us it seems that individuals have lost control over their lives, that they are manipulated by a system with an inherent death wish rather than one in which enhancement of life is the primary goal. The major symbol of this death culture is the institutionalized violence perpetrated upon people and the land by corporations such as General Electric.<sup>70</sup>

The hope that Earth Day would lead to a truly radical movement for social change was not borne out. But the efforts of the organizers had important consequences. The coverage of environmental issues in the media increased dramatically. In late

the *Progressive*, 215–22. For a short list of eco-groups, see “Appendix A: Environmental Organizations,” in *Earth Day*, ed. Environmental Action, 249–53.

<sup>68</sup> My account of Earth Day comes largely from Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (New York, 1993), 111, 113.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Garling, “The Movement,” in *Earth Day*, ed. Environmental Action, 85. On the debate about the meaning of Earth Day, see Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 106–14.

<sup>70</sup> Denis Hayes, “The Beginning,” in *Earth Day*, ed. Environmental Action, xv; Reid, “Roots of Crisis,” 165.



1969 and early 1970, after the preparations for Earth Day had begun, the general-interest weekly magazines published lavishly illustrated special sections about the environment. *Fortune* devoted two issues to the subject. Even *Sports Illustrated* put the environment on the cover, to draw attention to a story reprinted from *Foreign Affairs*. For the first time, commentators began to talk about the cause as a mass movement.<sup>71</sup>

The outpouring of Earth Day books gave greater currency to countercultural and radical ideas. Harper and Row published a collection of environmental articles from *Ramparts*. To meet the demand for analyses of the environmental crisis, a host of publishers put out mass-market anthologies, and many of the eco-books included pieces from the underground press. The arguments and activism of young critics of the system also inspired best-selling works by older authors. In *The Greening of America*—the most famous example—the Yale Law School professor Charles A. Reich called for a revolutionary new consciousness to overthrow the life-denying, nature-destroying “corporate state.”<sup>72</sup>

The antiestablishment rhetoric of Earth Day moved political discourse to the left. From 1969 to 1972, the business community suffered one political setback after another, and the nation’s economic leaders were forced on the defensive. The introduction to *Fortune*’s 1970 series on the environment exemplified the new defensiveness. “Unless we demonstrate, quite soon, that we can improve our environmental record, U.S. society will become paralyzed with shame and self-doubt,” the magazine’s editors declared. “Already we hear voices—and not merely from noisy rebels among the young—exploiting our environmental anxieties as part of an indictment against the basic characteristics and trends of Western civilization. The idea of material progress is especially deplored.” Accordingly, the editors urged a no-nonsense reckoning with the flaws, some quite serious, that underlay the environmental crisis. That meant acknowledging the need for “drastic innovations” to restructure the market, the government, and the university.<sup>73</sup>

In Washington, too, officials understood that once-controversial measures had become part of the mainstream. The shift in Richard M. Nixon’s agenda was striking. Taking a position that contrasted starkly with his stance during the 1960 presidential campaign, Nixon no longer conceded the environmental initiative to the Democrats. He began 1970 by signing the National Environmental Policy Act. He ended the

<sup>71</sup> Special section, “The Ravaged Environment,” *Newsweek*, Jan. 26, 1970, pp. 30–47; special section, “America the Beautiful?,” *Look*, Nov. 4, 1969, pp. 25–71; “Ecology, the New Mass Movement,” *Life*, Jan. 30, 1970, pp. 22–31; “Fighting to Save the Earth from Man,” *Time*, Feb. 2, 1970, pp. 56–63; Lord Ritchie-Calder, “Mortgaging the Old Homestead,” *Sports Illustrated*, Feb. 2, 1970, pp. 45–51. The *Fortune* articles were reprinted as a book: Editors of *Fortune*, *The Environment: A National Mission for the Seventies* (New York, 1970).

<sup>72</sup> For eco-readers containing countercultural and radical essays, see Editors of *Ramparts*, *Eco-Catastrophe*; De Bell, ed., *Environmental Handbook*; Disch, ed., *Ecological Conscience*; Mitchell and Stallings, eds., *Ecotactics*; and Harney and Disch, eds., *Dying Generations*. For sympathetic works by older authors, see Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York, 1970); William Braden, *The Age of Aquarius: Technology and the Cultural Revolution* (Chicago, 1970); Philip E. Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point* (Boston, 1970); and Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (Garden City, 1972).

<sup>73</sup> Editors of *Fortune*, *Environment*, 7, 8. For the business setbacks of the late 1960s and early 1970s, see Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes*, 59–92.

year by accepting a tough revision of the Clean Air Act—the first of a series of environmental laws that went much further than the Great Society initiatives in requiring business to reduce pollution. He created the Environmental Protection Agency by executive order. Nixon even called for a new land ethic. “Traditionally, Americans have felt that what they do with their own land is their own business,” he argued. “The time has come when we must accept the idea that none of us has a right to abuse the land, and that on the contrary society as a whole has a legitimate interest in proper land use.”<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

Of course, liberals, middle-class women, and young critics of the nation’s institutions were not the only important supporters of environmentalism. The old conservation organizations took up new environmental issues in the 1950s and 1960s. Inspired by the example of the atomic physicists who had formed the Union of Concerned Scientists at the end of World War II, a number of scientists warned the public about the environmental dangers of new technologies. In 1958, for example, the biologist Barry Commoner formed a group to publicize the threat from nuclear fallout, and he soon took up many other environmental issues. In 1970 a *Time* cover story hailed him as the “Paul Revere of ecology.” The environmental movement also depended on the institutional support of many professional groups. In different ways at different times, the investigations of public health officials, hydrologists, geologists, civil engineers, soil scientists, industrial hygienists, architects, landscape architects, and wild-life biologists helped promote a new environmental agenda. Several unions supported the environmental cause. So did many musicians and writers.<sup>75</sup>

But the contributions of liberals, middle-class women, and antiestablishment young people are especially critical in understanding the chronology of the movement. In the early 1960s, liberal intellectuals and elected officials put the environment on the national agenda. To achieve greatness, they argued, the nation needed to protect and improve environmental quality. Throughout the decade, middle-class women made the environment an issue at the grass roots. In the late 1960s, the grow-

<sup>74</sup> J. Brooks Flippen, *Nixon and the Environment* (Albuquerque, 2000). For Richard M. Nixon’s statement, see Council on Environmental Quality, *Environmental Quality: The First Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality* (Washington, 1970), xii–xiii.

<sup>75</sup> The best study of the transformation of an old conservation organization in the 1950s and 1960s is Wellock, *Critical Masses*. The exemplary work by a scientist-activist is Barry Commoner, *Science and Survival* (New York, 1966). See also “Paul Revere of Ecology,” *Time*, Feb. 2, 1970, p. 58. For the growing concern about the environment in professional circles, see F. Fraser Darling and John P. Milton, eds., *Future Environments of North America: Transformation of a Continent* (Garden City, 1966). The secondary literature about scientists and professionals in the environmental movement is growing rapidly. See, for example, Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 9–10. On union support, see Scott Dewey, “Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948–1970,” *Environmental History*, 3 (Jan. 1998), 45–63; Robert Gordon, “Shell No!”: OCAW and the Labor-Environmental Alliance,” *ibid.* (Oct. 1998), 460–87; and Chad Montrie, “Expendient Environmentalism: Opposition to Coal Surface Mining in Appalachia and the United Mine Workers of America, 1945–1975,” *ibid.*, 5 (Jan. 2000), 75–98. A good collection of eco-songs from the period is Morse and Mathews, eds., *Sierra Club Survival Songbook*.

ing involvement of the young gave environmentalism new energy. The young also gave the cause a new name—the environmental movement.

At the least, then, historians of the sixties need to acknowledge that environmentalism was a force in American life throughout the decade, not just at the end. Though few environmentalists used the rhetoric or the confrontational protest tactics of “the movement” before the late 1960s, the cause had considerable momentum by then. By the mid-1960s, indeed, the environment had become a major topic of debate in the nation’s capital, in countless communities, and in many professional circles. No single constituency drove the environmental movement. Instead, the cause gained strength in the 1960s from a variety of groups. The mass demonstrations of Earth Day were as much a culmination as a beginning.

Acknowledging the sixties roots of environmentalism leads to a deeper understanding of the political, social, and cultural history of the period. The important role of liberals in the environmental movement argues against the view that modern liberalism is mainly about rights. The liberal environmental agenda was part of a far-reaching effort to redefine the public interest and, especially, to shift the balance between public and private spending. The story of grass-roots environmental activism in the 1960s makes clear that the feminist movement was not the only way that middle-class women reshaped the nation’s institutions. The contribution of the young to the environmental cause offers new insight into the relationship between the counterculture and the more overtly political forms of student protest.

A more contextualized understanding of the environmental movement also challenges historians of the sixties to go further in rethinking the analytical foundation of the period’s historiography. Instead of characterizing the sixties as “a radical era,” scholars have begun to write about the period as a polarized decade when the nation divided along ideological lines. Yet the history of the environmental movement suggests that America in the 1960s did not just divide into Left and Right. The environmental activism of women is especially difficult to fit into neat ideological categories. Though some grass-roots activists were liberal Democrats or fiery young radicals, others were Republicans—and some, wary of partisanship of any kind, preferred to see the environmental cause as one that transcended politics. For some women, the cause made traditional domestic arrangements more acceptable; for others, environmental activism was consciousness raising.<sup>76</sup>

The complex gender politics of environmentalism speaks to the ideological complexity of the movement as a whole. In many respects the environmental movement was a part of the Left—in others, however, it had more in common with conservatism. The environmental movement challenged the rights of property owners and the

<sup>76</sup> On the sixties as a decade of ideological polarization, see Leo P. Ribuffo, “Why Is There So Much Conservatism in the United States and Why Do So Few Historians Know Anything about It?,” *American Historical Review*, 99 (April 1994), 445; Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided*, ix; and Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley, 1999). My argument against interpreting the sixties simply as a polarized decade owes much to Lynn Weiner’s work on the La Leche League, which grew with astonishing speed in the 1960s by challenging both patriarchal and feminist ideals. See Weiner, “Reconstructing Motherhood,” 1359, 1371, 1381.

prerogatives of corporate management, yet environmentalists were often attacked as a privileged class seeking to defend their privilege. Though liberal Democrats argued for environmental protection throughout the 1960s, the cause attracted Republicans too. Environmentalists and antiwar activists often shared a sense of what was wrong with the nation, yet the environmental movement had a more ambiguous relationship to the other major reform efforts of the period. Though environmentalists sometimes argued for the “right” to a beautiful and healthy environment, the movement was scorned by many civil rights leaders. Few environmentalists in the 1960s spoke with passion about the problem a later generation would call “environmental justice”—the inequalities in exposure to the hazards of pollution and toxic waste. The relationship of the environmental movement with the feminist movement was also strained.<sup>77</sup>

The history of environmentalism thus demonstrates that the forces for change in the 1960s were diverse. If historians of the sixties move beyond an analytical framework that privileges the concerns of the New Left and New Right, we will be able to give the environmental movement its due. We also will develop a subtler appreciation of the period’s complexities.

<sup>77</sup> For a critique of environmentalism as a defense of privilege, see Jon Margolis, “Our Country ’Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Ecology,” *Esquire*, 73 (March 1970), 124, 172–79. The most prominent Republican environmentalist was Nelson Rockefeller, who pressed for environmental legislation as governor of New York in the mid-1960s. See Nelson Rockefeller, *Our Environment Can Be Saved* (Garden City, 1970). For examples of the use of rights rhetoric, see Carson, *Silent Spring*, 12–13, 86; and Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison, 1989), 125–31. On the response of civil rights leaders to the environmental movement, see Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*, 111–35. For the difficulty environmentalists and feminists had in finding common ground, see Gail Robinson, “A Woman’s Place Is in the Movement,” *Environmental Action*, March 25, 1978, pp. 12–13.