

***From the “Bad Boys of Environmentalism”***



***To the Karl Roves of Industry Spin***



***Recovering the Politics of Possibility from  
Shellenberger’s and Nordhaus’ “Breakthrough”***

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## **Foreword**

Many of us have been fooled by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus. Their book, *Breakthrough*, is targeted at thoughtful, well-intentioned readers who believe in innovation and progress and appreciate diversity. They use their readers' good intentions, however, to distract them from the most effective ways of facing the challenges of climate change. Since they have positioned themselves as the "bad boys of environmentalism," people who try to respond to their work with facts and history are seen as hopelessly old school and out-of-touch "environmentalists."

Journalists and policy makers often don't have the background knowledge necessary to evaluate Shellenberger and Nordhaus' claims. One important bit of knowledge is how much polluting industries spend to shape the public's values, or the level of sophistication these efforts reach. *Breakthrough* seems to be an aspect of a very sophisticated campaign to marginalize people who want to place concerns about environmental and occupational health, safety, genuine prosperity, and equality at the center of their politics.

*Breakthrough* isn't about policy recommendations, but values formation. The authors don't want readers to associate the supposedly small-thinking environmental movement, or the environmental justice movement, with the legitimate and effective civil rights movement. They seek to convince us that the global nature of the global warming conundrum means that specific people and places don't matter. They want us to believe that "environmentalists" are powerful elitists rather individuals doing their best to protect their families from powerful polluters. They want to manipulate our guilt over the plight

of Brazilian street children, so we will think we're being good global citizens by advocating general prosperity rather than supporting promising coalitional movements that protect forests.

We need to create a *sincere and informed* "postenvironmentalism" that combines Shellenberger and Nordhaus' rhetoric about possibility with effective coalition politics. First, though, it is necessary to take a close look at Shellenberger and Nordhaus' handiwork. The following is a step-by-step look at the introduction and first three chapters of *Breakthrough*. It emerges from my recently accepted Cultural Studies MA thesis. I've chosen to release it by PDF without peer review so that it doesn't get lost in some obscure journal. I welcome critiques and additions from others more knowledgeable and experienced, and hope this inspires others to examine the work of the Breakthrough Institute with a critical eye. If I had all sorts of funding and time, I would make this much less academic-sounding and more reader-friendly.

So that it's clear I don't fit into Shellenberger and Nordhaus' formulation of a small-bore environmental thinker, I'll point out that I'm not a "typical environmentalist" who just "doesn't get it." When the "Death of Environmentalism" debate first began in 2004 I was relieved. I had taken part in rewarding environmental health advocacy in the 1990s but quit activism because I found the culture and limitations of environmental organizing frustrating. I then spent years reflecting on my own experience and studying the cultural aspects of environmental organizing. I grew up on a farm, but became decidedly urban as a teenager. I wanted to care about the fate of the planet without having to disavow my

roots or dislike mainstream culture or grow out my leg hair. TreeHugger.com was a great place to promote business-friendly, upbeat, aesthetically modern environmentalism – until I was fired for advocating for fair pay for the writers before the site was sold to the Discovery Channel for \$10 million. That event reminded me just how important workers’ rights are, and how easily environmentalists can overlook them. I plunged back into my thesis work and read *Breakthrough*, expecting that the authors may have continued to ignore the accomplishments of the environmental justice movement, as they had been criticized for in the past. What I found was much more disturbing.

## ***Acknowledgements***

I would like to thank my mother for making me watch *Shoah* in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and teaching me to stand up when my conscience demands it. Her love has made me see that our worst moments are easily subsumed by an overall commitment to self-improvement, honesty and goodness.

Over the last year, a number of people have unexpectedly entered my life. You have enabled me to find strengths I didn't know I possessed. Without you, I wouldn't have had the perspective or insight that made this work possible. Your efforts have ensured that I will remain a lifelong advocate for justice and equality.

## ***Introduction***

Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus' 2007 *Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility*, replaces promising political possibilities centered around places, people, science and government with economic imperatives and technology. The authors shrewdly recount spurious and reductive histories, create straw man environmentalists, and then use critiques that actually emerged from a variety of environmental disciplines to further their own anti-environmental ends. There is no other conclusion than that these moves were calculated. Shellenberger and Nordhaus masterfully create a postenvironmentalism that on the surface seems to address environmentalism's lack of traction, but in fact abandons equality and justice, science, people and places for vague notions of "prosperity" and technological innovation.

### ***Breakthrough Introduction: Separating Environmentalism from Equality and Displacing the Promise of Ecology, Science, and Government***

The authors open their introduction by sharing one of the passages that so resonated with readers of "The Death of Environmentalism." In illustrating that doomsday rhetoric had not been working for environmentalists, they posed the question, what if Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech had been "I have a nightmare"? They describe how King's rhetorical shift during the march on Washington speech (from the evils of the world to the uniting dream) touched Kennedy, and then how Johnson went on to pursue

civil rights legislation over the next two years. Apparently it wasn't the unrelenting work, courage and sacrifice of civil rights advocates - a coalition of individuals from house workers to Supreme Court justices - that pushed the civil rights struggle forward. Rather, King's rhetorical turn that day magically convinced the state to allow minority citizens their rights. This begins the authors' privileging rhetoric at the expense of rights and justice.

After drastically over-simplifying the effect and context of Dr. King's rhetoric, the authors caution us against attempting to apply their own oversimplification to our relatively complex current circumstances. According to the authors, "The truth is that King's dramatic leap from the nightmare to the dream can be a parable for the future only if we first understand how much the world has changed since the 1963" (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 4).

However, with the exception of a passing mention of school segregation (due to "reasons vastly more complex than Jim Crow"), the contemporary world they paint is actually quite simple and lovely. We are all living longer and have bigger, better and more material goods. Because we are so rich, free, and untouched by environmental issues, "Our unprecedented wealth and freedom have profoundly changed what we care about, aspire to, and believe in, so it's no wonder the old political and moral fault lines no longer apply" (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 4). Thus, because of our prosperity, we no longer need worry about, or advocate for justice or equality.



According to Shellenberger and Nordhaus, rights-based liberalism did its job and environmental laws “cleaned up our air and water and protected wilderness lands” and now needs to move on (5). Civil rights, the environment, feminism and labor were once “cutting edge” but are now established interests whose effectiveness has run their course and who have not changed with the times.

In defining themselves and their interest so narrowly it is the issue groups and their political allies – not bogeymen like Rush Limbaugh, Fox News, and the Heritage Foundation – who have created the widespread impression that liberalism is little more than an aggregation of the aggrieved (Shellenberger and Nordhaus, 5).

So, any sense that “issues groups” are just harping and not legitimately fighting for equality within a democratic system has nothing to do with the oppositional interests that motivate and fund their portrayal by partisan media. Nor is it connected with those same interests pouring resources into partisan think tanks. Rather,

In reducing their own manifold interests to single essential causes and complaints, liberal-issue groups have inhibited their ability to create the kinds of broad coalitions they need to achieve their goals. And in consistently defining the interests of others – whether they are corporate executives, labor unions, or Brazilian peasants – as outside the categories of the environment and nature, environmental and conservation leaders have failed to create a politics capable of dealing with the ecological crises.

In essence, then, any current ecological problems are the result of the liberal failure to create effective coalition politics. Given the tone and lack of citations, the reader would assume that Shellenberger and Nordhaus are the first to make this critique, while in actuality, activists and academics within the Environmental Justice realm have not only critiqued the narrowness of mainstream environmentalism, but also struggled to create broad coalitions for over twenty years.

In this section, Shellenberger and Nordhaus have drawn upon the following contentions without substantiating them:

- 1) Americans are better off economically and materially than they were in the late 1960s
- 2) Environmental laws have sufficiently cleaned up pollution and protected wilderness areas
- 3) The biosphere is in better shape than it was 40 years ago
- 4) We are equal: the fights for civil, women's, and labor rights are complete
- 5) Our wealth means that equality is no longer politically salient or important
- 6) The insularity of interest groups is more detrimental to their goals than partisan media or think tanks funded by powerful oppositional interests
- 7) No one within or on the periphery of these movements has made these critiques, or worked to create coalitions that transcend narrow interests.

The pair then lay the foundation for the tenet central to most arguments in *Break*

*Through*: environmentalism emerges from postmaterialism.

Environmentalism and other progressive social movements of the 1960s were born of the prosperity of the postwar era and the widespread emergence of higher-order postmaterialist needs. As Americans became increasingly wealthy, secure, and optimistic, they started to care more about problems such as air and water pollution and the protection of the wilderness and open space. The powerful correlation between increasing affluence and the emergence of quality-of-life and fulfillment values has been documented in developed and undeveloped countries around the world.

Shellenberger and Nordhaus don't provide references for these assertions, and their wording here is tricky. Though there may be a correlation between affluence and "quality-of-life and fulfillment values" there is *not* an undisputed correlation between post-materialist values and environmental values, as the pair allude here and argue throughout the book. Post-materialism can emerge as a factor in values-formation, but there is certainly no sole, undisputed correlation.

There are three important consequences to framing environmentalism solely in post-material terms. First, it removes environmentalism from science and nature, drawing economic discourses to the center. Second, it eliminates the environmental justice classification of clean air, water, homes and food and workplaces as basic material rights/needs. Third, it displaces concrete concerns about places and pollution with tactical concerns about values formation. “Nothing,” contend the authors, “is more central to this book than our contention that for any politics to succeed, it must swim with, not against, the currents of changing social values” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 6).

In the mid-1990s Cooper (quoting Killingsworth and Palmer) pointed out that the idea of nature serving as an object resource may have been shifting to an alliance of deep ecology, science and government, and that the link between science and environmental reform movements held significant promise (Cooper 253-54). Shellenberger and Nordhaus seem to purposely attempt to make this sort of promise illegitimate. In their formulation, environmentalists don’t get that economic growth is the solution to the ecological crisis rather than its cause. Since prosperity is the basis for ecological concern, it is incumbent on us to focus our political energies on general prosperity creation and the values that contribute it. Having established rights/equality/justice-centered agendas as passé, and economic growth as a prerequisite to ecological health, Shellenberger and Nordhaus move on to undermine the notion that non-human nature has intrinsic value or rights. They frame efforts to protect nonhuman nature as restricting human potential.

One aspect of the authors' undermining the relevance of place involves moving us from a framework of site-specific pollution to the abstract, global conundrum that is climate change. To do so, they critique essentialist constructs of nature that have been much discussed within environmental philosophy, activism and left academic discourse generally. They do so without acknowledging that this body of critiques exists.

The authors argue that the crisis of global warming has triggered the "death of environmentalism" because the nature of the crisis renders both our old conception of "the environment" and "humankind's fall from nature" irrelevant. We must meet this global, complex and massive problem by looking "beyond the issue categories of the past and embrac[ing] a grand new vision for the future." According to the authors, environmentalists' "stories, institutions, and policies" reinforce nature's separateness and victimhood. This leads us to verbs like 'stop', 'restrict', 'reverse', 'prevent', 'regulate' and 'constrain': "stopping the bad, not creating the good" (7). Any positive language surrounding preservation "define[s] human activity as an intrusion on, or a contaminant of, a separate and once pure nature" (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 7).

This discussion attacks many strains of environmental thought and action simultaneously, without acknowledging environmental history. First, the construction of nature as object and resource (Cooper 253) was not created by environmentalists, who have fought to protect nature through regulatory and preservationist channels and discourses in response to others' encroachments. In that sense, what Shellenberger and Nordhaus say is correct and could easily resonate with readers. Various types of environmentalists have had to

rely on restrictions because they often come up against powerful forces that see nature as a resource rather than of intrinsic value. Because those protecting the interests of nature are often responding to a specific threat, creating “positive” rhetoric has often not been a top priority. The authors don’t acknowledge that often the problem is simply that the corporations and the state traditionally work in tandem to eek out as much monetary value from the natural world as possible. As with the Civil Rights example, Shellenberger and Nordhaus focus on rhetoric at the expense of the messy context of political economy.

Shellenberger and Nordhaus claim that this obsession with protecting a separate nature is especially irrelevant now that we are dealing with changing temperatures, melting ice caps, and resource wars resulting from greenhouse gas emissions. However, greenhouse gas is but one aspect of pollution resulting from energy production. That the global warming problem is more colossal than any we have experienced (and one can’t see or smell CO<sub>2</sub>) does not mean that the pollution issues transcend local. Coal-fired plants release mercury in specific places, “clean energy” producing nuclear power plants use uranium mined from particular localities and threaten singular communities. Also, threats to specific locations provide motivation to act.

Shellenberger and Nordhaus contend, however, that global warming’s impact must be considered “a problem of evolution, not pollution.” It’s not about whether we can stop the inevitable global warming, but how we will adapt. Their answer, then, is not to restrict economies or limit pollution at specific places, because *we protect nature to the detriment of human potential*; we curtail Shellenberger and Nordhaus’ teleological version of

evolution. As NASA scientist James Hansen has recently pointed out however, we are at a critical moment; if we can reduce CO2 emissions significantly now, we can greatly mitigate the disastrous potential of climate change (Hansen lecture 2007).

Now that they are focused on human potential, the authors discuss the failings of the Democratic establishment that did not support their Apollo energy project. They then continue to lay out four “inconvenient truths” about global warming: 1) The countries that ratified Kyoto have made little headway 2) China and India will not constrain their greenhouse gas emissions or economic growth 3) Even if we reduce power and auto emissions we must address deforestation 4) Global warming has arrived and will have serious consequences (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 12-13).

In this context, the Democratic party must “embrace a new story about America, one focused more on aspiration than complaint, on assets than deficits, and on possibility than limits” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 13). Essentially, they must accept that voters are reverting to scarcity values, so leaders must focus on post-material abundance. The authors go on to outline their agenda; pro-growth, investment in energy technology innovation, investments in infrastructure and research and development. They repeat their refrain of increasing prosperity for the masses. They propose that “high tech businesses and the new creative class may become a political force for a new postindustrial social contract and a new clean-energy economy” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 16). Here, then, is the focus of their hegemonic shift; Shellenberger and Nordhaus strive to articulate postenvironmentalism with high technology and postmaterialist cosmopolitanism,

replacing the promising hegemony of deep ecology, science and government. They in fact remark “If we are to overcome the ecological crisis, we must no longer put concepts like nature or ‘the environment’ at the center of our politics” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus, 17).

After a small elegy for the accomplishments of environmentalism, the authors castigate it once more for saddling us with the politics of limits, “which seeks to constrain human ambition, aspiration, and power rather than unleash and direct them.” Too much attention has been focused on what has been lost rather than on the amazing world humans have created: “Environmentalists have felt more resentment than gratitude for the efforts of those who came before us... And the ‘rational’ environmentalist focus on just fixing what’s wrong with the present narrows our vision at a time when we desperately need to expand it.” Without acknowledging that such critiques have come from EJ quarters for two decades, the authors finally acknowledge that there are different types of environmentalism and claim that they have attempted to “describe them with reference to specific events, leaders, and ideas.”

When we describe the conceptual underpinnings these different expressions of environmentalism share, some readers will no doubt feel that we have overgeneralized. But those readers who do not see themselves in our descriptions and definitions of environmentalism might consider whether they themselves have already moved beyond environmentalism (Shellenberger and Nordhaus, 17).

This flourish gives the authors a win-win: either they are correctly describing the state of affairs, or readers have already become good post-environmentalists. Whereas to many academics or activists this may seem cheap or preposterous, to their target lay audience

of tech-faithful cosmopolitans, it must sound as though they have authority to define environmentalism.

The authors conclude their introduction by reminding us that “fear may be inevitable, but despair is a choice” (N & S, 17). They then return to Dr. King and his fateful decision to shift his tone from “dream” to “nightmare” during the March on Washington. I must quote the following passage in full, as paraphrasing would not do it justice:

With Abraham Lincoln at his back and Congress before him, Martin Luther King felt fear and resentment, and he expressed those dark feelings. But then he stopped himself midspeech. Perhaps he felt the crowd’s wishes. Perhaps he heard Mahalia Jackson’s cry. Perhaps he had *scared himself sensible*. Whatever the reason, consciously or unconsciously, King made a choice.

Today we have new choices to make. We must choose between a politics of limits and a politics of possibility; a focus on investment and assets and a focus on regulation and deficits; and a discourse of affluence and a discourse of insecurity. And, most of all, we must choose between a resentful narrative of tragedy and a *grateful narrative of overcoming* (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 18) (emphasis added).

First, the patronizing language in these two paragraphs is striking. It’s hard to imagine anyone having the authority to guess whether Dr. King would have “scared himself sensible.” For two white men who have already reduced the success of the Civil Rights movement to this rhetorical flourish to do so can charitably be called presumptuous. The context of racial power relations is so fraught it’s stunning that the authors would opt for such language when many white men at the time *were* trying to scare King sensible in the form of death threats long before he was actually *assassinated*. Further, why associate environmentalists’ lack of gratitude with King and a “grateful narrative of overcoming?” Are the authors suggesting that minorities should experience gratitude for the rights they



have fought for? That we all just feel grateful for the incomplete fulfillment of such dreams? The polluted world we've inherited?

The authors conclude that it was best for King to have given a nightmare speech first: he had to acknowledge anger and frustration in the dark valley before ascending to the mountaintop. And now the readers too must venture through such a valley of limited, rights-based advocacy before they can ascend the postenvironmental summit. The authors continue, "We will, to be sure, always call it the 'I have a dream' speech. But we should never forget that it all began with a nightmare – one that King, and America with him, overcame." Racism is over, then. Limited rights-based advocacy and regulatory environmentalism are the new racism to overcome through creative economic and technological solutions.

However, as Jackson points out in *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice*, King's dream became a nightmare by 1965:

The dream shattered when whites murdered voting rights workers in Alabama, when police battled blacks in Los Angeles, when he met jobless and "hopeless" blacks on desperate Chicago streets, and when he saw hunger and poverty in rural Mississippi and Appalachia. (Jackson, 2)

In whose interest is Shellenberger and Nordhaus' rosy recollection of civil rights victory?

I imagine the authors used Dr. King with the assumption that their mostly white audience would long to believe that racism is no longer a factor in U.S. life, and would also like to feel righteous through identification with King. At once readers are absolved of the

responsibility to continue to eliminate racism, economic inequality, and any white or privilege-based guilt. Complaints about inequality, calls for corporate accountability, and demands for the enforcement of environmental laws; all “small bore” approaches that the audience can feel righteous in overcoming.

### ***Breakthrough Chapter 1: Inventing A “Modern Environmentalism” Untouched by State or Corporate Power***

Shellenberger and Nordhaus’ “Birth of Environmentalism” chapter seeks to obscure the role of state and corporate power as it relates to the environmental movement’s challenges in order to prove that prosperity is the basis for environmental concern. In so doing, the authors construct a history that ignores environmentalisms that did not arise from prosperity alone, such as the Smoke Abatement Movement. They completely omit the Environmental Justice movement’s challenge to mainstream environmentalism as well as left and environmental struggles over strategies and tactics. Shellenberger and Nordhaus position environmentalists only as out-of-touch has-beens who have failed to capture the imaginations of everyday people due to their proximity to the levers of power.

In Shellenberger and Nordhaus’ birth narrative modern environmentalism arose in the late sixties as a response to “newly visible consequences of industrialization” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 21). They mention Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* as having woken the U.S. up to pesticide dangers early in the 1960s, but focus on visual events such as smog and the first photograph of the earth from space. They then zero in on Ohio’s Cuyahoga river fire, which made the cover of *Time* in 1969. (Though they refer to the

narrative as a touchstone of environmental identity, it is not one that this environmentalist related to.) The authors point out that such fires had been occurring for decades and the place had been a cesspit since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century:

Like the sad and largely unacknowledged history of the Cuyahoga, smog in Los Angeles and other cities was bad in 1970 but hardly worse than the foul air Americans breathed in earlier eras. All of which begs the question: if modern environmentalism was born in response to the dramatic visual evidence of industrial pollution, why wasn't it born in 1868, 1912, or 1952? (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 24).

First, we must acknowledge that the visual emphasis is not a claim the authors back up with citations. Second, the authors don't mention the Cold War and related anxiety over technology and the nuclear age that *Silent Spring* tapped into. Third, the "moment" of environmentalism's "birth" is contested. Rather than dating the birth of postwar, modern environmentalism to 1962 and *Silent Spring*, Ignatow looks to the 1950s conservation movement in the U.S. and Britain and Julian Huxley, the naturalist and first director of UNESCO, who was instrumental in integrating environmental issues into U.N. work (Ignatow 25). Ignatow emphasizes the impact of the liberal consensus on the growth of "rational, efficient government projects, consensus rule, technocracy, and global political engagement" (Ignatow 26). He contends that environmentalism became popular in the 1960s and did not remain "a preserve of scientists, academics, and bureaucrats" because public education "laid the groundwork for cultural modernism, for popular faith in science and technocracy, during the early postwar period" (28). The democratization of literary and scientific knowledge facilitated scientific/technocratic environmental problem solving (28).

Stradling's *Smokestacks and Progressives* reaches even further back in U.S. history. He demonstrates that pollution- and health-centered environmentalism gained momentum in U.S. cities starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that it shared many characteristics with both Shellenberger and Nordhaus' prosperity-centric framework and modern environmentalism. The smoke abatement movement started with women and other reformers in U.S. cities who, "influenced by such Victorian ideas created an environmental philosophy that aligned beauty, health, and cleanliness with prosperity and security as worthy goals of civilization." Stradling points out that this foundation for improving the urban environment was "closely akin to modern environmentalism" (Stradling 4).

Shellenberger and Nordhaus don't discuss this aspect of environmental history, however. They castigate their straw man environmentalist for an over-reliance on the visual and a belief that exposing the public to the natural world would engender sympathies with it. They repeat their "why didn't it happen earlier?" refrain, specifically dismissing atavism as having any connection to the upsurge in Americans' enjoyment of outdoor activities in the postwar era. The true reason for increased outdoor activity, and the explanation for environmentalism's emergence in the 1960s and not the 1930s, was post-war affluence.

We could ask: If affluence was the salient motivating factor, why didn't *all* Americans whose material needs had been met take on environmental discourses? Or we could ask why the authors didn't take the history of the smoke abatement movement into consideration.

Stradling points out that neither wealth nor the environmental degradation of the post-war era was new to U.S. cities. The same concern for health, aesthetics and recreation space were popular and achieved success in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He argues that both the means and the interest were essential to environmental efforts, and that the interest had roots in the middle-class Victorian philosophy developed decades earlier (Stradling 4).

According to Shellenberger and Nordhaus, however, it was the New Deal consensus and economic growth that buttressed modern environmentalism. Moreover, environmentalism was not particularly countercultural, but came from the liberal establishment: “It was Ivy League universities, not rural communes, that produced today’s environmental leaders” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 30). As with many of their pronouncements, this comes across as a revelation, not a possibility acknowledged by environmental scholars like Ignatow who points out that though the second wave of environmentalists associated with the New Left could be considered antiauthoritarian and used antitechnocratic rhetoric, their goals were modernist rather than romantic or traditional. Though they could be hostile to modern science, they relied on it.

Shellenberger and Nordhaus continue their argument about environmentalism’s institutional embeddedness, citing Nixon’s 1970 State of the Union speech in which he discusses the potential for prosperity, crime reduction, and a clean environment over the coming decade: “...Shall we *surrender* to our surroundings, or shall we make our *peace*

with nature and begin to make *reparations* for the damage we have done to our air, to our land, and to our water?" (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 30. Emphasis mine.) The authors explain such unabashed environmental rhetoric from the highest office holder as a consequence post-war abundance. It could easily be argued, however, that Nixon's focus on the environment compensated for his inaction on Viet Nam. Could it not have been much easier to talk of "peace" and "reparations" when it came to the environment, and unite a nation on domestic issues, than to capitulate on the Viet Nam debacle?

Shellenberger and Nordhaus next transport us from the modern environmental movement's "birth" to its current failings. Now that the temporary affluence/environmental consensus has abated, environmentalists fall back on "superficial polling" as evidence for broad support of environmental issues (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 31). But environmentalists miss the point; polls show that Americans care about jobs and the economy, but "environmental foundations and organizations haven't advanced a strategy for action on the environment as a way to create job and stimulate growth" (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 33). Further, since the 1990s positive perceptions of environmentalists have deteriorated. The authors quote a poll in which the statement "Most of the people actively involved in environmental groups are extremists, not reasonable people" rose from 32 percent agreement in 1996 to 43 percent in 2004 (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 33).

What have we skipped in the 34 years from the time of Nixon's speech to 2004, and George Bush's disastrously anti-environmental presidency? Why might the public have

negative perceptions of environmentalists? What sorts of power imbalances have affected the state of play?

Shellenberger and Nordhaus don't discuss the ironic relationship between protective legislative victories of the 1970s and the intense corporate backlash and labor outsourcing of the 1980s and 1990s (Bellamy Foster 195-6). Corporations took on two overriding backlash strategies to mitigate environmental successes: confrontation and cooptation. Confrontation involved the rollback of environmental legislation, and the think tank, PR and Wise Use strategies to emphasize the ability of the market to address environmental conundrums profitably. Cooptation was exemplified by the Clinton/Gore administration's support of environmental policy combined with major concessions to industry. Shellenberger and Nordhaus also neglect to mention that even after the post-Nixon Church Committee reforms, activists faced neo-COINTELPRO state repression when trying to forge linkages with labor (Bellamy Foster, 202; Bevington 271).

Public relations strategies to shape perception of environmentalists and environmental issues are quite formidable. Biased "experts" are presented – from commentators to scientific journal authors, to "nonprofit," "independent" institutes (Rampton and Stauber, 159). "Grassroots" front groups are created (Rampton and Stauber 162) and over \$500 million is spent annually to fund "grassroots" campaigns around industry issues. PR agencies specialize in campaigns to thwart local NIMBY or union advocates (Rampton and Stauber 164). They pay off environmental groups, hire away their staff members, or offer to sit on the board of directors (Rampton and Stauber 165).

Foundations are created and funded by major corporations: "The Foundation for Public

Affairs monitors more than 75 specialized activist publications, and gathers information on ‘more than 1300 activist organizations, research institutions, and other groups’” (Rampton and Stauber 167). It publishes a biannual directory called Public Interest Profiles, which “offers intelligence on 250 of the nation’s key public interest groups... current concerns, budget, funding sources, board of directors, publications, conferences, and methods of operation” (Rampton and Stauber 167). It even arranges conferences billed to activists as a chance to rub shoulders with PR professionals, but actually helps corporate reps get insight into strategies, tactics and agendas.

In the Bush/post-9/11 era the collusion between industry and the State has once become quite transparent. We have seen energy companies helping to set policy, censorship of climate-related information, and executive interference with public health data related to climate change. The administration has gutted environmental laws and made it difficult to pass meaningful energy legislation.

In this era there has also been a concerted industry-state collaborative effort to frame environmentalists as extremists and to hamper their effectiveness, likely coordinated by Ron Arnold, Wise Use movement mastermind (Rampton and Stauber 2004). In the post-9/11-era “Green Scare,” “eco-terrorism” has been named a top domestic terror threat by the FBI, and efforts have been made to position mainstream groups as aiders and abettors. Under the USA Patriot Act, environmentalists and animal rights groups have faced surveillance for legal activities. According to Brian Jenkins, a RAND Corporation terrorism analyst who is presumed to have worked with Jane Harmon on creating the Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007, “leftists,”



anarchists, environmentalists and anti-globalists are linked with jihadists as “homegrown terrorists” ([www.ccrjustice.org](http://www.ccrjustice.org)). The act would criminalize the use of “force” against the government for political or social ends. “Force” is not defined, and many civil liberties/rights advocates are concerned about its potential infringement on First Amendment protected speech and assembly. The Pentagon and Justice Department appear to have made major moves to support the framework of “homegrown terror” as the bill nears the Senate floor. Major press outlets have so far failed to mention the bill’s anti-environmentalist context or its potential civil liberties ramifications. It appears to be yet another example of the administration’s capitalizing on terrorism fear to in order to restrict risks to profits.

Shellenberger and Nordhaus don’t acknowledge the executive, legislative and industry pushes to marginalize environmentalists. In their inverted representation, it is environmentalists’ power that hinders their ability to tap into the zeitgeist. The authors make undocumented claims about the “environmental leaders from the generation of ‘68” who “grew up in the corridors of power” and are out of touch with Americans’ focus on money and jobs (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 34). Unlike the conservatives who found a way to harness social values and public morality while out of power, liberals have been overly focused on rationality because they and environmentalists controlled the levers of power.

The authors go on claim that the values environmentalists misunderstand right now are the turn away from “fulfillment” and toward “survival values, including fatalism,

ecological fatalism, sexism, everyday rage, and the acceptance of violence” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 35-36). The authors do not even attempt to demonstrate that we previously reached an apex of self-expression and quality-of-life fulfillment values that are now on the decline. They argue that we need more prosperity to create more environmentalists. After all, “The civil rights movement no more emerged because African Americans were suddenly denied their freedom than the environmental movement emerged because America suddenly started polluting” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 37). We know by now not to trust the authors: their assessments of the histories of both movements have proven suspect.

According to Shellenberger and Nordhaus, any focus that is not prosperity-centered is wrong; environmentalists are either elitists who don’t care about the poor, or they care about them while ignoring their hungry bellies and insecurity. Environmentalists are not hard-headed, but narrow-minded. Their preoccupation with explaining intrusions upon nature mean that their only solutions can involve reducing the “frequency and severity of these intrusions” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 39). The 2006 elections seemed to provide comfort, but Americans are still full of fear, pessimism and insecurity, which means they will not want to deal with global warming.<sup>1</sup> The answer is not to focus on single issues (presumably like emissions caps and fuel standards), but to focus on social values and how we “might create a new social contract for postmaterial America that can provide enough security and prosperity to support a new, more ecological era” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus, 40).

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<sup>1</sup> The authors do not discuss the terrorist threat, terrorism rhetoric, the erosion of civil liberties or anxiety over the Iraq war as possible contributors to general insecurity.

In addition to the lack of transparency, what makes Shellenberger and Nordhaus's work so tricky is that though there are nearly always kernels of truth in their claims, they ignore the context for and sources of that truth. As Cornel West noted in 1995, the left has not been as successful as the right at harnessing the powers of "desire and death" to create persuasive political narratives (West, 1995). When Shellenberger and Nordhaus write as though the left has been out of touch for thirty years they ignore the vast amounts of paper and panel time that have been devoted to these issues. There has been a major divide between mainstream environmentalists and environmental justice advocates who were irritated at overly place- and animal-focused advocacy that Shellenberger and Nordhaus discuss. However, as early as 1994 even the relatively conservative, place-centric Nature Conservancy was acknowledging the necessity of taking socioeconomic factors into consideration (Cooper, 247).

Barbara Ehrenreich's work expanded on identity's connection to resources and political position in the mid-1990s. Somewhat similarly to Shellenberger and Nordhaus, she identifies the New Left/countercultural politics in the US as "post-scarcity" in that there was an assumption that there was enough for everyone to have a reasonable amount of food and goods but that means of production needed shifting and resources needed equitable distribution. She acknowledges the "embarrassingly provincial" chasm dividing American radicals' focus on identity shifts vs. third world revolutionaries' focus on resources. She laments that while the right-wing produces rhetorics of scarcity, now we face genuine deficits of soil, ozone, species, and water. She points out that the

dispossessed want the trappings of the better-off (“chemical-rich lawns”), but environmentalism cannot offer more and in our consumer culture, “an ecological consciousness can only mean the prospect of *less*” (226). Ehrenreich calls on the left to expose both the “false scarcity of right-wing propaganda” and the “scarcities created by sheer waste and, of course, maldistribution.”

But it will not be enough to graft some granola-style, less-is-better ecologism on to our radical democratic, socialist-feminist, or whatever we want to call it, politics. If the left wants to recover, if it wants to have anything at all to say in this jaded and depleted world, it is going to have to reinvent a credible vision of abundance (226).

Ehrenreich was using “human potential” and prosperity-based arguments ten years before Shellenberger and Nordhaus, but she clearly articulates them with justice and equality.

These broad brush strokes and allusions to academic arguments make it clear that the duo is not seeking legitimacy from those who have dedicated themselves to environmental or other left scholarship or activism at any time over the last thirty years. Their kernels of truth seem destined to come across like informed arguments for readers who don’t have the context or knowledge to refute them.

## ***Breakthrough Chapter 2: Transposing U.S. Terrorism Anxiety onto Brazilian Street Children***

At the conclusion of *Break Through’s* Chapter 1, the audience is firmly focused on the United States. We are ensconced in our postmaterialism and yet many of us feel “fearful, pessimistic, and insecure.” This “social values ecology” is inhospitable to ecological concern. Why aren’t environmental strategists and funders focused on creating optimal

economic conditions for environmentalism to flourish rather than on single-issue environmentalism? It's time to stop constraining economic growth and human potential.

Now we move swiftly from post-material insecurity to gritty poverty, corruption and violence. Chapter 2 begins with an example of the "everyday acts of terrorism" that plague Brazil: the 1993 massacre of 30 Brazilian street children who had taken refuge at the Nossa Senhora da Candelaria cathedral. This extraordinary, internationally condemned event is used as a springboard to discuss everyday violence. Shellenberger and Nordhaus seem to want to emphasize the *terrorist* nature of the common violence when they contend, "Politicians promised to root out the evildoers, send them to prison, and reform the system" (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 42). But poverty and corruption are endemic. The street children comprise a "firmly established and respectable interest group," but we in the North often don't hear them. They, like the destruction of the Amazon, become "background noise" in our "cacophonous modern world."

In this first section, the authors have accomplished much. First, they have displaced their readership's fears. They have shifted the focus of an audience now aware of its first world insecurity (not *true* insecurity) to concentrate on the "genuine" poverty and insecurity of the Brazilians. They have imbued the Brazilians' plight with what Americans now fear most: terrorism. The pervasive terrorism anxiety that was not mentioned in the previous section as contributing to the fear, pessimism and insecurity of the American public is transposed onto the Brazilian context. The word "evildoers" is most strongly associated with George Bush's use of it to describe "enemies of America" in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Ascribing such a loaded descriptor of our most urgent

external threat to an internal Brazilian threat (the police) makes their plight seem all the more viscerally dire.

Second, in defining a legitimate interest group of small, poverty-stricken children who die at the hands of a corrupt state, they tacitly de-legitimize our first world interest groups. Who could deny the children's legitimacy? What first world reader could compare herself with these children and not feel lucky? For an audience that is supposed to create a positive future, this plays powerfully on first world and white guilt. What of our interests could possibly be meaningful in comparison?

Shellenberger and Nordhaus describe the "terrorism" in greater detail and then designate it a function of the rich/poor divide. It is through "this prism of violence, poverty, and inequality that the destruction of the Amazon must be understood" (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 45). The authors then provide a brief history of Brazil's political economy, from colonial times to the present, demonstrating that the policies of a U.S.-installed dictator would lead to inflation and debt, and that inequitable land distribution would "become the macrodrivers of hunger, misery and deforestation for a half century to come." Today, because the state must service its debt, it cannot afford to eliminate slavery or enforce the law – either in the streets of Rio or in the Amazon. According to Shellenberger and Nordhaus, environmentalists are oblivious to these interconnections: "Why then do Brazilian and non-Brazilian environmentalists alike make the violence and poverty in the Amazon part of their politics but not the poverty and violence that afflict the rest of Brazil?" The solution to Amazonian deforestation lies not with a focus on

poverty and violence in the Amazon, but with the meta debt issues that affect the entire country.

Now the street children take on a new role; the compelling and deserving antidote to the tale of Brazilian rubber tapper Chico Mendes, whose “story could trigger a tear among North Americans and Europeans who knew nothing of Brazil or the Amazon.” According to Shellenberger and Nordhaus:

Around the world, a barrage of hopeful books and articles were published touting the romantic notion that the little guys of the forest were agents of history, authentically representing nature’s true interests against corrupt governments, violent landlords, and rapacious corporations. Even writers critical of how Europeans projected their own romantic notions of the ‘noble savage’ on Indians ended up reading their own fantasies into Mendes’s coalition.”

Shellenberger and Nordhaus quote a socialist ecology text, Hecht and Cockburn’s *Fate of the Forest*, which calls for popular control over means of production and distribution of forest commodities, financial credits to producers, and justice -- including legal protection of rights to “land and life.” The authors have no qualms about using the street children’s plight as a repository for readers’ fears, but de-legitimize the “romanticizing” of Mendes. This allows Shellenberger and Nordhaus to de-legitimize social ecology tenets without addressing them directly.

What happens next is typical of the authors’ deft conflation of a number of issues and creation of a “straw man” environmentalist to be dismissed. Shellenberger and Nordhaus frame the “environmentalists” as not understanding that Mendes was not an environmentalist but a labor and community organizer. However, the quote they just

dismissed as “romanticizing” indigenous people clearly focused beyond “narrow” environmental issues, and encompassed labor and legal domains. The straw man “environmentalist” who is not concerned with economic development is in reality a social ecologist or an environmental justice advocate. The authors say that “few people outside of Brazil” know that Mendes was not an environmentalist but a labor organizer. However, in reality, few people outside of activist and academic circles know the ins and outs of Environmental Justice, a close cousin of social ecology.

Mainstream environmental groups’ work with Mendes’ “social justice-based” Rubber Tappers Union has been identified as promising by proponents of Environmental Justice. They have acknowledged that “The efforts of his organization went way beyond the preservation of the forests” (Sander and Pezzullo 300). That coalitional work is seen as a promising indicator of the ways mainstream groups can make cross-border linkages around the world.

After creating their straw man environmentalist, the pair pull back again to the meta issues of sustainable development, this time adding their postmaterialism spin. They expand their argument from Brazil to China, and apparently all Southern nations, emphasizing that until populations achieve a minimal level of economic development and security, it is unreasonable for us to expect them to “sacrifice economic development for the purpose of reducing pollution and protecting nonhuman ecosystems.” Referencing the postmaterialist necessity, they contend that ecological concern is only actionable in post-scarcity societies (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 52).



The authors rely heavily on the notion that post-materialism leads to environmental values without discussing theorists or researchers who suggest otherwise. As Ester, et al discuss, the relationship between postmaterialism and ecological concern is contested (18-19). Their Global Environmental Survey (GOES), published in 2003, involved decision-makers and everyday people in Brazil, Bangkok, Canada, China, Germany, Japan, Manila, and the Netherlands. At the conclusion of the survey, Ester, et al contend, “In Brazil we observed that postmaterialist values and socio-altruistic/biospheric values are hardly related to pro-environmental behavior.” It is odd that Shellenberger and Nordhaus would ignore such a complete repudiation of their most emphatic claim by organizers of the world’s most comprehensive cross-national study of environmental values. The study’s organizers further conclude:

We observed in the GOES Mass Public Survey that in all countries included, citizens both in developed and developing countries prioritize ecological concerns over economic interests. Decision makers clearly underestimate public readiness to support ecological stakes in balancing environmental and economic interests. Likewise, they underestimate public willingness to take individual responsibility in fighting environmental deterioration. Moreover, their assessment of public knowledge of environmental “global” problems is much more negative than the public’s self-evaluation in this respect. (Ester et al 253 – 254)

Ignatow also points out, data that emphasizes post-materialism in the North and direct contact with pollution in the South as central explanations for environmental values have been seriously challenged by additional sources (he cites Dunlap, Gallup, and Gallup 1993, Brechin 1999) (Ignatow 19). Additionally, postmaterialism interacts with cultural factors (Ignatow 18).

The authors also fail to contextualize the reason that so much international attention and resources have been heaped upon the Amazon. They write:

By the time of the 1992 United Nations environment conference in Rio de Janeiro, everyone from CEOs to ranchers to heads of state had adopted the language of sustainable development, leading environmentalists to believe that the promises being made would somehow progress to a new mode of economic development in the Amazon. It was a belief reinforced by several hundred million dollars invested by wealthy countries in conservation and sustainable development pilot projects, with \$200 million invested by computer-chip mogul Gordon Moore alone.

Shellenberger and Nordhaus place this passage in the midst of a discussion about Chico Mendes, as though “environmentalists” were somehow responsible for the sustainable development discourse and the resources marshaled in its name. The reasons for this, however, were well beyond any individual environmental group’s control. The UNCED adopted “sustainable development” as a principle in advance of the 1992 Rio Summit. An international group of CEOs created the Business Council for Sustainable Development and tried, in advance of the Summit, to convince the Bush administration that pollution controls were good for business (Newhouse 75).

To the administration, however, Southern deforestation was a more comfortable target than emissions caps. The U.S. was in a recession, and the Cold War had just ended. The Japanese had invested heavily in climate-controlling technology and the Bush administration was leery of boosting their economic and technological edge.

Additionally, it was reluctant to bow to any international authority. As an article covering the lead-up to the Summit noted, “The only issue to which the Bush

Administration warms and on which it has taken an advance position is deforestation.”

Further,

As the producer of about one-fourth of the world’s CO<sub>2</sub>, America is anxious about preserving the sinks... Among industrialized nations only the United States has opposed capping CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The other parties have accepted a target and a timetable... It is hard to hold the high ground on deforestation when your position on climate control is judged politically absurd (and when you are busily depleting your own forests).” (Newhouse 67)

As a Japanese diplomat was quoted in 1992:

If the U.S. cannot commit itself to stabilize CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, then developing countries like China, India, Brazil, and Mexico won’t make commitments either... We need a strong CO<sub>2</sub> convention – one with teeth in it.

However, it was an election year, and the administration did not want to upset the coal industry. (Newhouse 69)

Beyond debt relief, and the need to promote a post-materialist aspirational vision, Shellenberger and Nordhaus don’t offer solutions for Brazil. They go on to discuss specific approaches to deforestation and biodiversity protection as though the “environmentalists” they expose represent all environmental efforts to engage with Brazil and the Amazon. They continue the refrain “do you care about us or just our forests?” We are meant to care about those children in Rio left out by “small bore environmental approaches.” But Shellenberger and Nordhaus have already dismissed environmental justice, the diffuse movement with a commitment to the economic wellbeing and rights of traditionally disenfranchised people and roots in critiquing narrow environmental frameworks. Using their “straw man” to denigrate regulatory or justice-centered approaches emerges as the most salient point of the chapter.

### ***Break Through Chapter 3: Delegitimizing Environmental Justice***

In “Interests Within Interests,” Shellenberger and Nordhaus’ take on the people-centered environmental justice movement. One central question from the EJ movement has been something akin to “Do you care about mountain peaks and owls -- or people?” Based on their purported affection for poor children, interest in jobs, and promotion of discourses that expand environmental categories beyond preservationist and conservationist frameworks, one would think that they would celebrate EJ. However, in a manner similar to their spurious framing of modern environmentalism, they provide a skewed and incomplete picture of the diverse, coalitional movement.

Shellenberger and Nordhaus begin with the 1987 United Church of Christ study, and follow up with the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. The authors place an emphasis on EJ claims that the disproportionate pollution burden poor people of color bear amounts to genocide. “EJ activists have rarely showed much hesitation in playing the genocide card,” (66) they claim.

The use of the term ‘genocide’ makes sense if we understand the context of the Leadership Summit. It brought together over 300 African American, Native American, Latino American and Asian American delegates from the US, and additionally attendees from Canada, Central and South America, Puerto Rico, and the Marshall Islands. After a meeting of these grassroots activists on the first day, on the second day, another 250 lawyers, professionals and organizers arrived. Through consensus, 17 EJ principles were established, to “secure our political, economic, and cultural liberation that has been

denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples” (Di Chirro 114). Though the term can be used in other relevant contexts, it can safely be deployed concerning Native Americans Nations, like the Mohawk who fought a fifty year battle for clean-up of a Superfund site that impaired their traditional use of land and subsistence fishing along the St. Lawrence (Tarbell and Arquette 96). It’s hard to imagine faulting them for “playing the genocide card” or appealing to the United Nations.

Shellenberger and Nordhaus go on to claim that after the seminal United Church of Christ report, studies by EJ activists, “sympathetic journalists, and left-leaning academics” made similar claims and EJ as well as “environmental racism” entered the “political lexicon” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 67). This movement “grafted the race-based politics of the civil rights movement onto the place-based politics of grassroots environmentalism,” hoping to create a “more expansive, inclusive, and powerful basis upon which to advocate for both social justice and environmental protection.” They claim that the movement “served its original protagonists well”; they are seen as an antidote to “out of touch, elitist, or irrelevant” national environmental leaders (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 67). They were also brought to prominence and embraced by the “liberal establishment” of the Clinton administration. So, in Shellenberger and Nordhaus’ formulation, the EJ leaders have deployed successful narratives and insinuated themselves into powerful positions.

As Dreiling points out, however, Clinton's neoliberal bent hardly meant respite for environmentalists in any sort of liberal establishment. Instead it required adaptation. The "third wave" of environmentalists were a mixture of pollution preventers and market-based incentivists. During the 1980s several mainstream environmental organizations targeted large banks and international finance capital in an effort to mediate the consequences of "ecological imperialism," most typically as manifested in the politics of biodiversity and tropical deforestation, trade in toxics, global warming, and a whole host of debt-related assaults on the biosphere. Tactics varied, with the "impolite" Rainforest Action Network representing one end of global environment and groups like the World Wildlife Fund holding up the "politics of compromise end," negotiating with "representatives of Northern finance capital." Both worked with growing movements in the "Global South" (Dreiling 222). Neoliberal intellectuals and corporate foundations began cultivating and refining the ideological tools of the third wave and forged a "free-market environmentalism;" and environmentalist discourse subsumed under neoliberal ideology. The neoliberal "Group of 10" leaned toward market solutions, with National Wildlife Federation president Jay Hair urging "Our arguments must translate into profits, earnings, productivity, and economic incentives for industry" (222). It's clear then, that just the sort of prosperity-friendly environmentalism N and S favor, and that Smoke Abatement advocates gave way to over 100 years ago, was alive and well nearly twenty years ago as well.

The two-pronged globalization of environmentalism was confronted with a "fourth wave" grassroots current – the EJ movement, which by 1989 was challenging mainstream

leaders. Di Chiro notes that though the activists were not part of the traditional, middle class preservationist environmental movement, to call them “new environmentalists” is misleading as their roots were in labor, civil rights, welfare rights and farm worker struggles. These people were focusing on contamination and poisoning issues in urban centers, as well as joblessness, and defined the environment as where we “live, work, and play.”

According to Di Chiro, there were two landmark events in the EJ movement; the contamination of Love Canal in the late 1970s and Warren County, North Carolina in 1982. She classifies antitoxics as single-issue, provincial, focused on local actions, lacking any critique of the status quo or appeal to history of oppression, and without identity politics or class articulation. Antitoxics involved no inherent questioning of authority. EJ on the other hand, created coalitions among diverse and disenfranchised communities, engaged in discursive politics, developed strategies and methodologies for “changing consciousness” and the material realities of their lives, and drew connections between local issues and broader issues. Often, a capitalist critique was involved. Historical narratives of descending from workers’, indigenous and civil rights struggles created an “imagined community” of previously voiceless people making historical changes.

As DiChirro notes, the claims around environmental racism were much more nuanced than Shellenberger and Nordhaus lead us to believe. The 1987 United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice Report they mention described it not only as genocide but:

Racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of people of color communities for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and history of excluding people of color from leadership in the environmental movement.

In the early 90s EJ activists confronted the Big Ten environmental organizations on these issues to varying results. Various coalitions offered promise. Dreiling notes that “Mainstream response was uneven, at best” (222). There was a sense, however, that the larger, established groups were working in the language of EJ to attract grant money that the EJ groups sorely needed.

Shellenberger and Nordhaus would like us to believe that select people have benefited greatly from the creation of EJ. Author of the United Church of Christ report Benjamin Chavis would go on to become head of the NAACP and EJ would attract \$46 million in grant money by 1999. Meanwhile, EJ has done little for the low-income people of color it “claims to represent” in the form of new environmental laws or civil rights legal challenges (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 67). Once again, we can thank those laws from earlier eras for reducing pollution in low-income communities.

This characterization profoundly misrepresents the grassroots genesis of EJ as a unified movement represented by a high profile few, rather than a diffuse, fragile coalition of people who are forced to become EJ advocates because they are affected by pollution. As Di Chiro notes, many of these people are low-income women of color. “Though they often organize for the good of the community, becoming politically engaged makes them visible and identified as (often eccentric) women” (121). Watching corporations and



government officials show complete disregard for their children has been a key motivator. “Many women evoke deep concerns about the health and future survival of their children and communities when explaining their initial or continued involvement in fighting for environmental justice” (Di Chiro 119). These hardly sound like individuals angling for funding or prestigious appointments.

According to Shellenberger and Nordhaus, not only are EJ advocates guilty of rallying around genocide and failing in their efforts, but they ignore what poor Americans of every color care about: jobs, health care, and public safety (68). This is simply wrong. As Allen, Dara and Holland point out, EJ activists experience environmental threats as connected to other threats to their communities, and become empowered by their struggle:

Within the figured world of environmental justice, the environment is associated with the daily smells and sights of blight, along with an awareness of ever-present danger and insult to one’s body and the community. Accompanying these threats are the experiences of other forms of injustice and disregard. It is not surprising that the environmental justice movement sees the empowerment of environmentally stressed communities as equally important to the removal of environmental threats. The work of the movement simultaneously addresses people’s concerns *and* helps them change oppressive systems under which they live.

Additionally, a focus on job safety has been central to EJ critiques (Levenstein and Wooding). The 1990s Pacific Northwest forest issue, rather than examined from the limited lens of jobs vs. owls, is seen in the context of globalization and outsourcing to Mexico and China (Bellamy Foster 196). As Dreiling points out, the cross-border environmental organizing around NAFTA was tied to the exportation of American jobs

(231). EJ interrogates the relationships among power, capital, and the state. Shellenberger and Nordhaus seem to want to move us away from such critiques.

Next Shellenberger and Nordhaus make what has become a trademark move. They incorporate some of the complexity of their subject's critique into their own accusation of reductionism:

Disproportionate environmental health outcomes can no more be reduced to intentional discrimination than can disproportionate economic and educational outcomes. They are due to a larger and more complex set of historic, economic and social causes (68).

EJ activists and writers have taken pains to explain the intricate and multifaceted historical and contemporary contributors to unhealthy communities. Shellenberger and Nordhaus obfuscate and rely on reductionism. As the chapter goes on, they attempt to rescue "risk assessment" based public health from EJ critiques. They also try to reframe disease as a personal health and genetic issue rather than acknowledge the carcinogenic effects of the cocktails of untested and randomly combining chemicals we are exposed to at home, work, and in between. They blame EJ activists for reacting to the pollution in their communities rather than taking on the tobacco industry. Overall, they write as though EJ is an organized, centralized movement with the resources to take on powerful forces.

After having castigated the mainstream environmental movement for its limited and ineffectual strategies and outcomes, they now portray it as a victim of the racist claims of EJ activists. Those shrewd advocates were playing on white guilt to panic the groups and funders. According to Shellenberger and Nordhaus, after the 1991 Leadership Summit, a

tacit agreement was brokered whereby EJ would lay off high profile accusations of racism in exchange for jobs and funding. These people who came together after finding little assistance from the mainstream environmental movement or elsewhere were powerful extortionists.

Finally, like mainstream environmentalists, EJ advocates simply see the environment as a separate thing, and don't put prosperity in the center of their politics so are doomed to fail. Their multiplication of special interests has divided rather than united. Apparently, "ecological democracy" and greater popular social control of governmental processes and capitalist production combined with local and international linkages among labor, human/civil rights and environmental advocates should not steer postenvironmental politics (Faber, 51).

### ***The Beginnings of a Sincere Post-Environmentalism***

One of the positive aspects of Shellenberger and Nordhaus' work is that it reveals exactly which arguments and approaches are most threatening: the scientific/governmental/natural hegemony they work to dismantle, as well as economic and racial equality, and focuses on rights tied to place and health. In the U.S. right now, it seems that we must ask: What if we were safe, healthy, equal, free and prosperous? Articulating safety, health, equality, freedom and prosperity as American ideals for the 21st century would provide a patriotic hegemony that would prove difficult to assault. Safety/security, for example, could require meaningful climate change legislation that would protect us from deleterious shifts in weather patterns, the chaos of population

displacement, and the introduction of new diseases to our continent. Further notions of safety, health, and equality could be drawn from environmental justice quarters. A patriotic notion of prosperity could be about a redefinition of abundance that combines each of us having enough with the sacrifice necessary to cut our energy consumption below catastrophic levels. A strong citizen's movement with a focus on transforming the energy economy is essential. In this time of sacrifice, we can distill the best aspects of Americanness: innovation and a belief that government should serve the common good. Clearly, this moves us beyond any "small bore" approach that S and N would critique, and transcends traditional "environmental" boundaries. It even sounds similar to the surface of what they promote.

The patriotic element is especially important because of the efforts to frame environmentalists as terrorists. As energy industries attempt to remove the last bit of oil or tar or coal from the ground or mountaintop, build coal-fired plants, or mine and transport uranium, there will be citizens who are willing to sacrifice their bodies to prevent it. If they are framed as powerful, elusive and evil, the interested state actors and energy industries have won the rhetorical battle. If, however, patriotic Americans are asserting their rights, and claiming a future that would be stolen by profit motive, then those on the side of health and safety are much harder to marginalize. Here it becomes clearer why S and N have distanced themselves from and demonized "environmentalists" as they have romanticized and isolated the civil rights movement: such a citizen's movement to combat global warming must be industry's greatest fear, and nonviolent direct action environmentalists cannot be seen in the same light as civil rights marchers.



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