

{ The
Soul }

of Environmentalism

REDISCOVERING
TRANSFORMATIONAL POLITICS
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Table *of* Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| An Introduction to the “Soul” of Movements | 5 |
| Why Race and Class Matter to the Environmental Movement | 8 |
| The Lessons We Haven’t Learned from the Struggles for Civil Rights | 11 |
| What Winning Looks Like | 16 |
| Conclusion | 27 |
| <i>Postscript</i> | 28 |
| <i>Authors & Acknowledgements</i> | 30 |

An Introduction to the “Soul” *of* Movements

*Someday I hope you get the chance,
To live like you were dyin’* —TIM MCGRAW, 2004

CAN A MOVEMENT REALLY DIE?

In 1991, Dana Gioia, the poet who now heads the National Endowment for the Arts, published a magazine article proclaiming the death of poetry. He looked at a multitude of small-circulation ‘zines and academic reviews that published nothing but verse and said, “The heart sinks to see so many poems crammed so tightly together, like downcast immigrants in steerage.” A few months later, another writer argued that poetry had become irrelevant and attacked “preening” work by an anonymous, but ethnically specified, “Hawaiian of Japanese ancestry.”

Poetry as a movement was afloat, vital, and most definitely not dead. Immigration and ethnicity aside, Rap was Def by 1991. Today, the live club performance series “Def Poetry Jam” attracts television viewers “in the upper millions,” according to co-founder Bruce George. Def means “death” in the lingo of the Rap genre, and its blossoming was just one symptom of the life that words in rhyme have to this day.

We thought of “Def Poetry” while reading “The Death of Environmentalism,” an essay released by two activist communications consultants last fall. The furious debate that erupted around that essay is a sign that the environmental movement is still alive and kicking. And just as in the debate over poetry, we should thank the medical examiners for their premature autopsies. Their first incisions have jolted the still body to new life. The lively corpse is now reacting thoughtfully and with vigor.

We have discussed “The Death of Environmentalism” with environmental justice and sustainability activists, leaders from the reproductive and gay rights movements, members of the faith community, labor organizers, philanthropists, business executives, and people in the military. Like us, they have saluted the essay for jump-starting a debate over our shared strategic challenges. Leaders of the environmental justice movement welcome the essay because it echoes concerns they’ve been working on for well over two decades.

We want to be sure that the crux of the critique stays at the fore and moves forward. We want to be sure that environmentalism’s true strengths, as embodied in

Environmental Justice, Sustainability, and a number of other movements, increase to scale. We are also writing to bring the broader perspectives we've encountered into the debate. We have a few myths to bust about contemporary activism and a few points to add about the environmental movement's true heritage.

In the '90s, the declaration that "poetry is dead" was an attempt to deny and to marginalize a rich array of new anti-establishment forms of poetry. Back then, the writers ignored rap, performance art, and poetry slams. The debate over "The Death of Environmentalism" feels like a similar exercise in its omissions.

This reaction follows from a point Wendell Berry made in a 1970 essay titled "The Hidden Wound": "The crucial difference, I think, between our society and others that have been divided, by class if not by race, is that in our self-protective silence up to now about the whole problem, we have not developed the language by which to recognize the extent or the implications of the division, and we have not developed either the language or the necessary social forms by which to recognize across the division our common interest and our common humanity."

Environmentalism and other progressive movements in the United States are not dead, but they are crippled by denial. Right-wing extremists are not any closer to the truth than progressives, but their political agenda thrives to the extent racial and class inequality is denied. "The Death of Environmentalism" does an admirable job of starting a debate over how environmental organizations should change their strategies. But what we really need is a death of denial.

Environmentalism, like poetry, has a soul deeper and more eternal than the one described by its examiners. It's a soul tied deeply to human rights and social justice, and this tie has been nurtured by the Environmental Justice and Sustainability movements for the past 20 years. We are writing to explore this soul, to break the unwritten gag rule about race and class, and to examine the intermingled roots of social change movements. These roots, these rules, and this soul together hold the key to environmentalism's new life.

*I got two white horses following me,
waiting on my burying ground* —BLIND LEMON JEFFERSON, 1927

As we move through George W. Bush's second term, it might seem as though progressive and liberal ideas are almost wholly out of fashion. War and security

dominated the Democratic Party's agenda in 2004, even as it tried to win the election on health care and the economy. Right after the election, the Bush Administration freed publicly funded clinics from the obligation to provide abortion services, and no one seemed to pay much attention.

It is fashionable to explain Bush's strength by saying that "frames trump facts." George Lakoff, a cognitive scientist at the University of California, has gained some notoriety by pointing out that ideas have physical, cultural, and political manifestations, called "frames," that rarely depend on the facts. You can't necessarily change someone's frame of reference simply by stating a new one, even if your frame wins on the facts.

Frames can trump facts, but UC Berkeley sociologist Tom Medvetz points out that Lakoff's cognitive science is limited to analyzing what goes on in people's brains. What's happening to environmentalism has a lot to do also with history and with institutions, and a singular focus on framing can also be a form of denial.

Frames emerge from history, and they are connected with institutions. To win, we must take on all of it—the frames, the history, and the institutions. We must have the courage to name what is right and plot a course that connects to everyday lives and transforms them. If we do this, we can re-frame our movements in ways that astonish, delight, and liberate. The debate surrounding "The Death of Environmentalism" is really an opening to re-examine modern political strategy in general, and environmentalism in particular. In the next few pages, we're going to widen that opening and blaze a trail through it.

Why Race and Class Matter to the Environmental Movement

*El costo de la vida sube otra vez. El peso que baja ya ni se ve,
Y las habichuelas, no se pueden comer, ni una libra de arroz, ni una cuarta de café.
A nadie le importa que piensa usted. Será porque aquí
No hablamos ingles.¹ —JUAN LUIS GUERRA, 1996*

Environmentalism in the United States has always been as diverse as our country itself. In the 19th century, for example, African American abolitionists fought slavery as well as the use of arsenic in tobacco fields. Later, Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King, Jr., were only two of thousands of people of color whose movements for justice set the template for Earth Day. These leaders are part of our soul as environmentalists. The rebirth of the movement depends on being clear about that lineage.

The authors of “The Death of Environmentalism” begin by invoking their ancestors. “Those of us who are children of the environmental movement must never forget that we are standing on the shoulders of all those who came before us,” they write. They cite John Muir and David Brower—and Martin Luther King, too. They quote from interviews they did with 25 senior executives at mainstream environmental groups. History seems duly respected. But we need to stop the music here and make two big points before we leave the subject of ancestry.

First, many environmentalists would rather not stand on the shoulders of certain early conservation heroes. Muir developed his conservation ethic during the Civil War and the expropriation of Native American lands, the two great racial struggles of the 19th century. He pretty much ignored both of them, according to Carl Anthony, an historian and urban planner. After dodging the Civil War draft by going to Canada, Muir walked the occupied lands of the West and the South and saw nothing more sinister than “forest walls vine-draped and flowery as Eden.” Before we sanctify Muir, we need to understand how his racial attitudes affected his commitments to conservation. If the environmental movement is ever going to revive, it must first confront the many ways in which the U.S. has reserved open space for the exclusive use of whites.

John Muir’s racism is about more than just history. It’s about building a new frame for a bigger environmental movement. There are better shoulders for us to stand on. In 1849, Henry Thoreau explained that he was refusing to pay taxes to a government

¹ Translation: *The cost of living increases again. The peso that falls is never seen, and neither beans, nor rice, nor coffee can be found to eat. It matters to no one what you think. That’s because here we don’t speak English.*

“which buys and sells men, women, and children like cattle at the door of its senate-house.” In 1914, Louis Marshall made the critical argument that saved the Adirondack wilderness, despite the fact that he was a Jew and many of his neighbors in the North Country were rabid anti-Semites. In the 1930s, Marshall’s son Robert founded the modern wilderness protection movement. Around the same time, Zora Neale Hurston documented multiethnic America in her many books about people and nature. In the 1960s, Henry Dumas wrote of the healing role of nature in even the most viciously segregated rural areas of the South.

“The Death of Environmentalism” refers often to America’s “core values” and cites surveys that show how those values have changed in the last decade. But when people talk about their core values their words don’t always match their meaning. For much of American history, the values of “freedom” and “progress” have been code words for a system that profits by oppressing the poor and communities of color. U.S. rhetoric is taking this charade to new heights globally while masking an agenda that actually celebrates authoritarian control and the decay of civic life.

Denying the racial content of the “values” debate in the U.S. today only deepens the predicament of environmentalism. Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson reminds us how the idea of freedom has been intertwined with the practice of slavery. From ancient Greece to the United States of 1776, he says, cultures that have theorized and celebrated “freedom” have simultaneously excluded huge swaths of their populations from any shred of it. At the same time, nations through history that profess to love “freedom” have been relentless in promoting heartless geopolitical agendas outside their borders.

Freedom is an important value, and its meaning is an important debate. Denying the links between “freedom” and oppression makes it harder for progressives to articulate a broader vision. The death of this denial is liberating because it links us more fully to our rough and glorious pasts. It also points the way to new choices and a more hopeful future.

*Elvis was a hero to most,
but he never meant sh*t to me...* PUBLIC ENEMY, 1989

Giving a nod to your ancestors when you start talking is a good oratorical trick. It establishes that your ancestors are dead, so you’re in charge now. But the authors of “The Death of Environmentalism” completely ignore a second set of ancestors who

need to be included in our deliberations. We're talking about the people who brought you the Civil Rights Movement.

Modern environmentalism was, after all, the Elvis of Sixties activism. It was a radical and innovative departure from the conservation movement that preceded it. And in almost every way, the politics and innovations of the early environmental movement derived directly from the same era's fight for black power and racial justice.

Norm Collins, the Ford Foundation program officer who first funded the Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense, and others, wrote in his decision memos that what was needed was "an NAACP for the environment." National legislative victories for the environment depended heavily on a re-jiggering of states' rights. This strategy copied one that had already been used successfully by the Civil Rights Movement. A critical factor in the passage of the Clean Air Act, for example, was to unify and to supersede the patchwork of existing air quality standards that states had promulgated on their own. And mass mobilizations for the environment depend heavily on nonviolent civil disobedience as popularized by African American advocates in the 1960s.

Just as the courts were fertile ground for black liberation, environmental organizations sought standing for nature and human health in ways that deeply challenged business as usual. As historian Roderick Nash pointed out in *The Rights of Nature*, environmental activists attempted to extend the 1960s legal focus on the rights of oppressed individuals to nature and to people facing environmental risks. Boycotts, consumer campaigns, and labor-environment alliances—where would these be without the models established by Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers?

The environmental justice movement emerged in the 1980s as a way to revitalize the grassroots activism started by the Civil Rights Movement. It also offered a home for activists who weren't comfortable separating their concern over the state of the planet from their concerns about social justice. Twenty years later, the mainstream environmental movement has been unable to racially integrate its senior staff, not because of overt discrimination but because of differences in vision. Many environmentalists of color admire the mainstream movement's goals, but they also know firsthand that social justice is routinely ignored in the mainstream movement's decision-making.

Despite its limitations, environmentalism as we know it today wasn't just the marriage of liberalism and conservation. It was committed activists, engaged in struggle and riffing on every tool they could see around them. Like Elvis, the environmental movement had soul—and soul is one thing you can't kill.

The Lessons We Haven't Learned from the Struggles for Civil Rights

Don't nobody know my troubles but God.

—DOCK REED, HENRY REED, AND VERA HALL, 1937

Millions of us went into the 1960s burning for the right to eat, drink, ride, work, play, and pray anywhere we wanted to. We sought a right to a job, to due process, to health care, to a good education, to fair housing, to live in the suburbs, to play in parks, and to love whom we chose. Among the rights we sought, we left the 1970s with rights to clean air, clean water, and our day in court on questions of environmental impacts. The Civil Rights Movement didn't fare as well. After an astonishing string of successes in the 1960s, it lost steam. The Civil Rights Movement wasn't dead by 1979, but the techniques it had deployed—mass mobilization, litigation, policy advocacy, and moral appeals—had started to run dry. That ought to sound familiar.

So what knocked Civil Rights off the track?

Me/We —MUHAMMAD ALI, 1987

Two leaders who have commented on “The Death of Environmentalism” have described the problems facing their movement in terms that also describe a central problem of the Civil Rights Movement. Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club, acknowledged our failure to build a case for problems that are “intangible, global, and future oriented.” He added that “rational collective self-interest IS an inadequate approach” (emphasis in original). Former Sierra Club president Adam Werbach, in a recent speech, emphasizes integration and interdependence. He says that we haven't found a way to make those principles part of environmentalism.

The Civil Rights Movement tried to overcome this same challenge. Remember the “join hands” section of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech before the Lincoln Memorial in 1963? King had a dream of an Alabama “where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.” As it turned out, King's phrasing captured both the promise and the shortcomings of the Civil Rights strategy. The image in context portrays integration and interdependence. It paints a picture of a better, tangible, and global future.

In this speech, King yanked America out of fragmentation and segregation and redefined community.

For a while, our country heard this call. The Civil Rights Act and other congressional actions of 1965 eliminated many systemic barriers to global community, such as blanket restrictions on immigration from non-European countries. Forty years later, 80% of Chinese Americans in Los Angeles are foreign born. Banks, colleges, and healthcare providers face heavy fines if they judge people by the color of their skin. The environmental movement followed suit, focusing on whole systems with compelling images of rivers on fire and poisoned air. Barry Commoner put it best when he wrote about a closing circle between humanity and nature.

Over the next fifteen years, the metaphor of whites and blacks joining hands came to be interpreted more literally, and more in terms of the lives of individual people. U.S. Supreme Court decisions of the early 1970s steadily chipped the idea of communities and groups out of civil rights. The key legal questions became whether specific African American medical students were entitled to hold hands with specific white medical students, or whether specific applicants for jobs were discriminated against by specific entities. And as the lawyers fought, communities were left out of the discussion.

From the very outset, the Supreme Court steadily rolled back the idea that Civil Rights had anything to do with groups or communities. They dragged the dominant frame back across the wall to the picture they wanted, as if to say, “This country is all about granting rights to individuals!” The equivalent for the environment would be, to paraphrase a line from California’s 2005 State of the State message, “What’s all this about cars being bad for people and the planet? California is about driving a motorcycle down Highway 1!”

The problems facing environmentalism today are eerily similar to those faced by the Civil Rights Movement two decades ago. Any debate over the death of environmentalism should acknowledge this. Both movements started out as social uprisings that were visionary and community- and systems-oriented. Both lost popular support as time went by. Both narrowed their advocacy increasingly to legal interventions. Both shifted from winning broad mandates to fighting specific political, regulatory, and legal battles.

Environmentalism has much to learn from understanding why the Civil Rights Movement made the choices it did and what the consequences were. The central debate in the Critical Race Theory field for many years now has been whether King and, by association, the entire Civil Rights Movement, made a mistake by framing our struggle in terms of individual rights at all. By seeking greater rights for African

American individuals, some argue, the movement played into the country's very strong ideological bias towards the individual and away from community.

Others highlight the subversive nature of the movement's strategy. Kimberlé Crenshaw, in a seminal 1988 Harvard Law Review article, showed how, by playing on the rights of the individual, the Civil Rights Movement found a way to bring communitarian values into the mainstream. In this view, King and others were using the contradiction between the United States' values of equality (for individuals) and the reality of racism to challenge fundamental institutions.

Was there another, less risky way to go for Civil Rights or environmental leaders of yore? We stand on their shoulders right now to even ask this question. The important problem is to figure out why, despite brilliant leadership and mass support, progress on Civil Rights was all but over by the late 1970s—and why the soul of environmentalism is adrift today.

Who's the Man with the Master Plan? —HOUSE OF PAIN, 1994

We can think of a few good reasons why environmentalists and civil rights activists are currently in this tough spot. First of all, in case anyone forgot, key leaders of the Civil Rights Movement were assassinated. A few environmental leaders were also killed, and many were harassed so severely that it became impossible for them to continue their work.

Tom Medvetz looked recently at why the Heritage Foundation has so outpaced its progressive counterpart, the Institute for Policy Studies. Both of them were founded in the mid-1960s by the same type of people, but IPS's budget today is the same as it was in 1982. Peering back into the archives, Medvetz was stunned to find how much money and time was spent from the outset fighting IRS audits, FBI wiretaps, and even COINTELPRO activity.

The Civil Rights and Environmental movements both played along, allowing legal action and technical advocacy to dominate their activism and funding. Whenever a movement spends more energy and money on winning in court than it does on winning in the streets, it speeds its own demise. And, as mentioned above, the highest courts of our land are happy to oblige.

Another reason why both movements have stumbled is the essentially conservative nature of philanthropy. Today some funders have adopted progressive values, but they

have lagged behind the rest of society by at least a generation. The Pew Charitable Trusts, for example, were founded by one of the right wing's most venerable funders, J. Howard Pew. This makes a lot of sense when you think about it: many great philanthropies arose from great individual fortunes, so U.S. foundations to this day emphasize individual-rights approaches far more than communitarian rights and systemic models of change. They also seem tuned to individual achievement more than community change. David Callahan and Francis Kunreuther of the think tank Demos are among those who have shown how strategic philanthropy has been fundamentally conservative or supportive of incremental change.

Our country's dominant institutions don't go quietly. Whenever significant challenges to individualistic ideology crop up, a wide flank of judicial, governmental, corporate, and quasi-military forces swing into action to dampen and ultimately defeat the impulse for a more communitarian society.

(love loves gonna get you) ya know a lot of people believe that that word Love is real soft, but when you use it in your vocabulary like you're addicted to it it sneaks right up and takes you right out. out. out. out. out.

So, for future reference remember it's alright to like or want a material item, but when you fall in love with it and you start scheming and carrying on for it, just remember, it's gonna get'cha —KRS-ONE, 1990

Our ancestors fought a war of ideas in the streets for the environment and civil rights. They wanted to make us realize how connected we were to each other and to the Earth. They wanted to change our institutions to reflect that insight. The opposition came in the form of state power: the courts, the FBI, and the barrels of fire hoses and guns.

Antonio Gramsci thought a lot about the struggle between ideas and state power while sitting in a jail cell in early 20th century Italy. In any struggle, he wrote, those with legal and physical power engage in "the war of position." Those without power can only resort to "the war of maneuver." This is the battle for the hearts and minds of enough people who will eventually generate enough power to defeat the war of position. Ideas are the key tool of the powerless in such battles. And this is the rub for us today.

Just as progressive movements like environmentalism and civil rights were being beaten back by institutional power, the country's economic base was shifting towards the production of ideas. The service sector had dominated the U.S. economy since the 1930s. By the early 1970s we had moved fully into an economy where the real engine is information and the production of ideas.

Before we environmentalists waste any more time worrying about how pitiful our frames are, we should realize this: In the 1960s, General Motors was really good at making cars. Today, they are really good at selling the idea of a car; and a war for the idea of equality or the environment is a lot harder to fight when Americans increasingly spend their lives in a war of ideas over which brand of fleece sweater they should buy.

The movement waiting to be born must be stronger than the one that's dying because the challenges we face now are even more difficult than the ones we tackled in the 1970s. When the pundits on commercial television say, "we live in the information age," what they mean is that ideas have become much more than just instruments of social change. Ideas have also become the most powerful instruments of commerce. This means that "the marketplace of ideas" is controlled more by commercial forces than by politicians, and the two are growing closer every day. It was no accident that the Bush campaign's successful strategy in 2004 relied more on market research than on voter rolls to target its message.

The average trip to a supermarket in the U.S. today lasts 55 minutes, or 3,300 seconds, and is a carefully choreographed encounter with 3,600 brands, each of which is competing to identify with our most cherished values. For progressives to win, we must enter the cycle that constrains the debate over values in the marketplace and break it. We have to reach people in their souls.

What Winning Looks Like: Ideas and Actions *for* Transformational Politics

Hunger only for a taste of justice

Hunger only for a world of truth

'Cause all that you have is your soul —TRACY CHAPMAN, 1989

The United States is a country at war. We are world leaders in the profligate use of fossil fuel, incarceration, private and public debt, and the gap between rich and poor. We are an ideologically divided country—we have the closest elections and one of the lowest rates of democratic participation. In America today, we are all Romans or slaves in the most powerful empire the world has ever known.

In the face of unprecedented challenges, great movements cannot choose ideas and actions by convenience. We must choose those that confront and overcome the great problems.

This chapter shows how ideas and actions must combine to build movements and then victories for environmentalism and beyond. Like Lakoff, we argue for new frames. But the ideas that drive them must emerge from a deep encounter between our values, our experience, and the giant social challenges we face. We also argue for a focus on action: investing in ideas that foster deep change, and transforming our leadership and our politics to overcome the threats that the last three chapters have identified.

IDEA 1: FIGHT THE BIG FIGHTS

How ya gonna win if you're not right within —LAURYN HILL, 1995

There is a short list of solutions to the conditions described at the beginning of this chapter. It includes the idea of community responsibility and what we owe our children. It includes the personal responsibility to vote and control our destiny politically, socially, and in our choices of whom to love. It includes how we carve up our land, and what residential apartheid is doing to our planet and our politics. It includes making “be all that you can be” a term attributable more to Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen than to the U.S. Army. It includes a different definition of what it means to be rich on this earth and in the hereafter.

Somewhere in that last paragraph, or a couple more you can write in a few minutes, are ideas big enough to challenge the “get-it-while-you-can/ I-wish-I-had-this-freeway-to-myself/ I-can’t-believe-I’m-voting-for-this-jerk/ Operation-Iraqi-Freedom/ wonder-if-I-have-room-for-another-extra-dozen-rolls-of-paper-towels-that-are-so-cheap-I’ve-got-to-stock-up” frame that is kicking our asses so hard right now. So take out your pens... and then, when you’re finished writing, compare notes. The goal is to identify the big fights. The discussion we need to have will identify the crucial intersections in progressive politics that will allow us to come together in radically new ways.

Table 1 (page 19) shows the notes we came up with when we tried to list the big fights and what’s at stake for our country.

The top row of our table reflects the bottom line of government—the budget. Conservative leader Grover Norquist would like a government “so small it can be drowned in a bathtub.” Right-wingers continue to pass deep tax cuts that create huge deficits, and then ratchet up the pressure to cut government spending. The only way for parents, healthcare advocates, labor, reproductive rights, anti-deficit, and environmental groups to turn this strategy around is to unite against it and to come out swinging with a new vision for our government’s priorities.

The environmental movement actually holds the key to winning this big fight. Two of the most important fixes to structural budget deficits lie in our hands: pollution charges and deep property tax reform. Each holds the promise of raising up to \$300 billion a year in new revenue while growing our jobs and economy. They do this simply by breaking our national addictions to fossil fuels and destroying land, and redirecting resources to more productive parts of the economy.

Another big fight is to grow the battle to protect wilderness and open space while reflecting all the challenges embedded in it. Land conservation traces its roots in U.S. culture to 19th century environmentalism, and land use activists today have expanded their efforts to fight sprawl. To fight effectively, they must open several new fronts. Right-wing apparatchiks know that sprawl works in their favor. As long as outer-outer-ring exurban homes offer lower taxes and better schools, they will undercut community while supporting the delusions of Americans who are anti-government.

The new environmental movement also has to stand with groups that fight for sexual and reproductive rights because our histories are so intertwined. Laws restricting marriage in the United States trace their roots to the control of slaves, indigenous people, and land. One obstacle environmentalism increasingly faces is the privatization of nature, and efforts to ban gay marriage are closely related to efforts aimed at radically shrinking the public sphere.

People who advocate for the Earth must speak out against the destruction being wrought by the War on Terror. Accepting this new paradigm for national security means complicity in the creation of “national sacrifice zones” like the bombing range in Vieques, Puerto Rico; a domestic police state; and an ideological rallying point for the far right.

A final big fight has emerged from the new ways wealth is being created in the information economy. The U.S. today is in a period similar to the Gilded Age of the late 19th century, in that we are passing things that once belonged to all of us into the hands of the few. The effects of this shift have been disastrous for the average American. In the late 1800s, government abetted the concentration of wealth through policies like the Homestead Act and the Mineral Rights Act. Today we are experiencing similar “land grabs” of tremendously valuable resources in arenas like the Internet, cell-phone bandwidth, and genetic information. Imagine if every water pipe in 1900 had been installed by Comcast or Verizon, and you get some sense of the assets we are now denying our children. Who owns bandwidth? Who owns the sky? The proper answer is “everyone.”

The economic boom of the 1990s was one of the biggest in American history, but almost all of the new money it generated went to the top one-fifth of U.S. households. Today more people are rich, and the richest few have enough money to make Louis XIV feel inadequate. Environmentalists have over a century of experience fighting the land grabs and wanton resource depletion that originated in the 19th century. These land grabs are the models for the dysfunctional parts of the information economy. It's time we put our long experience in service of a new definition of shared wealth for everyone.

TABLE I

THE BIG FIGHTS: CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND WHAT'S AT STAKE

| THE FIGHTS | WHAT'S AT STAKE |
|---|---|
| Funding the Public Sector in the 21st Century | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposing the “supply-side” attack on public services like education, health care, and infrastructure that is driven by large deficits at every level • Rolling back the Taxpayer Bill of Rights • Finding new revenue streams to fund vital public needs • Reversing budget cuts to environmental and land use agencies* |
| Land Use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposing sprawl as a symptom of race and class segregation, not its cause • Bringing our message to the core area for conservative electoral strategies: exurbs • Combating “War on Terror” initiatives that drive people away from community • Protecting open land and re-developing industrial sites* • Fighting sprawl* • Promoting Smart Growth* |
| Human and Reproductive Rights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding human rights to include sexual preference • Advocating for women’s rights domestically and internationally • Reclaiming the definition of “family values” • Promoting the politics of inclusion • Fighting overpopulation* |
| “The War on Terror” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reclaiming tax dollars now spent on the military for more constructive purposes • Reporting on waste and corruption in the reborn “military-industrial complex” • Turning “terror” from a rallying point into a point for debate • Fighting increased military pollution* • Preserving “right to know” laws for critical environmental information* |
| Creating Wealth for Everyone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting the Old New Deal: Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid • Launching the New New Deal: easing poverty and creating wealth for lower-rung workers in the “information economy” • Reining in monopolies • Developing a political formula for distributing information-economy wealth • Building community assets like transportation, parks, and the arts • Protecting common assets like drinking water, the gene pool, and airwaves • Protecting common ownership of land, mineral, and pollution rights* |

* = framing often used by environmental advocates

IDEA 2: COMMUNITY

*Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!* —LANGSTON HUGHES, 1938

Sharing is one theme that unites all the fights on this short list as well the bulk of Civil Rights activists, environmentalists, community leaders. What we have in common is the idea of commonality itself. The traditional values of Native Americans are based on sharing and community in nature. The deeper call of the Civil Rights Movement was to community wellbeing and harmony. And both Carl Pope and Adam Werbach, in their responses to “The Death of Environmentalism,” call for approaches that go beyond self-interest to integration.

Americans have a schizophrenic relationship to communitarian values. On the one hand, we have the cultural and political roots described earlier. We also have a strong tradition of patriotism and volunteerism that brings people together in diverse and cross-cutting communities. Yet our culture seems to have lost the ability to speak of shared wealth, community, and the commons.

We are already one of the most privatized societies in the world, and the right wing wants to push it even further. The privatization movement is really an attack on the idea of the commons and community. As our shared political and public spaces shrink, so too does our ability to take collective action to relieve poverty and protect the environment. The mainstream used to listen when we talked about solving these problems through collective action. But now civic space has eroded so much that mainstream Americans think these problems can be remedied by a “free market.” The term “market failure” has become exotic and marginal.

IDEA 3: GROWING SMALL VICTORIES INTO DOMINANT VALUES

How are the Souls called forth? —HENRY DUMAS, 1963

The frames the old movements used were linked to a string of incremental victories that evolved from a long struggle. Almost a century after the Civil War, African Americans had little reason to believe that they could ever wield real political power. Yet a mere 10 years separate the bus boycott sparked by Rosa Parks from the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. That political sea change was the flowering of something that had deep roots. The most important contribution of the civil rights activists of the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s was to build faith in the potential for change. Today's progressive activists must also build from one strength to another, from small victories to dominant values.

In 1961, John F. Kennedy inspired the country by announcing an ambitious and all-consuming goal—the Apollo program, which would put a man on the moon by the end of the decade. Today the authors of “The Death of Environmentalism” have issued a similar call. They have joined with others to launch the “New Apollo Project” to radically reduce America's dependency on oil as a source of energy over the next 10 years. They are calling for big investments in energy efficiency. This would be great. We support this goal. But we shouldn't confuse this new movement with the way JFK organized the moon shot. We should focus investments on the smaller, visionary victories sprouting up all around us. In fact, the Apollo Alliance has adopted this approach by supporting state and local-level activism.

In the early 1980s, environmental activists began to use the term “sustainability” to refer to a movement that began with pollution control and land protection but also included social justice, economic sufficiency, and democratic governance. American media and mainstream activists have a hard time with this new term for two reasons: first, it implies inter-connectedness; and second, because it implicates us in the profligate use of resources. Yet sustainability is an idea deeply rooted in grassroots activism around the country. Visionary national solutions from the Blue-Green Alliance to pension-fund activism all reflect a linkage between human, economic, and environmental rights.

The domestic movement for sustainability is linked, in turn, to international movements that are politically mainstream in their home countries. Sustainability is a pillar of national constitutions in Europe, while in less-developed countries the concept

is often a unifying force in bringing landless, coal mining, or rural communities together in supporting environmental measures. The models for the U.S. may be slightly different, but there is no shortage of winning strategies and coalitions to import.

Environmental justice is another visionary movement that emerged in the mid-1980s to redefine civil and environmental rights. It has had many successes, but few mainstream environmental organizations have noticed how or why. For example, California has been leading the country in eroding civil rights for communities of color and immigrants. But, at the same time, California has also passed six environmental justice laws since 1993. The environmental justice movement is based in some of our country’s most resource poor but idea and spiritually rich communities, and its leaders are keeping hope alive.

The environmental justice and sustainability movements have been re-framing environmental issues for more than 20 years. They see environmental challenges in ways that are new to the mainstream movement, and these new frames have already taken root in lots of ways. Table 2 (below) shows some of the ways these movements have re-stated, renewed, and reworked traditional environmental issues into a broader, more powerful base.

TABLE 2
RE-FRAMING ENVIRONMENTALISM: “NEW” FRAMES FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY MOVEMENTS

| ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE | CONVENTIONAL FRAME | NEW FRAMES |
|--|---|---|
| Energy Use & Global Warming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A threat to human health and ecosystems, present and future | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean Energy/New Economy: climate and energy policy is about human rights, jobs, security, trade, and economics One planet: nuclear and climate policy can't work without global community Justice: climate policy must remedy the huge expropriation of natural resources and ecosystems by wealthy countries The sky and nature's bounty belong to all: most coal and nuclear reserves are on aboriginal lands in China, the U.S., and Russia. Who owns the right to change our climate? Addiction: fossil-fuel use is a symptom of addiction to unhealthy production and consumption |

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| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Toxics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollutants should be regulated one at a time • Risk assessment governs the process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better safe than sorry: follow the precautionary principle • Polluter responsibility: shift the burden of proof • Creation is sacred |
| Land Use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote living patterns that use less resources • Preserve green spaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living together: regional inequity and segregation drive land use policy • Ownership for all: exclusion from land ownership and access to parks is immoral |
| Ecosystems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect species diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacred creation: treat all living beings with respect and consideration • One world: Humans are integral to ecosystems |
| Clean Technology, Renewable Energy, and Energy Efficiency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulate Technology • Mandate higher performance • Develop green power | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart, fair, and clean: policies that genuinely benefit workers, low-income communities, and nature • Raise all boats: efficiency gains must serve equity gains • A better system: plans for new energy technologies must include life-cycle analyses |
| Consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The crisis is over-consumption • Recycle | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bounty: the crisis in material consumption has spiritual roots • Producing value: challenging the economics of production |
| Environmental Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect children's health • Find causal links between pollution and disease | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honest care: there are tight links between polluters and the health care industry. Both subsidize health advocacy organizations • Deep health: modern medicine is about fixing symptoms, not causes |
| Conservation Finance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More nature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open access: more nature for all |

Sources: *The Earth Charter, Principles of Environmental Justice, Principles of Climate Justice, Tokyo Declaration, Bruntland Commission.*

Successful movements fight big fights. They call for community and they build momentum from small victories. In short, they have a strategy for winning people's hearts and moving their values. Transformational politics also means new types of action designed to win the big fights.

ACTION 1: THE 15% SOLUTION

I'm tryin to make a dollar out of fifteen cents

It's hard to be legit and still pay tha rent —TUPAC SHAKUR, 1993

The Bush Administration's refusal to act on climate change was the main reason why "The Death of Environmentalism" was written. The authors call for a radical revision of the movement's goals and a more expansive definition of winning, just as we do. But the problem goes beyond needing a clearer vision. U.S. energy industries have already prepared themselves for a tactical fight. Efforts to control greenhouse gas emissions at the state level, for example, are hamstrung by industry advocacy for coal and nuclear energy. Michael Noble, the executive director of Minnesotans for an Energy Efficient Economy, is proud of the \$100 million a year in wind energy investment slated for his region in coming years. But he wonders what he will tell his children about the \$2 billion a year that will be invested in the same region in coal-fired power plants.

Global warming is an economic, trade, human rights, security, and jobs issue. When you're in the thick of it, lobbying for changes in climate policy often feels like leading Napoleon's troops into Russia. Environmentalists join only with other environmentalists to stop global warming, slow investment in coal, and fight the re-licensing of nuclear facilities that are now sold as "climate-friendly." What's more, we have to do all these things at the same time!

These efforts are not misguided. They just aren't enough. The environmental community must also invest deeply in outreach to other constituencies affected by these policies. We must get to know anti-deficit groups, community development organizations, labor unions, and trade associations for new industries. We must celebrate and join in common cause with those in evangelical communities who assert a scriptural basis for the sustainable and responsible stewardship of our earth. We must build a new macro-frame for a clean energy future. The goal is to shift the ideological and institutional playing field so that dirty energy industries are the ones playing catch-up.

This kind of change doesn't mean killing existing strategies. But it does mean making significant investments in visionary projects that can build new movements. Nonprofit groups in the U.S. spend over \$70 million a year to fight global warming. How much of that sum serves non-environmental groups and advocates for cross-cutting policy initiatives? Next to nothing.

Yet various fringe members of the environmental movement who work outside traditional borders are clearing the path to victory on climate change right now. We need more entrepreneurial funders making venture investments that can yield results in areas as disparate as toxic wastes and land use. As venture capitalist and environmentalist Bob Epstein has pointed out, companies in trouble need not change overnight. But they must take a substantial portion of their present activity and devote it to new approaches.

Mainstream environmental advocacy organizations and funders need to adopt a "15% solution." They need to overcome their own conservatism and invest in deep change. Over a fairly short time, a coordinated investment of 15% of that \$70 million in the best ideas for deep change—\$10.5 million a year—would boost our effectiveness immeasurably.

Right now, the sustainability and environmental justice movements cannot roll back the right wing's onslaught on civil society, the middle class, and the environment. But in these movements and a few others lie the seeds of the environmental movement's rebirth. We need to water those seeds and give them room to grow.

ACTION 2: LEADERSHIP WITHOUT BORDERS

And if you're wondering why I got kids so big

They weren't born from the body, they were born from the soul —QUEEN LATIFAH, 1989

Winning will also depend on growing new leadership. The new environmental leaders will not be policy wonks—at least not in public. They will speak to the broader range of problems Americans face. Ideas need a human face to break through commercial noise and political disillusionment. Winning movements must actively foster such leadership and then let it fly.

The U.S. needs to move quickly to solve mammoth problems like climate change and our dependence on non-renewable sources of energy. But even if we act with

breakneck speed, environmental leaders 50 years from now will be facing challenges on these very same issues. Ensuring that our children inherit a better world than we did means preparing them to lead their own struggles for a just and sustainable future.

The leaders of the new environmental movement are already working in groups like the Green Corps, the Environmental Leadership Program, and the Climate Justice Corps. They are also being nurtured by every activist who mentors interns and younger staff. Today, these programs often fall short in the same ways “The Death of Environmentalism” does. They fail to connect the dots between broad social movements and environmentalism. Younger leaders are starting to break across issue lines, however, and they are doing this out of more than just youthful enthusiasm. They are doing it to broaden their base of people and ideas, and to gain access to more resources. Every mainstream environmental leader should follow their lead.

ACTION 3: TRANSFORMATIVE ALLIANCES

*I'm talking to you, my many inspirations
When I say I can't, let you or self down
If I were of the highest cliff, on the highest riff
And you slipped down the side and clinched on to your life in my grip
I would never, ever let you down —J-IVY, 2004*

We agree with the authors of “The Death of Environmentalism,” Carl Pope, and many others on the third and most important ingredient for social change—transformative alliances. On its way up in the 1970s, environmentalism passed civil rights, women’s rights, and a number of other causes in trouble. The 1970s were marked by rancor among movements as attention strayed from human and environmental justice. In environmental boardrooms across the country to this day, directors still make program choices by asking, “If we stop to help another cause, what will happen to ours?”

Focusing on a well-defined mission is a mark of good nonprofit management. But the question before us in this political night is not so different than the one posed by the Good Samaritan on the road to Jericho or by Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis in 1968: “If I do not stop to help this cause, what will happen to it?” Remember the truth about the environmental movement’s ancestry. Other movements come from the same family we do. One of our central struggles has always been getting people to recognize inter-connectedness. Socially, economically, and environmentally, it’s time for us to start walking the talk.

Conclusion

You gotta understand man

[Elvis] was America's Baby Boom Che.

I oughta know man, I was in his army —JOHN TRUDELL, 1989

In its details, winning means having ideas that fight the big fights, raise the value of community, and build from small victories to dominant frames. Winning also means new actions, like investing at least 15% in deep change strategies, fostering new leadership that transcends boundaries, and building transformative alliances.

Writ large, the soul of environmentalism shares with the Civil Rights Movement and many others one central characteristic: empathy. Empathy is what makes us reach out when we see a wounded bird. It is what calls to us when a child suffers from poverty or asthma. It is how we know our children will miss the snow when the latitudes of climate change have passed us by.

Empathy is also the central component of every point in the short list of big solutions. It is a central component in moving our country away from destructive individualism and toward a regenerative idea of community. It is a big part of what winning means to progressives.

Finally, political empathy is an action, not an emotion. It is expressed in building coalitions, not in writing essays. It means seeking and speaking the truth, not denying one's troubled ancestry. Empathy is about whom you spend your days talking and walking with. It is how, in Martin Luther King's words, we reach the Mountaintop.

Postscript

And the gas leaks

And the oil spills

And sex sells everything

And sex kills ... —JONI MITCHELL, 1994

Civil Rights and environmentalism share a common lineage. This essay focuses on what we can learn from that particular confluence. Its central argument is that we only truly understand our political predicament when we look at it in new and more inclusive ways. Other essays can and should be written on the qualities environmentalism shares with other social movements whose strength seems to be fading. Two of these movements seem particularly salient right now.

The first concerns efforts to promote economic rights and opportunity, including organized labor and the anti-poverty movement. Long before pundits invented terms like “outsourcing,” the fight for workers was steeped in geopolitics. For nearly 100 years, conservatives tarred labor and anti-poverty advocates by calling them communists. Today communism is no longer a threat to the U.S. but we are still struggling to find a productive way to talk about the vast gaps in wealth and the often inhumane way we make people work. Environmental problems are commercial and geopolitical in nature, so we have much to learn by joining forces with labor and anti-poverty activists. Environmental solutions have to do with our relationship to material wealth, so we must also suggest alternative definitions of wealth in the future.

The second area of particular importance right now concerns efforts to promote sexual freedom, including the pro-choice and reproductive rights movement and the gay rights movement. As the iconic environmental scientist George Woodwell pointed out recently, environmentalism and a woman’s right to choose are inextricably linked—they are both human rights.

It is inconsistent to block a woman’s right to choose—or a gay person’s right to marry—while advocating free choice in the destruction of species or landscapes. How do conservatives do that, and how have our allies in those movements responded? How do we broaden our connections?

Environmentalism must connect with and be of service to a broader social movement. This one essay cannot plumb the depths of challenges and innovations

facing our colleagues in every arena, but we do suggest that our common issues be understood not just along the lines of race, but also of reproductive rights, sexuality, and class.

*Dime con quien andes, y te dire quien eres.*² —MEXICAN PROVERB.

² Translation: Tell me with whom you walk, and I'll tell you who you are.

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Redefining Progress is a public policy institute founded in 1994 to advance a new definition of progress and sustainability. Through coalition building, framing new agendas, and policy innovation, RP brings sustainable economic and environmental solutions to the political forefront. Redefining Progress works with local, state, national, and international advocacy groups, grassroots organizations, foundations, public officials, and industry leaders to generate innovative policies and tools that balance economic well-being, the environment, and social equity.

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