Adam Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day,* New York: Hill and Wang, 2013.

Preface

I've come to believe that the first Earth Day is the most famous little-known event in modern American history. Environmentalists and scholars long have recognized that Earth Day 1970 was critical in the rise of the environmental movement. Indeed, many people argue that Earth Day 1970 inspired a decade of far-reaching legislation to control air pollution, restore the health of rivers and lakes, ensure safe drinking water, regulate hazardous waste disposal, protect endangered species, and much more. Yet *The Genius of Earth Day* is the first in-depth study of the subject.

How is that possible?

Historians have assumed that the force of Earth Day 1970 essentially was symbolic: Millions of Americans demonstrated that they cared about the environment, and the unprecedented size of the demonstration convinced lawmakers to take the issue more seriously. That assumption makes most of the details of the story irrelevant. If all that mattered was the scale of the event, why look closely at how Earth Day was organized, or how it was celebrated across the country, or what people said in Earth Day speeches?

For years, I myself had little curiosity about Earth Day. I lectured about Earth Day, but I relied on a handful of short accounts of the event, and those accounts all derived from just a

few sources. Even after I decided to write about Earth Day, I did not expect to make new claims about why Earth Day mattered. I simply was excited by the narrative challenge of bringing a history-making event to life.

I soon discovered that the story of Earth Day was more complex and compelling than I'd thought. Even the phrase "Earth Day" turned out to be misleading. In many places, the event lasted a week, not just a day, and the extended celebrations had many names. In Birmingham, Alabama, Earth Day was part of Right to Live Week. Cleveland, Ohio, celebrated Crisis in the Environment Week. In some places, Earth Week didn't even include Earth Day: The events were in late March or early April.

The more I learned about Earth Day, the more improbable the story seemed. The basic facts still amaze me. In September 1969, Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin vowed to organize a nationwide environmental teach-in in spring 1970, and his call to action inspired thousands of events across the country. Roughly 1,500 colleges and 10,000 schools held teach-ins. Earth Day activities also took place in hundreds of churches and temples, in city parks, and in front of corporate and government buildings. The teach-ins collectively involved more people than the biggest civil-rights and antiwar demonstrations in the 1960s.

But the numbers do not begin to tell the story. The first Earth Day had a freshness and intensity that are difficult to imagine today. Because Earth Day 1970 was unprecedented, the organizers had to plan everything from scratch, and the effort often was life-changing. Tens of thousands of people spoke on Earth Day—and many had never spoken publicly about environmental issues before. The discussions at Earth Day teach-ins sometimes were soul-searching: Many participants truly were struggling to get to the roots of "the environmental crisis."

That freshness and intensity gave Earth Day 1970 tremendous power. Thousands of organizers and participants decided to devote their lives to the environmental cause. Earth Day built

a lasting eco-infrastructure: national and state lobbying organizations, environmental-studies programs, environmental beats at newspapers, eco sections in bookstores, community ecology centers.

The Genius of Earth Day ultimately is about the making of the first green generation.

The prologue describes a teach-in at the University of Michigan six weeks before Earth Day. The Michigan teach-in was the first sign that Earth Day would be a stunning success, and the prologue introduces the major themes of this book. Chapter 1 considers the prehistory of Earth Day. In the 1950s and 1960s, a variety of Americans became more concerned about environmental issues, but their efforts were fragmented until Earth Day. Chapter 2 is about the thousands of organizers who made Earth Day happen. Chapter 3 illustrates the variety of Earth Day events. Because Nelson allowed local organizers to make their own plans, no two events were the same, and the local adaptations ensured that Earth Day would be much more than a huge demonstration. Chapter 4 profiles seven Earth Day speakers to suggest the intellectual energy of the event. Chapter 5 analyzes the institutional legacies of Earth Day. The epilogue tells the stories of four people whose lives were changed by Earth Day.

I have not considered every aspect of the Earth Day story. When I began my research, I planned to include a chapter about how African-Americans, union members, conservative intellectuals, and corporate executives reacted to Earth Day. I also planned to write about media coverage. But I eventually decided that those topics did not fit. They shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the environmental movement, but they did not help to explain why Earth Day was a transformative event, and that is my focus.

Though I did not try to be comprehensive, this book took much longer to write than I expected, but I never tired of the subject. I found the story of Earth Day energizing. Inspiring, really. I hope you will too.

● Prologue: "Give Earth a Chance"

The first sign that Earth Day would be a history-making event came on March 11, 1970, in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Nearly 14,000 people were at the University of Michigan's basketball arena for the kickoff of a teach-in on the environment. The kickoff began with the cast of the musical *Hair* singing "Let the Sunshine In." The governor of Michigan spoke briefly, and then the president of the university. Then biologist Barry Commoner stepped to the podium to give the keynote.[1]

Commoner was used to speaking in public—he was a professor and a well-traveled activist—but he was momentarily awed. Fourteen thousand people! He had never spoken to so large a crowd before. No environmentalist had.

Six weeks earlier, Commoner had appeared on the cover of *Time*. "The Paul Revere of ecology," the magazine called him. But Commoner knew that the huge turnout was not just a sign of his new renown. The environment had become a hot issue, and students everywhere were gearing up for Earth Day.[2]

"I am deeply honored to appear before what must surely be the world's largest seminar on ecology," Commoner began. "What a wonderful thing you have done! At a time when the whole country has begun to ask why, in the wealthiest, most scientifically advanced nation in the history of man, the heavens

reek, the waters below are foul, children die in infancy, and we and the world which is our home are threatened with nuclear annihilation—you have shown us how to take off our blindfolds, pull out our earplugs and shout 'We're not gonna take it!' "[3]

Commoner was especially moved by the young teach-in organizers. They were leading "the nation's new fight for survival," he argued. Their resolve gave Commoner heart.

Commoner was right to be impressed by the organizational effort. The teach-in committee at first was only six graduate students in the School of Natural Resources. The organizers took the name ENACT—Environmental Action for Survival—and decided on a teach-in slogan: "Give Earth a Chance." In October 1969, the first teach-in planning meeting drew 350 people, and more than 1,000 eventually helped to make the teach-in happen. The planning was not all peace and love. The campus black-power organization threatened a boycott because the organizers were not devoting enough attention to the problems of the ghetto, while members of Students for a Democratic Society mocked the "not-so-liberal liberalism" of the featured speakers. But the event blossomed. The organizers raised $50,000. The teach-in became four days, with more than 125 activities.[4]

To raise environmental consciousness in the community, housewives hosted teas and businessmen sponsored lunches. High-school students urged consumers at Ann Arbor grocery stores to boycott pesticides. On campus, a guerrilla theater troupe put a 1959 Ford sedan on trial for crimes against the environment. At a "scream-out," participants debated whether the environment would deflect attention from the Vietnam War, the civil-rights struggle, and the movement for woman's liberation. One workshop provided a Republican take on the environmental crisis, while another offered a socialist perspective. Technical sessions focused on everything from the future of the Great Lakes to the role of engineers in preventing pollution. A U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee on conservation and

natural resources held a hearing at the teach-in. The headliners included the most prominent environmentalists in the U.S. Senate, Gaylord Nelson and Edmund Muskie; Friends of the Earth director David Brower; consumer activist Ralph Nader; United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther; entertainers Arthur Godfrey and Eddie Albert; several renowned scientists; the chief executives of Dow Chemical and Consolidated Edison; environmental economist Kenneth Boulding; radical ecophilosopher Murray Bookchin; environmental lawyer Victor Yannacone; and Richard Hatcher, one of the nation's first black mayors. The attendance topped 50,000.[5]

Because the Michigan teach-in offered a preview of Earth Day, the week's activities received national attention. A television crew even came from Japan. ABC and CBS reported on the event on the nightly news. The teach-in also was the subject of a documentary shown on network television just before Earth Day. *Business Week*, *Science*, and *The Nation* ran feature stories, and *Saturday Review* published Commoner's reflections on the teach-in. Syndicated columnist Joseph Kraft reported on the teach-in. So did reporters for big-city newspapers from across the country. *The New York Times* positively gushed about the event, calling it "one of the most extraordinary 'happenings' ever to hit the great American heartland: Four solid days of soul-searching, by thousands of people, young and old, about ecological exigencies confronting the human race."[6]

The energy of the teach-in continued to flow through the community after March 1970. To provide a focal point for local activism, ENACT members helped to found the Ann Arbor Ecology Center. (ENACT veterans later established an ecology center in Washington, D.C., as well.) The School of Natural Resources added master's degrees in environmental advocacy and environmental communication. The school also hired two new faculty members; one became a leader in the environmental-justice movement. The teach-in organizers at the high school

formed an environmental-action club. In the early 1970s, club members lobbied the state legislature for a ban on DDT, a bottle bill, and a measure to protect wild and scenic rivers. The outdoor writer for *The Ann Arbor News* began a weekly "Eco-Action" column. Two ENACT organizers put together a collection of essays by teach-in contributors: *Recycle This Book!*[7]

Years later, the four principal organizers of the teach-in still had vivid memories of the event. All four—co-chairs Doug Scott and David Allan, finance director Art Hanson, and publicity director John Turner—were changed by the experience. Though they already were interested in environmental issues, the teach-in shaped their careers in significant ways.

John Turner, the publicity director, was most affected. He grew up in a conservative ranching family in Wyoming, and he was working toward a Ph.D. in wildlife ecology. He might have gone back to the ranch or become a professor. Instead, the teach-in convinced Turner to enter politics. "I was challenged daily," he recalled. "I was targeted as a supporter of Nixon, a lackey, a Republican." The attacks shook him but ultimately gave him new resolve. He became convinced of the need for leaders who were levelheaded and practical, not bomb throwers. He ran successfully for the Wyoming legislature. In nineteen years as a state representative and senator, he was a forceful advocate for environmental protection. He then served as director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under George H. W. Bush, president of the Conservation Foundation in the Clinton years, and assistant secretary of state for global environmental issues under George W. Bush.[8]

The legacies were subtler for Scott, Allan, and Hanson. Scott felt a deeper determination to pursue a career in environmental politics. He had written a master's thesis on the legislative history of the Wilderness Act of 1964, he had worked for a summer as a lobbyist for the Wilderness Society, and he devoted his life to the cause: He now is a grassroots organizer for the Cam-

paign for America's Wilderness. Allan became a professor of stream ecology. The teach-in pushed him to do more policy-oriented research, not just the straight science he did in graduate school. Hanson also earned a Ph.D. in science, but he became an academic entrepreneur: He ultimately directed an international institute on sustainable development. "For me, the most important legacy was a sense of empowerment," Hanson recalled. "The teach-in gave me the sense that if you really wanted to do something, you could. Just go ahead and do it."[9]

1 ● The Prehistory of Earth Day

Earth Day was not the work of a well-established movement. Indeed, commentators did not begin to speak about "the environmental movement" until the run-up to Earth Day. Though many Americans had sought to address environmental issues before 1970, their efforts were fragmented. Few organizations worked on both rural and urban problems. The old conservation groups focused on wildlife and wilderness. The fight against air pollution largely was led by single-issue organizations, from Stamp Out Smog in Los Angeles to Citizens for Clean Air in New York. The only "environmental" organization in the late 1960s—the Environmental Defense Fund—essentially was a handful of lawyers and scientists who pursued high-profile lawsuits. The Natural Resources Defense Council was a month old on Earth Day.[1]

Because the environmental movement still was inchoate in the 1960s, Earth Day had no obvious precursors. That made Earth Day quite different from the biggest civil-rights and antiwar demonstrations of the era. The 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was the culmination of nine years of activism: the Montgomery bus boycott, the Greensboro sit-ins, the arrest of Martin Luther King Jr. in Birmingham. The 1969 Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam came after four years of protests, from the antiwar teach-ins of 1965 to the 1967 march on the Pentagon.

The lack of antecedents reveals much about the significance of Earth Day. Earth Day did not just mobilize activists to demonstrate the growing power of their cause. In several ways, Earth Day helped to create the movement. Earth Day gave environmental activism a name. Earth Day also convinced many Americans that pollution, sprawl, nuclear fallout, pesticide use, wilderness preservation, waste disposal, and population growth were not separate issues: All were facets of a far-reaching "environmental crisis." Perhaps most important, Earth Day brought together activists who had worked separately before.

The new movement drew support from a variety of people, but members of five groups were critical. In the course of the 1950s and 1960s, many liberal Democrats, scientists, middle-class women, young critics of American institutions, and conservationists became more concerned about environmental issues. Though the activists in those groups did not become a concerted force until Earth Day brought them together, they made Earth Day possible.[2]

Liberals

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

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

The most influential advocates of the new liberalism were the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and the economist John Kenneth Galbraith. The two Harvard professors were unusually well positioned to shape political debate. Both wrote speeches for Stevenson in 1952 and 1956, and both were founders of Americans for Democratic Action. Both also served on the domestic policy committee of the national Democratic party. In the late 1950s, both men became advisers to John F. Kennedy, and their influence in Democratic politics continued into the 1960s.[3]

For Schlesinger and Galbraith, a liberal agenda for the 1960s followed from two related ideas about the nation's postwar prosperity, and both ideas provided a powerful new justification for expanding the role of government in protecting the environment. First, liberals needed to move beyond the basic goals of the New Deal. In an age of abundance, government could and should do more than ensure that Americans enjoyed a minimum of material comfort. Schlesinger put the point succinctly: "Instead of the quantitative liberalism of the 1930s, rightly dedicated to the struggle to secure the economic basis of life, we need now a 'qualitative liberalism' dedicated to bettering the quality of people's lives and opportunities." Second, liberals needed to address what Galbraith called "the problem of social balance." Though the postwar economic boom enabled people to buy more and more consumer products, the private sector could not satisfy the increasing demand for a number of vital community services. Accordingly, the challenge for liberals was to offer a compelling vision of the public interest.[4]

Though neither Schlesinger nor Galbraith was a noted conservationist, both pointed to environmental problems to support their argument for a new liberalism. The state of the environment clearly affected the quality of life. If the nation's

streams were polluted, then fewer people could enjoy the pleasures of fishing or boating. The quality of the environment also was a classic example of a public good, since consumers could not simply buy fresh air, clean water, or sprawl-free countrysides.

Schlesinger addressed the issue first. "Our gross national product rises; our shops overflow with gadgets and gimmicks; consumer goods of ever-increasing ingenuity and luxuriance pour out of our ears," he wrote in a 1956 essay on the future of liberalism. "But our schools become more crowded and dilapidated, our teachers more weary and underpaid, our playgrounds more crowded, our cities dirtier, our roads more teeming and filthy, our national parks more unkempt, our law enforcement more overworked and inadequate."[5]

In *The Affluent Society*—a bestseller in 1958—Galbraith used more evocative language. "The family which takes its mauve and cerise, air-conditioned, power-steered, and power-braked automobile out for a tour passes through cities that are badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted buildings, billboards, and posts for wires that should long since have been put underground," he wrote. "They pass into a countryside that has been rendered largely invisible by commercial art . . . They picnic on exquisitely packaged food from a portable icebox by a polluted stream and go on to spend the night at a park which is a menace to public health and morals. Just before dozing off on an air mattress, beneath a nylon tent, amid the stench of decaying refuse, they may reflect vaguely on the curious unevenness of their blessings. Is this, indeed, the American genius?" Those lines would become the most famous in the book.[6]

The fame of the passage was not due simply to Galbraith's acerbic style. In a few nauseating images, Galbraith had caught a growing concern about the deterioration of the nation's environment. By the time *The Affluent Society* appeared, many Americans no longer could take for granted the healthfulness of their milk, because radioactive fallout from nuclear testing had contami-

nated dairy pastures. Across the country, people had begun campaigns to save "open space" from the sprawl of suburbia. The smog over California's exploding cities had become a symbol of the perils of progress, and federal health officials had organized a national conference on the hazards of air pollution. Thousands of homeowners in new subdivisions had watched in shock as detergent foam came out of their kitchen faucets. As Galbraith suggested, countless families also had come face-to-face with pollution while trying to enjoy new opportunities for outdoor recreation.[7]

Sputnik also gave bite to Galbraith's words. Even before the Soviet satellite orbited the earth in 1957, a handful of social critics had begun to question the fruits of abundance, and the stunning Soviet success turned those lonely voices into a resounding chorus of self-doubt. Had the United States become too comfortable? The question helped to provoke a spirited end-of-the-decade debate about the nation's mission. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund commissioned a series of studies of "the problems and opportunities confronting American democracy," and the studies appeared with great fanfare under the title *Prospect for America*. In 1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed a presidential commission on national goals. The editors of *Life* and *The New York Times* asked Americans to reflect on "the national purpose."[8]

Much of the debate focused on the Schlesinger/Galbraith argument about the imbalance between private wealth and public poverty. In a series of articles early in 1960, *The New York Times* reported that many officials in Washington had concluded that "the most important continuing issue of American policy and politics over the next decade will be the issue of public spending—what share of America's total resources should be devoted to public as distinct from private purposes." Though Americans enjoyed more consumer goods than any people in the history of the world, the newspaper summarized the liberal side of the

argument, that the public sector of society was impoverished: "Education is underfinanced. Streams are polluted. There remains a shortage of hospital beds. Slums proliferate, and there is a gap in middle-income housing. We could use more and better parks, streets, detention facilities, water supply. The very quality of American life is suffering from these lacks—much more than from any lack of purely private goods and services."[9]

As *The New York Times* summary suggests, the problem of pollution was cited again and again by the advocates of a more expansive public sphere. The problem of suburban sprawl also figured often in "the great debate." In the *Life* series on the national purpose, two of the ten contributors wrote about the deteriorating environment. The political scientist Clinton Rossiter argued that the private sector was not equipped to deal with "the blight of our cities, the shortage of water and power, the disappearance of open space, the inadequacy of education, the need for recreational facilities, the high incidence of crime and delinquency, the crowding of the roads, the decay of the railroads, the ugliness of the sullied landscape, the pollution of the very air we breathe." Adlai Stevenson agreed. Though the nation's manufacturers were providing cars and refrigerators in abundance, the booming private economy could not protect against "the sprawl of subdivisions which is gradually depriving us of either civilized urban living or uncluttered rural space. It does not guarantee America's children the teachers or the schools which should be their birthright. It does nothing to end the shame of racial discrimination. It does not counter the exorbitant cost of health, nor conserve the nation's precious reserves of land and water and wilderness. The contrast between private opulence and public squalor on most of our panorama is now too obvious to be denied."[10]

In the report of the presidential commission on national goals, the urbanist and housing advocate Catherine Bauer Wurster gave considerable attention to the problems of "vanish-

ing open space and spreading pollution." Wurster also offered a shrewd psychological explanation for the reluctance of taxpayers to accept a rise in community spending. Because the average citizen often had no chance to participate directly in the large-scale decisions that shaped the public environment, she argued, the public world was less satisfying than the private sphere. "Since he has more sense of personal power and choice in the consumer goods market, he tends to spend more money on . . . automobiles than on public services, and is likely to vote down higher taxes even though a park, or less smog, might give him more personal pleasure than a second TV set."[11]

The bestselling social critic Vance Packard made similar arguments about pollution, sprawl, and national purpose in *The Waste Makers*. Packard already had questioned the consumerism of the 1950s in *The Hidden Persuaders* and *The Status Seekers*, and *The Waste Makers* extended the critique. In addition to the insights of a few conservationists, Packard drew on the arguments of both Schlesinger and Galbraith. As the nation entered a new decade, Packard wrote, the great unmet challenges all involved the provision of public goods. "A person can't go down to the store and order a new park," he explained. "A park requires unified effort, and that gets you into voting and public spending and maybe soak-the-rich taxes." But the effort was essential. The consumption of ever-greater quantities of "deodorants, hula hoops, juke boxes, padded bras, dual mufflers, horror comics, or electric rotisseries" could not ensure national greatness. Instead, Americans needed to improve the quality of the environment, to stop the spread of pollution and "the growing sleaziness, dirtiness, and chaos of the nation's great exploding metropolitan areas."[12]

Though the national-purpose debate was bipartisan—the conservative columnist Walter Lippmann wrote often about the need to give a higher priority to public goods—the Democrats seized the issue of the deteriorating quality of the environment. When *Life* asked both presidential candidates in 1960 to define

the national purpose, only John F. Kennedy mentioned environmental problems. "The good life falls short as an indicator of national purpose unless it goes hand in hand with the good society," Kennedy wrote. "Even in material terms, prosperity is not enough when there is no equal opportunity to share in it; when economic progress means overcrowded cities, abandoned farms, technological unemployment, polluted air and water, and littered parks and countrysides; when those too young to earn are denied their chance to learn; when those no longer earning live out their lives in lonely degradation."[13]

In the White House, Kennedy's top domestic priority was a growth-boosting tax cut. But he took a few important steps to address the issue of environmental quality. He supported a new federal program to assist local and state governments in acquiring open space, and he endorsed a measure to preserve wilderness. In 1962, he held a White House Conference on Conservation, the first since Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency. After the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Kennedy instructed his science advisers to report on the use of pesticides. He also appointed an activist secretary of the interior, Stewart Udall, who energetically promoted the cause of environmental protection.[14]

Like Kennedy, Udall borrowed from Schlesinger and Galbraith. He argued again and again that "the new conservation" was a vital effort to improve "the quality of life." He also argued that the nation's deteriorating environment was a sign of "the disorder of our postwar priorities." In *The Quiet Crisis*—a 1963 call to action—he began by pointing out the stark contrast between the economic and environmental trends of the postwar decades. "America today stands poised on a pinnacle of wealth and power," he wrote, "yet we live in a land of vanishing beauty, of increasing ugliness, of shrinking open space, and of an overall environment that is diminished daily by pollution and noise and blight."[15]

The growing Democratic interest in the environment went

beyond the Kennedy administration. By 1961, the California chapter of Americans for Democratic Action had deemphasized the old economic issues of unemployment and workmen's compensation; instead, the group was focusing on "quality of life" issues, including the preservation of open space and the planning of metropolitan growth. In the early 1960s, a new breed of policy entrepreneurs in Congress sought to establish national reputations by championing consumer and environmental legislation, and Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine soon earned the nickname "Mr. Pollution Control."[16]

After Kennedy's assassination, Lyndon B. Johnson resolved to finish the unfinished environmental business of the Kennedy administration. But he hoped to do more. Johnson had a more personal stake in the issue than Kennedy. His wife had a keen interest in nature. In the field of conservation—as in so many areas of policy—Johnson sought to surpass the achievements of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Like his mentor, Johnson wanted to go down in history as a great conservation president.[17]

The decision to give a higher priority to environmental protection made perfect sense to Johnson's domestic advisers. Early in Johnson's presidency, they proposed "the Great Society" as the overarching theme that would give historic weight to the 1964 campaign, and the roots of their vision lay in the Schlesinger/Galbraith call for a qualitative liberalism. The historian Eric Goldman and the speechwriter Richard Goodwin especially found inspiration in the arguments of the late 1950s about the challenge of abundance.[18]

As the president's house intellectual, Goldman asked Galbraith to serve as "the quality of American life" adviser to the Johnson brain trust. He had written admiringly of Galbraith's contribution to the debate over national purpose in 1960, and he spoke several times in the next few years about the proper goals of a "post-affluent" society. "Material concerns were still pressing—particularly the disgraceful and dangerous economic

position of the Negro—but the nation had reached a general affluence which permitted it to give attention not only to the quantity but to the quality of American living," he argued in 1964. The next generation of Americans at last could escape the burdens of the "dull society," the "overmaterial society," and the "ugly society."[19]

Goodwin recognized that a part of the Johnson agenda needed to do what the New Deal had not done to guarantee a modicum of comfort and security for all Americans. But he concluded that the great opportunity for going beyond the old liberalism lay in acknowledging "that private income, no matter how widely distributed, was only a foundation; that private affluence, no matter how widely distributed, could not remedy many of the public conditions that diminished the possibilities of American life." For Goodwin, that meant tackling the issues of pollution, suburban sprawl, and environmental health.[20]

In a speech written by Goodwin, President Johnson spoke to those issues in May 1964. The speech was the president's first attempt to define the Great Society, and he addressed only a few points. The Great Society required the abolition of poverty and racial injustice, he argued, "but that is just the beginning." The Great Society would spark the imagination, offer stimulating forms of leisure, and provide the satisfactions of true community. "It is a place where man can renew contact with nature," the president continued. "It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods." Perhaps because the occasion for the speech was a college graduation, the president spoke passionately about the need to ensure that "every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and enlarge his talents." But the rest of the speech focused on the problems of the metropolis and the countryside. The president decried the social and environmental costs of suburban growth, including the loss of open space. He also called for action to protect the natural splendor of the nation. "We have

always prided ourselves on being not only America the strong and America the free, but America the beautiful," he explained. "Today that beauty is in danger. The water we drink, the food we eat, the very air that we breathe, are threatened with pollution. Our parks are overcrowded, our seashores overburdened. Green fields and dense forests are disappearing."[21]

The speech was not merely talk. Johnson made the environment a major focus of the Great Society. Though scholars have paid much more attention to the civil-rights acts, the War on Poverty, and the expansion of health and education programs, Johnson himself considered the environmental agenda no less important. As historian Robert Dallek concludes, "he had no real priority" among the Great Society initiatives—"he wanted them all." Johnson aggressively used the power of the presidency to draw public attention to environmental problems. He convened a White House Conference on Natural Beauty, and he asked the President's Science Advisory Committee to report on ways to restore the quality of the environment. He devoted several major addresses to his environmental proposals. The result was a torrent of legislation: Johnson signed almost 300 conservation and beautification measures. The most important bills addressed the problems of air and water pollution, solid-waste disposal, wilderness preservation, and endangered species. The Johnson initiatives also created national lakeshores and seashores, increased the number of national parks, and provided funds to state governments for land and water conservation.[22]

To be sure, the legislation of the mid-1960s was not enough to solve the most serious environmental problems. In the fight against pollution, the truly landmark acts did not come until the early 1970s. But the achievements of the Great Society were critical in the evolution of the environmental movement. Before the 1960s, the problem of pollution was not a principal concern of the federal government. In 1960—just before leaving office—President Eisenhower vetoed a clean-water act with a blunt

declaration that water pollution was "a uniquely local blight." John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson both rejected that view, and the legislation of the mid-1960s firmly established the principle of federal responsibility for the quality of the nation's air and water. That responsibility was institutionalized in two new agencies with the ability to research and publicize environmental problems. The Federal Water Pollution Control Administration and the National Air Pollution Control Administration both helped to strengthen the demand for tougher legislation to protect the environment. The new bureaucracies were agenda setters.[23]

Scientists

When *Time* published a special issue on the environment before Earth Day, the magazine put biologist Barry Commoner on the cover. The magazine could have chosen a number of people to symbolize the environmental movement. The decision to use Commoner acknowledged the critical role of scientists in the surge of concern about environmental degradation. Though members of many professions contributed to the new movement, scientists were especially active.[24]

For some scientists, the cause largely was pedagogical. They introduced environmental issues to the classroom, and their courses inspired a generation of eco-activists. Other scientists put environmental issues on the public agenda by speaking at community meetings, testifying at hearings, writing essays for popular periodicals, and organizing groups to seek action. A few scientists became famous author/activists. Paul Ehrlich—author of *The Population Bomb* and founder of Zero Population Growth—even became a frequent guest on *The Tonight Show.*[25]

The environmental activism of scientists was both surprising and predictable. Unlike landscape architects or civil engineers or

doctors, scientists had no commitment to the ideal of service. Just the opposite: They prided themselves on their detachment. As *The New York Times* argued in a profile of Ehrlich, "scientists as a group have long disdained direct political action and propagandizing, feeling it compromised their objectivity." Yet almost every environmental problem had a scientific component. Once scientists decided to speak publicly, they often addressed what many called "the environmental crisis," not just one or two issues.[26]

Commoner did more than anyone to rally scientists to the cause. He argued repeatedly that scientists had a duty to provide citizens with the scientific knowledge needed to make informed decisions about environmental issues. He helped to establish influential institutions dedicated to the public-information mission. His 1966 book *Science and Survival* became a classic—a call for "a new conservation movement" that would focus on preserving "life itself," not just forests or soils or places of sublime beauty.[27]

Commoner intended to be an activist long before the environment became an issue. As a graduate student in the 1930s, he was active in the American Association of Scientific Workers, a leftist group keen to ensure that science served the public good. That organization focused on social justice, not the environment. But Commoner began to be concerned after World War II about the unintended environmental consequences of technological development. The fallout issue drove the danger home. The testing of atomic weapons in the deserts of the Southwest caused radioactive rain to fall over a vast region. Because radiation settled on dairy pastures, milk became contaminated. Yet the tests continued without a thorough understanding of the environmental consequences—and with little discussion of the wisdom of aboveground testing. To Commoner, that was appalling.[28]

At first, Commoner pressed the American Association for

the Advancement of Science to act. In 1956 and again in 1960, he chaired AAAS committees that called for scientists to take part in public debate about the potentially destructive effects of science. Both committees argued that the vastly greater control over nature afforded by modern science brought unprecedented risks as well as wondrous opportunities. "In some situations our enhanced ability to control nature has gone awry and threatens serious trouble," the 1956 committee concluded. To ensure that science served society, scientists no longer could remain mute. They had to concern themselves with "social action." The 1960 committee recommended that the AAAS make public information a priority.[29]

The AAAS did not rise to the challenge, but Commoner pressed on. In 1958, he joined a group of St. Louis women to form a grassroots organization to draw attention to fallout. The Greater St. Louis Citizens' Committee on Nuclear Information soon earned a national reputation for effective activism. In addition to organizing local events, the committee invited parents to send baby teeth to St. Louis to be tested for radioactivity, and the response was overwhelming. The committee also published a newsletter, *Nuclear Information*, that evolved into the first magazine devoted solely to environmental issues: *Environment*.[30]

With several veterans of the AAAS committees, Commoner formed a national organization, the Scientists' Institute for Public Information, in 1963. "Scientists today," he explained, "are the first to live with the knowledge that our work, our ideas, and our daily activities impinge with a frightening immediacy on national politics, on international conflicts, on the planet's fate as a human habitation." Affiliate organizations soon formed in several cities, and observers began to speak about a public-information "movement" among scientists.[31]

The new movement helped to make activists of many graduate students. At Rockefeller University in New York, chemist Glenn Paulson heard about the local committee from several

professors, and he soon was devoting much of his time to public science. Though his dissertation was about pesticides, he became an expert on several other environmental issues, from air pollution to nuclear power. In the late 1960s, he talked to PTA groups, testified at City Hall, and spoke with journalists. He coauthored a well-publicized report on the carbon monoxide hazard of a proposed Manhattan expressway. He led a campaign to reduce lead poisoning among city children. He also worked with the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union to publicize both occupational and environmental threats to health. In 1970, he helped to organize Earth Day events.[32]

Though a few scientists had no hesitation about speaking publicly, many only reluctantly became activists. Some were goaded to action by the fallout issue. Many more began to question the ideal of detachment after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962.

With a clarity no one had managed before, Carson warned that the human power to alter nature had become profoundly dangerous:

> During the past quarter century this power has not only increased to one of disturbing magnitude but it has changed in character. The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible. In this now universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little-recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world—the very nature of its life. Strontium 90, released through nuclear explosions into the air, lodges in soil, enters into the grass or corn or wheat grown there, and in time takes up its abode in the bones of a human being, to remain until his

> death. Similarly, chemicals sprayed on croplands or forests or gardens lie long in the soil, entering into living organisms, passing from one to another in a chain of poisoning and death. Or they pass mysteriously by underground streams until they emerge and, through the alchemy of air and sunlight, combine into new forms that kill vegetation, sicken cattle, and work unknown harm on those who drink from once pure wells. As Albert Schweitzer once said, "Man can hardly even recognize the devils of his own creation."

Silent Spring became both a bestseller and a subject of intense controversy.[33]

For life scientists, the debate over Carson's work was both technical and moral. Was she right? If she was, what responsibility did biologists have to help avoid the threats she made so vivid?

Silent Spring was especially troubling to members of the Ecological Society of America. Though the society was established in 1915, ecology still was a young discipline. The first celebrated textbook in the field only appeared in 1953, and the first academic departments of ecology were established in the mid-1950s. What kind of enterprise was ecology going to be? Carson's book made a powerful case that citizens needed to understand ecology, but would ecologists assume roles as educators of the public? In 1963, the ESA created a public affairs committee. The society's ecology study committee—charged with assessing the future of the discipline—also made "public welfare and policy" a major focus of its 1965 report.[34]

"The question of Society participation in public affairs has been a contentious issue for years," the study committee wrote. "There are members of the Society who still doubt the wisdom or necessity of becoming involved in controversial issues, but there are clearly areas of public interest which ecologists can no longer avoid, either as individuals or as a Society." The human

impact on ecosystems had increased tremendously, and the public needed to understand that impact. "Ecologists have a definite obligation to make their views known when they can provide information which might avert environmental disaster," the committee argued. "While members of the Society have testified as individuals, ecologists have never collectively brought their influence to bear on the range of environmental problems that are properly within their area of competence. It is the feeling of the Ecology Study Committee that they should and must . . . Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* created a tide of opinion which will never again allow professional ecologists to remain comfortably aloof from public responsibility."[35]

The committee acknowledged that spelling out the details of that responsibility would not be easy. The tax code barred lobbying by tax-exempt nonprofit organizations, so the society could only offer counsel, not organize campaigns to pass legislation. On some important issues, the society could not speak with one voice. Though most academic ecologists were concerned that pesticides might reduce biological diversity, the committee noted, many applied ecologists did not share that concern. ESA members also might disagree about the limits of ecological expertise. The profit motive had become a driving force in many ecosystems, the committee argued, but the ESA might not be able or willing to offer an ecological assessment of capitalism. Still, the committee concluded, the society needed "to furnish the best possible data and to contribute the most responsible, scientific judgment that is possible" on relevant issues of public import.[36]

The debate about the social obligation of ecologists went beyond the in-house publications of the ESA. In 1964, for example, the journal *BioScience* devoted a special issue to the future of ecology, and the issue editors made clear that they were prompted by concern about the environmental impact of modern technologies. For the first time, they argued, we faced the possibility

that we could contaminate the environment "beyond its capacity to support life." They cited the hazards of fallout and DDT, and they illustrated the issue with a series of photographs that collectively formed an essay on environmental degradation. Almost all of the contributors called for ecologists to become more involved in public life. But they offered different assessments of what specifically ecologists needed to do. Eugene Odum made a boosterish argument that ecology should be a basic tool of ecosystem "management." Paul Sears, in contrast, argued that ecology was "a subversive science," a phrase that became a rallying cry for many ecologists later in the decade. "By its very nature, ecology offers a continuing critique of man's operations within the ecosystem," Sears wrote. As he understood the field, ecology cast doubt on "the current glib emphasis on economic 'growth' as the solution of all ills." The editors did not try to resolve the disagreements. But they argued that ecologists had "a responsibility, a challenge, an obligation to revised and/or extended thinking." By 1970, many ecologists had accepted that argument.[37]

Paul Ehrlich ultimately became the most famous activist to draw inspiration from *Silent Spring*. He began to worry about pesticides long before Carson's work appeared: As a teenager, he feared that pesticides were killing butterflies, his great passion. When he was a graduate student in the late 1950s, he joined the Chicago Society for Exterminating Exterminators, a group formed to protest the U.S. Department of Agriculture's campaign to eradicate the fire ant. But he did not speak publicly about the environment until 1965. By then he had become a tenured professor at Stanford. He also had come to see the pesticide issue as part of a broader challenge. Humans had become vastly more adept at manipulating the environment, and that ability had led to vastly greater human numbers. Yet meeting the needs and wants of an exploding population—more food, more power, more water, more living space—threatened environmental catastrophe.[38]

The ever-increasing scale of human endeavor imposed new burdens on scientists, Ehrlich concluded. Scientific research no longer was academic. Scientists needed to "consider the consequences of their activities." How would their results be used? But the responsibility of scientists went beyond their own work. "We *must* come out of our ivory towers and take an active part in the political life of our society," Ehrlich argued. "Following Rachel Carson's lead we must fight abuses wherever they occur."[39]

Once freed from the shackles of scientific dispassion, Ehrlich quickly developed a prophetic voice. His talks in San Francisco attracted raves. After hearing Ehrlich speak, Sierra Club executive director David Brower invited him to write a short book about the population issue. Ehrlich took just three feverish weeks to produce *The Population Bomb*, which appeared as a paperback original in May 1968. By Earth Day, Ehrlich's tract had sold almost a million copies.[40]

The tone of the book was unlike anything Ehrlich had written before. If we failed to meet the challenge of exploding population, he wrote, "mankind will breed itself into oblivion." Hundreds of millions of people would starve. The quality of life of the survivors would be reduced drastically, because population growth was eroding the world's most fertile soils, poisoning the water and the air, destroying the habitats of countless species, and even changing the climate. Because the trends all pointed toward self-destruction, every nation needed to control population—by voluntary means if possible, but otherwise by compulsion. People also needed to act immediately "to reverse the deterioration of the environment before population pressure permanently ruins our planet." No task was more urgent. "Somehow we've got to change from a growth-oriented, exploitative system to one focused on stability and conservation," Ehrlich concluded. "Our entire system of orienting to nature must undergo a revolution."[41]

Critics called Ehrlich an alarmist, and Ehrlich did not

shrink from the charge. "I *am* an alarmist," he told *Playboy*, "because I'm very goddamned alarmed. I believe we're facing the *brink* because of population pressures." Though some scientists were appalled by Ehrlich's "unscientific" rhetoric, many others were inspired. By the summer of 1969, a year after *The Population Bomb* was published, journalists were reporting on "the new Jeremiahs," the growing number of scientists who were warning of environmental catastrophe.[42]

Like grassroots activists, most scientists had to educate themselves about environmental issues. The AAAS contributed to that process of self-education. Though the association did not directly support activism, the AAAS encouraged members to learn more about the most pressing problems.

The association's 1966 meeting explored "How Man Has Changed His Planet." Because the annual meetings rarely had themes, the decision to focus on the environment underscored the importance of the subject. (The last AAAS conference with a theme was 1948, when the meeting celebrated the association's centennial.) "The Historic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" was the subject of one keynote address. In a second keynote, insurance executive Thomas Malone called for scientists to take the lead in warning the nation's leaders about the possible consequences of global climate change. "The point is that there is still time for reflective thought, for setting objectives, for weighing alternative courses of action—in short, to act responsibly," he concluded. One plenary interdisciplinary symposium focused on pollution, and a series of three sessions explored population growth. Hundreds of specialized sessions addressed environmental issues as well. Many conference participants argued that scientists had to become activists.[43]

In the late 1960s, the AAAS journal *Science* effectively became a continuing education course in environmental studies. A cross between a news magazine and a scholarly publication, *Science* had everything from editorials to research reports. Because the

environment was relevant to so many scientific disciplines, almost every issue addressed the subject in some form.

For some scientists, *Science* even became the road to Damascus. Geneticist Wes Jackson exemplifies the journal's influence. In 1967, keen to make his introductory biology class more relevant, he began to clip the journal's environmental material. The more he clipped, the more concerned he became about the future. He soon remade the bio course into an "ain't it awful?" survey of environmental problems. He pressed his college administration to make "survival studies" a focus of the curriculum. In 1970, he turned his course materials into a pioneering environmental reader: In the first edition of his *Man and the Environment*, roughly half of the readings came from *Science*. He also helped to organize the college's Earth Day events, and he began to speak prophetically about the environmental crisis. He was one of many.[44]

Middle-Class Women

The environmental activism of middle-class women did not begin in 1960. In the Progressive Era, women actively supported the conservation movement. They also lobbied for smokeless skies, clean water, pure food, and urban parks, and they often justified their efforts as "municipal housekeeping." Women continued to press for environmental protection in the decades after World War I. For several reasons, however, the number of women active in the environmental cause increased dramatically in the late 1950s and 1960s. In some cases, the activists worked through old conservation or women's organizations. More often, women formed ad hoc groups to stop pollution, save open spaces, or protect wildlife. The activism of women was crucial in making the environment an issue in communities across the nation.[45]

The League of Women Voters played a vital role in the battle against water pollution. One of the first popular books about the issue—Donald Carr's *Death of the Sweet Waters*—was dedicated to the league's members. The national leadership of the league made water a focus for education and activism in 1956, and many local chapters soon launched clean-water campaigns. To win support for a sewage-treatment plant in Idaho Falls, Idaho, league members put flyers about polluted drinking water in every restaurant menu in town, convinced milkmen to distribute leaflets to every milk box, painted slogans on sidewalks, and erected road signs to direct people to the Snake River sewage outlet: "It's a shocker!" By 1960, the league had become a major player in the debate about the federal responsibility for water quality, and league members continued to lobby for government action throughout the 1960s. Their effectiveness was especially evident at the end of the decade, when the league organized a coalition of almost forty labor, municipal, and conservation groups to wage the Citizens Crusade for Clean Water.[46]

Activist women often became identified with the rivers and lakes they sought to save. In the mid-1960s, Marion Stoddart of Massachusetts earned the epithet "Mother Nashua" after forming a group to save one of the nation's most polluted rivers: The Nashua River Clean-up Committee played a key role in the passage of the Massachusetts Clean Water Act in 1966. The campaign of Verna Mize to stop a mining company from polluting Lake Superior became a national symbol of effective citizen action. In one account of her campaign, the author even imagined the lake offering Mize words of thanks.[47]

In many cities, women worked aggressively to stop air pollution. New Yorker Hazel Henderson organized a group called Citizens for Clean Air by passing out leaflets to mothers during her daily walks in the park with her infant daughter. The group soon had more than 20,000 members; roughly 75 percent were women. Despite the obstacles to success, Henderson wrote in a

1966 article in *Parents' Magazine*, the work was satisfying for a young mother. "You are exercising the responsibilities of citizenship, and you are setting an example to your children, at the same time that you are working for their health and welfare," she explained. "Best of all, you are learning firsthand about one of the most exciting frontiers of our growing knowledge and technology—how to manage our natural heritage so that it can support the needs of our increasing population, and at the same time remain orderly and beautiful, a fitting and joyous setting for future generations."[48]

Women also organized in the 1960s to address new forms of pollution. On November 1, 1961, approximately 50,000 "concerned housewives" went on strike to protest the hazards of the arms race. Instead of cooking and cleaning, the women lobbied elected officials, picketed nuclear installations, and marched in the streets. In all, the founders of Women Strike for Peace organized events in sixty cities, including New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, St. Louis, Denver, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Many of the marchers pushed baby carriages or held photographs of children. Though a number of the women called for a ban on nuclear weapons and a halt to the arms race, the immediate goal was to stop atmospheric weapons testing, since radioactive fallout from nuclear tests posed a threat to life. "This movement was inspired and motivated by mothers' love for children," one Women Strike for Peace member explained. "When they were putting their breakfast on the table, they saw not only the Wheaties and milk, but they also saw strontium 90 and iodine 131." In the months after the strike, the membership of Women Strike for Peace grew rapidly, as women rallied to the cause: "Pure Milk," they demanded, "Not Poison."[49]

Like nuclear fallout, the wanton use of pesticides inspired women to act. Women's organizations helped to make Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* both a bestseller and a political force.

Though Carson took pains not to appeal solely to women—she used a variety of arguments and rhetorical strategies—she recognized that women were likely to be quicker to share her concerns. "I believe it is important for women to realize that the world of today threatens to destroy much of that beauty that has immense power to bring us a healing release from tension," she argued in a speech to Theta Sigma Phi, a national sorority of women journalists. "Women have a greater intuitive understanding of such things. They want for their children not only physical health but mental and spiritual health as well. I bring these things to your attention because I think your awareness of them will help, whether you are practicing journalists, or teachers, or librarians, or housewives and mothers." Carson cultivated a network of women supporters—and women eagerly championed her work. They used *Silent Spring* as a basis for educational pamphlets, wrote letters to the editor, and lobbied politicians. The most active were the American Association of University Women, the National Council of Women, the Garden Club of America, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Carson also had support from members of the League of Women Voters and from women in wildlife conservation and animal-rights groups.[50]

In many communities, women also led campaigns to preserve open space. Often, the activists sought to save undeveloped woods or fields where children played. But some of the open-space campaigns were more ambitious. In California, a trio of Berkeley faculty wives—including Catherine Kerr, the wife of the university's president—organized the Save San Francisco Bay Association in the early 1960s: The group soon helped to secure passage of one of the first state laws regulating land use. Because the open-space campaigns often succeeded, journalists in the mid-1960s began to point to the activism of women as a model for a new kind of conservation. A short guide to open-space preservation published in 1964 began with the story of one woman's successful

campaign to preserve a marsh from development. "The war Ruth Rusch has been waging in her little corner of suburbia contains immense significance for all of us," the author wrote. "For it shows not only that we can win the fight to save our landscape from the despoilers but also specifically how to go about it."[51]

The list could go on and on. Lady Bird Johnson worked as First Lady to protect and restore "natural beauty," and her efforts led to the Highway Beautification Act in 1965. After the Santa Barbara oil spill in 1969, women were the driving force behind Get Oil Out, a grassroots group that sought to end offshore drilling. A Seattle housewife collected over 250,000 signatures on a petition to halt the development of the supersonic transport. From New York to California, activist women campaigned to stop construction of power plants in scenic areas. No matter what the issue, environmentalism at the grass roots depended on a volunteer corps of women.[52]

The women active in the environmental movement were overwhelmingly white. More often than not, they were in their thirties and forties, they lived in metropolitan areas or college towns, and they were well educated. Most were married to white-collar or professional men, and most had children. At a time when the percentage of married women working outside the home was rising sharply, the women activists usually described themselves as housewives.

Though women often were attracted to the environmental cause for the same reasons as men, the predominance of women at the grass roots was very much a function of gender expectations. As their children grew more independent, many housewives sought new ways to use their talents, and the environmental cause seemed to some to be more challenging and important than traditional volunteer work. For many other women, the decision to become active came in response to an environmental threat that hit home. That was especially true in the fast-growing suburbs.

The residents of postwar suburbs lived in the most rapidly changing environment in the nation. Every year, a territory roughly the size of Rhode Island was bulldozed for metropolitan development. Forests, marshes, creeks, hills, cornfields, and orchards all were destroyed to build subdivisions. Though some of the environmental consequences of suburban development were invisible to untrained observers, others were obvious. Again and again, the destruction of nearby open spaces robbed children of beloved places to play. The suburbs also were a kind of sanitation frontier. Beyond the range of municipal sewer systems, the residents of postwar subdivisions often depended on septic tanks for waste disposal, and widespread septic-tank failures in the 1950s and 1960s caused a host of health and environmental problems.[53]

Because the suburbs were domestic places—and women traditionally were caretakers of the domestic—threats to environmental quality in suburbia were threats to "the woman's sphere." The stakes were the sanctity of the home and the well-being of the family. For many middle-class women, the environmental cause seemed a natural extension of their concerns as housewives and mothers.[54]

In the early 1960s, the major women's magazines all published pieces about water pollution, and the articles highlighted the threat to domestic life. *Redbook* offered a primer on what readers needed to know "to protect your family," while *American Home* grabbed attention by describing water-related health problems in children. *Good Housekeeping* extolled the anti-pollution efforts of the League of Women Voters in traditional terms. "Here is where intelligent and aroused women can do the most important job," the magazine concluded. "The clean-up of our rivers to safeguard our precious water supply—this is the biggest housekeeping chore facing the nation today."[55]

Even in 1970—after the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, after the formation of the National Organization for Women, after the first women's liberation protests—

women in environmental groups often appealed directly to housewives and mothers. Betty Ann Ottinger used traditional arguments to make the case for environmentalism in *What Every Woman Should Know—and Do—About Pollution: A Guide to Good Global Housekeeping*. The environmental cause "is one that the American woman can really sink her teeth into," she argued. As housewives, women determined "how more than two-thirds of our consumer dollars are spent. This in itself is a major weapon which is made even more potent by the influence we exert over the decision as to how most of the remaining dollars are allocated." As mothers, women shaped "the attitudes and lifestyles of the coming generation which will play the key role in choosing whether we follow the road to environmental sanity or strangle in the products of our own affluence." Eventually, Ottinger hoped, women would work to protect the environment as politicians and business leaders. (Ottinger was the wife of U.S. Representative Richard Ottinger, a liberal Democrat from New York.) But Ottinger concluded that the immediate opportunity for women to make a difference was at home. In the domestic sphere—unlike the world of politics and business—women did not have to wait for men to lead the way.[56]

Though often attracted to the environmental cause as an extension of their traditional roles as housewives and mothers, many women found the work liberating. Sylvia Troy is a good example. Until her late thirties, Troy was content to be the wife of a doctor. She had little interest in politics. But in 1960 she went to a dinner meeting of the Indiana Save the Dunes Council, and she was impressed by the spirit of the group: "They were all nature lovers—non-political, non-activist, not organizers, not joiners, not cause-oriented." She became active in the organization, and she soon realized that she had the skills to be a leader. She could network, lobby, recruit, motivate, and negotiate. When the group's first president stepped down, Troy was chosen to succeed her. She then served as president for more than a decade. "The

Save the Dunes Council experience changed me dramatically," she recalled. "It became a vehicle for my personal growth. I learned a lot about my own capabilities, my own strengths, and my own assertiveness in behalf of a cause."[57]

Even for women who did not become leaders of organizations, environmental activism often was consciousness raising. In the group Women Strike for Peace, Amy Swerdlow concludes, "thousands of women who had identified themselves only as housewives found to their surprise that they could do serious research, write convincing flyers and pamphlets, speak eloquently in public, plan effective political strategies, organize successful long-range campaigns, and challenge male political leaders . . . to whom they had previously deferred." The result was a new sense of self-worth, a new willingness to take risks, even a new understanding of the ways women were limited by traditional gender roles.[58]

Again and again, women in environmental organizations struggled against the condescension of men in positions of power. When a group of California housewives met with officials in 1966 to argue against the construction of a highway, a project engineer dismissed a member of their group with a blunt put-down: "Get back in your kitchen, lady, and let me build my road!" The comment only intensified the desire of one of the women to fight on. Because many men considered women irrational, women often found that speaking at a public forum was a trying test. Yet many responded to the challenge with a new resolve. As air-pollution activist Michelle Madoff explained, "I didn't want to go and testify and be branded as another idiot housewife—hysterical Squirrel Hill housewife in tennis shoes, as we're referred to—you know, uninformed, emotional."[59]

The environmental movement also helped women to find vocations beyond the home. For some women, environmental activism led to elected office. Michelle Madoff drew on her experience as a founder of Pittsburgh's Group Against Smog and Pol-

lution to win election to the city council. The environmental study groups of the League of Women Voters were particularly good jumping-off places for careers in politics. Other activists moved from volunteer work to paid employment. Many became staff members of environmental groups or consultants to government agencies. After a decade of volunteer work with the Sierra Club in California, Claire Dedrick was appointed the state's secretary of resources in 1975. Hazel Henderson's struggle to address the air-pollution issue in New York laid the foundation for a pioneering career in the field of environmental economics.[60]

In different ways, then, the environmental movement benefited from the gender constraints of the postwar decades. For some college-educated housewives, environmental activism resolved a tension between traditional expectations and unfulfilled ambitions. Because they acted to protect the home and the family, they could enter the public sphere—they could be more than "just" housewives—without rejecting the claims of domesticity. For other women, environmental activism was the first step toward a new sense of mission. As they became more involved, they became more confident of their abilities and more determined to change the world.

The Young

At the end of the 1960s, journalists began to report that concern about the environmental crisis was exploding on college campuses. "American youth has found a new supercause," the Associated Press reported in November 1969. "So far, the young ecologists are not a full-fledged movement. They are unorganized, largely unknown." That soon would change.[61]

The environmentalism of the young owed much to the postwar economic boom. For the first time in American history,

millions of children grew up in settings designed to bring people into harmony with nature. In the new suburbs, kids often could play in forests and fields just beyond the edge of development. The newly affluent families of the 1950s often vacationed outdoors: Hunting, fishing, and camping became more popular after 1945. Then an unprecedented number of the baby boomers went to college, to spend four years walking across tree-lined quadrangles.[62]

The environmentalism of the young also owed much to the Bomb. Many baby-boom children had nightmares about atomic war. Would humanity survive? The mounting evidence of environmental degradation in the 1960s provoked similar anxieties about "survival," a word that appeared again and again in environmentalist discourse. In 1969, when Joyce Maynard read Paul Ehrlich's shocking bestseller, *The Population Bomb*, she immediately felt the kind of fear she had felt during the Cuban missile crisis: "Not personal, individual fear but end-of-the-world fear, that by the time we were our parents' age we would be sardine-packed and tethered to our gas masks in a skyless cloud of smog." Maynard's response was common. In a 1969 discussion of the generation gap, Margaret Mead argued that growing up in the shadow of the Bomb made the young more likely to understand the environmental crisis. "They have never known a time when war did not threaten annihilation," Mead wrote. "When they are given the facts, they can understand immediately that continued pollution of the air and water and soil will soon make the planet uninhabitable and that it will be impossible to feed an indefinitely expanding world population."[63]

Though the environmental movement drew young people from all parts of the ideological spectrum, the new cause appealed especially to critics of the nation's cultural and political institutions. For many rebels against the soul-deadening artificiality of consumer culture, nature became a source of authentic values. For many members of the New Left, the degradation of

the environment became a powerful symbol of the exploitive character of capitalism. The horrors of Vietnam also led many people to question "the war against nature." By 1970, the effort to protect the environment seemed to many activists to be part of a larger movement to affirm Life.[64]

The countercultural roots of environmentalism went deepest. In the late 1950s, the Beat writers began to tout the open spaces of nature as a kind of antidote to the poisonous conformity of suburbia. In Jack Kerouac's 1958 novel *The Dharma Bums*, the narrator joins the fictionalized Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg on a quest for truth in the mountains of California. At one point, the Snyder character, Japhy Ryder, dreams out loud about a new generation refusing to stay "imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume." "I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution," he tells his friends, "thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to mountains to pray, making children laugh and old men glad, making young girls happy and old girls happier, all of 'em Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason and also by being kind and also by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures."[65]

Within a few years, Ryder's dream was becoming reality as thousands of young suburbanites turned their backs on middle-class life. Many fled to countercultural enclaves in cities. By 1967, dozens of hippie communes also had sprung up in rural areas, and the number increased dramatically in the last years of the decade. "Right now, I'm trying to keep from being swallowed by a monster—plastic, greedy American society," a nineteen-year-old wrote to the members of one rural commune. "I need to begin relating to new people who are into taking care of each other and the earth."[66]

The hippies hoped to feel the flow of the seasons, to grow things, to enjoy the beauty of sunrise, to walk naked. Drugs